



Episode 25: High Conflict Couples, A Conversation with Nia Nimmers

Liz Higgins (00:02):

Hey, y'all! Liz Higgins here, and welcome to the Millennial Life Podcast, where my main goal is to share conversations that will inspire you and drive you toward the life and relationship you desire. I'm here to share what I've learned as a licensed therapist and relationship coach specializing in millennial relationships and wellness, as well as transformative conversations with other professionals. Thanks for listening and enjoy today's episode!

Liz Higgins (00:34):

Hello everybody! I am so excited to bring an interview episode back to the podcast. I've taken a few... Few of these last episodes to just sit with myself and put some messages out there for y'all. And today is a really special, um, interview for me because I'm sitting here with one of the Millennial Life Counseling team members, Nia Nimmers. Hi, Nia! Thank you for being here with me today.

Nia Nimmers (01:02):

I'm so happy to be here.

Liz Higgins (01:04):

I am too. Nia is on our team. She's one of our licensed marriage and family therapist associates. (Always a mouthful.) Um, and she's a really incredible person. So I'm excited for this conversation we're going to have today about high conflict couples, which as therapists, we, we see a lot of. And just what some of those characteristics look like in relationship dynamics, what people can do about those things...

Liz Higgins (01:36):

If they're in a high conflict relationship, and I know this type of client is one of your passions, so I'm excited to, to hear you talk on that.

Nia Nimmers (01:46):

Yes. One of my favorites.

Liz Higgins (01:48):

It's always funny to like be a therapist and say like, I love working with the highly conflicted people. I know it feels backwards. It feels a little crazy, but yeah. Well, why don't you start by

telling us a bit about you and what drew you into the realm of therapy and becoming a therapist?

Nia Nimmers (02:07):

Yeah! So I have known what I wanted to do with my life for a long time. I was one of the lucky ones. Um, my parents got divorced in, when I was in eighth grade. Um, and I had, had a marriage and family therapist at that time, um, and really did not have a great experience. And so I, one) didn't want other kids to go through what I was going through at that time.

Nia Nimmers (02:29):

But then also, like, I just felt like that was not the way to be doing therapy. And that I could do that, um, hopefully in a more effective way. And so from then on, throughout high school and college, I have just been chasing this calling and also, it's just been my natural positioning. I'm a middle child. Very true to that. Um, so always been a mediator, always been the person to help try to solve things and help people out.

Liz Higgins (02:55):

Oh my gosh. I nearly had, like, sub-connection going. I don't think, I don't know if I knew that I'm totally a middle child too, or it was for a long time until the youngest of us four girls was born, but... Oh yeah. I feel you on that one. Yeah. Can I ask you, cause that's, like, really interesting to hear that at such a young age you had this awareness of 'this is not helping me, this, this therapy that I'm in is not maybe how it's supposed to go'. What was happening that made that, like, kind of a negative experience?

Nia Nimmers (03:28):

Yeah, well, there was some connection and even now, as like someone going through the process of becoming a fully licensed marriage and family therapist, I don't fully understand. But he, um, was supposed to be our representative in court, um, during custody things. And so when we would be in sessions, it was like, he wasn't at all listening to us and he would ask us very pointed questions. Like 'you obviously want to be with mom', you know? And, and the whole court system is kind of leaned in that way. Um, but we were obviously not wanting to choose between a parent or not. So he would take what he didn't listen to in session and then share that in court. So it would be like we were saying that we wanted to be with one person over the other. And, uh, so that will be relayed to us by, you know, a parent who felt like, Oh, so you want to be with this past. It was just very, very messy. Yeah. Not at all attentively listening to us or no, no games, no desire to really get to know us... Kind of just, like, a formality. I have to meet with the use of that. I can go in court and say what I want to say anyways. So it was very interesting.

Liz Higgins (04:33):

Yeah. Just as you're describing that, I'm like, Oh yeah. Cause... So there was, uh, some of that triangulation happening with the kids, the therapist, and then each of the parents and just those webs start to create and he has to do his job, but you weren't, you knew something felt off about that. Kind of the manipulation maybe at play around the legal stuff going on. Yeah. And I think about, I know I have like a personal, a relative that went through the court experience and everything, and it's so hard how that whole legal world is still, um, just has so many layers and often isn't fair. I hate the word, but it's so true, you know?

Nia Nimmers (05:17):

Absolutely.

Liz Higgins (05:20):

So, so, okay. So that's something that (it sounds like) reaffirmed this calling that you had inside of you. What else has kind of led you to be so drawn to that world of relationships? Like, what have you learned about yourself as, as you've gone through school and gotten into the field that's reiterated that's where you want to be?

Nia Nimmers (05:44):

Yeah. I, I feel like, I don't know, like it was just all throughout growing up. Like I just automatically became the friend that, you know, everyone came to, or wanted to talk to. I don't know, there's like a calm air about me or, you know, feels like I'll listen and not talk much. I've always been more of a listener than a talker, but even too, like growing up and seeing healthy relationships (which was very, very rare) just always stood out to me. And I, I knew that that was like at the cornerstone or like the foundation of society, like in the way that I see it. Right. It's like couples are so pivotal to society, um, because out of couples comes families, right. And then out of their families comes more children and more generations. And so I knew if, if we can tackle that, if we can, you know, pinpoint the issues going on there, then that should trickle into how you raise your kids and then how they raised their kids. You know, kind of starting at the bottom.

Liz Higgins (06:46):

Yeah. That's awesome. So you've been a systemic thinker for a really long time. Yeah. You're in the right field. So I know we're going to talk today about high conflict couples. And you see a lot of that in your, in your therapy practice, but I'm thinking about people listening to this episode who might be in a high conflict relationship and be aware of it, but also those that might be dealing with this in their partner relationship or other relationships, and maybe don't have a great level of awareness that it is problematic. Or it isn't in an unhealthy space. So I thought we could talk a little bit about some of those characteristics of these types of relationships. What do you see that tells you this is, like, a high conflict relationship?

Nia Nimmers (07:38):

Yeah. So I've seen, um, I think the main characteristic I've seen is like frequent trivial arguments. Um, like when you feel like, you know, I just feel crazy. Like we're arguing every day, we can't get through one day without arguing or making each other upset or having a terrible fight. Uh, but it's never over anything deep. Right? Like it's covering something up. So it's always about the trash, or the dishes, or what the house looks like, or who took the car. Um, so having a lot of those frequent trivial arguments, I think is a huge one. And I think also, like, when you can't see your partner any differently, when they like have a reputation in your head and you're like, this is all, like, you only see through that one lens. So then everything that they say or anything that they do is like intentionally trying to hurt you or, you know, follows through with what you, what you've kind of made them out to be. Um, and probably for, for good reasoning, right? Because something's happened in the past, but they just can't beat that reputation. And probably both ways also.

Liz Higgins (08:45):

Oh my gosh. Yeah. That last thing you said really struck me because I think that is one of the, I don't know how else to say it, but, like, worst places to be in is when you've made this decision about your partner, that's in a very negative framework or a negative light. It makes it really hard for you to be able to shift the way you're experiencing them. You just start to see them that way all the time. And going back to the first thing that you said, like frequent trivial arguments, I think I know exactly what you're talking about. As I think about couples I've worked with. And what does that tell you when they're just arguing about like, like unimportant things like the trash, the laundry, the invitations for whatever, like what does that stuff tell you?

Nia Nimmers (09:37):

Yeah, I think it just shows that there is so much under the rug. That there's a mountain under their rug. That they haven't actually had the real conversation. Right. We haven't talked about what's actually wrong in our relationship. And so we have this mountain. And so like, we just argue about anything else because it would be really, really uncomfortable to actually talk about what's under there. If we lift that up and we take those things out, it's going to hurt more. It's going to be too deep, too vulnerable. And so often people are scared, scared to do that. And so one way that we can get those frustrations out or that anger out, or those built up emotions and resentment out is to talk about the dishes.

Liz Higgins (10:15):

Right, right. As you're talking, I'm like you're, you're going to say something monumental here. But Oh yeah, no, no, no. It's just, it's just the dishes. We fight where we feel safe doing it and take those hardcore stances against each other, which almost makes it impossible to go to the real deep stuff of what's actually going on. And I guess it's important to point out too, that when we talk about high conflict couples, I assume some people listening might be thinking those extremes like abuse, domestic violence, like... Stuff like that. But... Of course those things are high conflict, but those don't always have to be characteristics of a high conflict relationship. Right.

Nia Nimmers (11:02):

Not at all. I think that would even go beyond a high conflict couple, or what I would see as a highly distressed, couple. More dangerous, more volatile.

Liz Higgins (11:14):

Right. Absolutely. So why do some couples tend to get stuck in the same patterns of conflict?

Nia Nimmers (11:24):

Yeah. Um, what I think is that we see it backwards, right? You always hear couples say like, 'Oh, in the beginning...' Like, especially when they get into those, like, you know, deep patterns, they're like, 'it's been 10 years and now we hate each other. We can't talk, we can't, you know, have a day without arguing.' They often will reference the beginning and say it was so easy. Right? It was so natural in the beginning, we had sex all the time. It was great. But now it's like, 'it's, it's so hard. Why is it so hard now? We can't even see that. Like, I can't even think about going on a date with my husband or with my wife.' Um, and I think that's backwards, right? Because if you actually think about the things that made the honeymoon phase great, it's a lot of effort and a lot of work.

Nia Nimmers (12:07):

And so when you idealized that you think, 'Oh, it was just so natural, so easy.' But if you actually put yourself back in that position, you were actually like, calling mom and calling your best friend, seeing what you should wear. You were listening very well so that you know what they like, and you can plan great dates. You also listen to incentive at least to know, like what would be a good gift for an anniversary. You are going out to get that food item that they really liked. You were going to buy rose petals. You were bringing that home and you're lighting a bunch of candles. You were talking to her best friends so that you could plan a surprise party. Like, it was actually a lot of work that made that honeymoon phase happen. And so the right way to look at it, I think, is to say, 'Oh, actually in the beginning, it was so much work and we've just become more lazy, more natural. And so we just got stuck in this pattern and no one actually wants to put the work in. Not that it was easy in the beginning and now it's, you know, we just can't see ourselves putting that work in.' So I think it's just a shift in mindset. I think we just stopped doing the work and that's how you get stuck. Stop putting in the effort. Yeah.

Liz Higgins (13:03):

That is so interesting to hear you reflect on that initial honeymoon phase, because I think so many people don't think it's work because it feels so easy. You know, you're in that process of pursuit, your brain is on dopamine. You're bonding. Like there's so much physiological stuff happening in that time, that you're not recognizing all the actual effort, the actionable effort that you're putting in to stuff. Right? And, and you're right. When you shift into that next phase, what I think of as more of like a differentiated relationship, you, you start feeling that it's work. And you start thinking, you know, a lot more about your partner than maybe you do, or, you know, whatever. But, so you're kind of saying people stopped doing, stopped doing the work. Do you think most people realize when that shift is? Like, when it happens?

Nia Nimmers (14:03):

I don't know. If I think... Sometimes it can be, you know, certain events that will highlight it. Right. If you've got a couple who has experienced some kind of infidelity, that'll usually like, turn the light on and say like, something's going wrong here. And then they can look back and see, Oh, you know, these are the things that we stopped. This is when we stopped talking. And this is when we stopped having sex. Um, but often it's just such a, such a gradual shift into kind of complacency, you know, or comfortability, which is not a bad thing to have. Right. You want to be comfortable with your partner. You want to be able to, to show your full self to your partner, but it just is that continual courtship, right. Continuing to date the person that you're with. That we need to focus on in order to keep that, keep that going.

Liz Higgins (14:49):

Yeah. Intentional. That never ends, that never stops. Right. And I'm wondering what you think about this because, you know, we're both Millennial Life, and so we see a lot of millennials in our practice. And I think generally speaking, our generation was born into a world where we were told our self is really important. And self-esteem was like a thing that we learned about and, you know, kind of this process in our culture. I think that the I is important. So do you see in couples that you work with that, do you see that kind of apparent push then pull of being in a relationship and kind of individuation? Like people having a hard time letting go of their own needs, wants, thoughts, beliefs, for relationship to work?

Nia Nimmers (15:46):

Yeah. I mean, I've seen it in, I've seen it both ways. I've seen a couple that comes in - one partner says like, 'I think we've been too codependent. How do I set boundaries here to make sure that I remain an individual?' So I think younger folks are trying to figure out that balance of like, how, how can I be my own self or, you know, an individual in this relationship? But then I've also seen older millennials who feel like they've already lost themselves. Like, um, you know, 'now I'm looking back 35 or 40 and I'm like, who am I? Because I just fully gave in to that thing.' And so I, I think, really, it's about who you are and how much you value individuation. Um, and culture too, will play a role in that. But yeah, just, just balancing, it's a hard line. Yeah. I'm like, I don't even know, but I've seen, I've seen both sides of that spectrum and I think whatever is going to work best for that couple, because it will look so different depending on those people, how they grew up, how their parents showed them relationship, all of those things will factor into how much they want individual time versus couple time.

Liz Higgins (17:02):

Yeah. And I think you're totally right about that. It is a, a fine line because you need both elements. You need a sense of self engineered, the, the togetherness, the couple identity. And so there's a lot of moving parts and it's not one size fits all. Um, I think I see some similar things, um, with the couples that I see. So I'm going back to what you said about, like, high conflict couples and their baseline is just this conflictual environment where they get into it. It might be nitty-gritty stuff, I'm sure at times it probably feels painful. Um, but you're just kind of in this injurious environment in your relationship. And I'm wondering, what have you found are some helpful things for these kinds of couples? What do you see makes it better? Yeah, definitely people make it better. Yeah. Therapy.

Nia Nimmers (18:04):

Um, no, but so some of the things that we usually start with, are the easier things to try at home. I think these are gentle startups. Right. Which is, um, just the way that you approach conversation. I think often we get into a habit of, you know,

Liz Higgins (18:21):

Not starting out.

Nia Nimmers (18:23):

I think the way that we approach conversations less and less nice. Um, like 'what are you doing? Why are you doing that?' You know, or 'why didn't you do this?' Uh, so just stepping into that conversation differently, it might change the outcome, right? Like, um, so babe, I know that we talked about the dishes, you know, using those pet names that you have, or just coming in the best way that you can to approach that conversation. And one of the other thing that helps with that is leading with purpose. So I always tell my couples earlier in the therapy stages too, before they start conversations at home, to step back, take a deep breath, to realize, 'what am I trying to achieve out of this conversation?' Because if you know what you're trying to achieve, it's easier for you to actually get that. Does that make sense?

Nia Nimmers (19:09):

So what I'm saying is often people do things and create exactly what they don't want. So an example of that is, you know, I want my husband to do the dishes. And so the way that I try to achieve that is to nag him everyday to do the dishes. Does anyone think that he does the dishes

after that? No, probably not. Or maybe after the 20th nagging, but if I just want them to wash the dishes and I know that goal that I think about, obviously this didn't work right? Nagging didn't work. How can I achieve this goal? And so leading with purpose, leading with your goal will also help you to get that across to your partner. And really think about like, what's not worked in the past. So obviously the way that I'm doing this is not working. So what's a better way to try to achieve this purpose.

Nia Nimmers (19:54):

And then, yeah, I think a big red stop signs always helpful, especially when you are in therapy, when you are outside and living your life for that week, before you go into session to just use that big red stop sign, meaning don't do things the same way, because that is what is hurting the relationship that's, what's hindering your growth is if you continue to hurt each other, continue to make relational wounds while you're trying to clean up the other ones, it's never ending. And so when you notice that we're in the cycle, we are arguing, we are going at it. Somebody just has to say, stop. Someone has to just stop the conversation, just see that big red stop sign and use it.

Liz Higgins (20:32):

And can you see that? Do people have a hard time, you know, kind of creating that change? And they come back to you and are they like, 'Oh, you know, I can't stop. Or it was really hard to not do the same old things.'

Nia Nimmers (20:45):

Oh yeah. It takes a few weeks to really use that stop sign because I mean, frustration is a physical thing, right? Like you have a physiological response to like getting angry, right? You're like hot, your palms are sweating. You have to say this at the tip of your tongue. Like if I don't curse at him right now, like I'm not going, I have to get this out. Um, and so it's hard to stop that, to tell yourself no. To put all of that down is, is really, really difficult. And so it takes a few weeks. And then I think a few crossing the line experiences to realize like, we really don't want to do this to each other. And once you get to that point, once you get to like the remorse for that pattern that you usually go in, that really makes people turn and go, okay, all right, we'll stop. Yeah.

Liz Higgins (21:32):

I feel like it's all a huge exercise in mindfulness. Honestly, you have to really grow that muscle of self-awareness. And like, I know you probably talk to high conflict couples about taking time outs. Um, and I don't know why this was so, like, revolutionary for me, but when I got into Relational Life Therapy stuff... Like, Terry Real talks a lot about the personal accountability for that timeout. Like, it's never about saying you need a time out. You are losing. And you are, you know? You need to calm down because then we become a parent. Right. It's all about that personal accountability. Like I feel myself rising. I feel myself being flooded. I need to take space. And, um, I don't know if you see this with your couples, but I think even that mindset shift of like, I'm really working this stuff from the inside out, be a challenge, you know, because it is totally a transformation and probably the way you're focusing your energy.

Nia Nimmers (22:37):

Oh yeah. Oh yeah. It's all, it's all about our self control. And I think within couples therapy, you actually realize a lot of it is aimed at two individuals changing. Right? It's all about the way that you relate, in the way that you interact, but in order for you to interact well, you often have to

recognize and look back at like, 'what did I do to get us here?' Right. To recognize my fault in this and to seek and grant forgiveness. Um, and so yeah, a lot of that is putting, putting me down and not in a bad way, not put downs that way, but putting those negative reactive kind of responses down. Yeah. Yeah.

Liz Higgins (23:32):

I think about, like, simmering my inner ranger. I have one. And mine, she likes to bat her eyes really, really fast. So I can even be standing there, and my husband's like, 'you're doing your eyes.' And I'm like, 'Oh my God. Okay, well, I'm frustrated.' But I mean, not the same as words, but it's like, our body knows what to do. But it's all about being mindful and choosing a different way of, of being. So I'm just curious, like... One more thing. As you think about like teaching couples to use the stop sign and to think about showing up differently and stuff like that. Do you see partners kind of take on these healthy changes and stuff at a different pace? Like how do you see this typically go? Cause you're right. It is like two individuals that have to kind of go inward and look at changing things. And do you see that like, not all the time, are they on the same path at the same speed?

Nia Nimmers (24:28):

Oh, absolutely. All the time. That's all the vivid dream world. If you get both people to change exactly at the same rates, right. Dream therapy. Um, no. Yes.

Liz Higgins (24:40):

Yeah. If they're frustrated by that, like I'm making shifts here. I feel like my partner's not.

Nia Nimmers (24:47):

Yeah. I mean, I think what I've seen, actually, is I'll point that out more than the couple even would. Cause, you know, you don't want to be that person when you're in therapy with your partner, that's like, they're not doing something or like pointing the finger at them. And so often I'll notice like, there's weeks that have gone by, we've done the same thing every week and something's not going right. Right. Like my couple's not growing. They're not changing in any way. They just keep coming back and they're not happy. And so that takes me doing some self reflection, right. Doing what they pay me to do and going back and going what's, what's, what's not moving here? Right. What is this blockade? And often it's, it's one partner hindering the growth. Only because, you know, maybe they haven't felt like that's something they want to take ownership of yet.

Nia Nimmers (25:32):

Or haven't gotten to the point where they've really seen it clearly. And so gently calling that out in therapy of like, I think this is hindering your growth is like... We can talk about, you know, this one partner and we're all comfortable. All three of us are comfortable talking about their flaws, but it seems like all three of us are not comfortable talking about your flaws. Um, tell me more about that. You know, just gently bringing that up, because it's important and they will be mad at me if they were in therapy for five years because they didn't grow. Right? So it's my job to bring that up.

Liz Higgins (26:03):

Yeah, absolutely. I think, I think that makes, that makes a lot of sense. So it sounds like some of the focus then with high conflict couples is changing interactions, like becoming self-aware to

recognize when you're getting into your boiling points and what happens after that and everything. What are some of the other ways that you feel that therapy specifically helps these kinds of couples, you know, versus maybe other methods of like going out and reading a book or, you know, something else like...

Nia Nimmers (26:36):

Yeah. I mean, I think that therapist is a huge tool, right? I always tell people therapists are professional translators. First of all, like you, you can, um, we can sit there and hear a whole argument about dishes and then go, this is actually about you caring about the other person. Right? Which is just like, what, how did you hear that? And so we just have ears that are trained that way. And so being able to translate that and point that out to them makes them better at hearing it at home. Right? So then you go home and you have an argument, you realize like, Oh, neither of us actually had like, mal-intent. Like, none of us actually want to like hurt our partner intentionally. It's usually like those deeper rooted, like fears or feeling like I want to care for this person. Or I want to love this person.

Nia Nimmers (27:22):

Well, that sends us to, you know, this negative place. And so the more that I can put that out there for them and translate that for them, the better they get doing it at home. And then also I think therapists are great accountability partners, right? Sometimes couples have gotten so far, you know, left and they're like, we can't do it. And I'm like, just go home, do it for you. And they're like, we can't do it for like us. We can't do for us right now. So I'm like, okay, do it for me, like show up for next week for me, you know? Um, so just having someone who they know cares about the way that their relationship moves helps too, which is pretty interesting because you would think like, Oh family, family, or friends, like that's the kind of support that people need. And often family and friends don't know they want a third-party. They want someone there that knows what's going on with them. And also is guiding them, uh, collaboratively toward better health for their relationship.

Liz Higgins (28:18):

Oh yeah, totally. It's such a huge point because family and friends are wonderful, but they don't, they typically don't have the kind of skills that a licensed clinician is going to have for how to really listen beneath the fighting. And what seems to be the issue on the surface. Can you talk more about like, I mean, when you really peel back the layers of highly conflicted couples, what are some of the common relationship issues that you feel are really actually there on the deeper level?

Nia Nimmers (28:52):

Hmm. Yeah, I think I would say there's always some kind of fear going on. Um, and so it's interesting because you'll have clients come in and you'll ask them about their goals, right? Like what are your goals for therapy? And usually they haven't had this conversation outside of it, or they're just like, we need therapy, let's go to therapy. And when you ask them their goals or what they want in their relationship, they often want the same things, but they've never said that to each other. Um, so there's some fear of, of wanting better when you get into such a negative place, um, that you don't, you don't go after it or you don't say it. And so we kind of punish our partners for not doing that either. Like, you clearly don't love me. You clearly don't care for me because you didn't take me out or you don't spend time with me or you don't do this when we never asked for it, you know? Or you feel like, Oh, I shouldn't have had to ask for it. They should be able to just know that that's what, and then we get into reading minds, but, um,

Liz Higgins (29:48):

Yeah, just another great backwards mentality.

Nia Nimmers (29:51):

Oh yeah. A fear of asking for what you want rather than punishing your partner for what you want. And they don't know you want it. Um, there's also just, like, deeper things. I think like attachment styles, family of origin, things that you might be dealing with rise, or what your parents showed you in relationship with each other, how they taught you to be in relationship, are usually at the root of, of how you interact with your partner.

Liz Higgins (30:19):

Oh my gosh. Yeah. I feel like we could spend an hour on each of those things because it's so true. And I'm just glad you're speaking to all of that because you know, I think you, and I know as relationship experts that this is the stuff that's really going on beneath the surface of dishes and cleaning and you know, all the things on the, to do. And who's taking the kids where, and all that sort of stuff. It's the deeper, deeper needs that were just born into this world, having us humans. And I think there's been a real gap in letting these skills and that relational self-awareness be like a mainstream thing that we all know how to do. And also just like the history of our, of our culture and relationships. It's just changed so much over the generations and decades and stuff. So I'm a hundred percent with you on that notion that therapy can be such a huge tool because you're working with somebody that's listening to you from a completely different context and framework.

Liz Higgins (31:27):

And one that really can help you get into the deeper piece of like, what are you uniquely need here? And to help people have that language. I love that idea of a therapist is like a professional translator. That's like so true. It's so true. Yeah. There's a quote that I heard a long time ago, I think through a motto therapy, but it's conflict is growth trying to happen. And I so love that. And I've found it to be true personally! Like anytime I've ever gone through any form of conflict and you know, again, like I'm not talking about those extremes where, you know, you need to get out if it's an abusive situation and stuff like that, you need to like separate, remove yourself. But if it's, if it's regular old conflict and feelings of frustration or lacking or longing for something more like it's, it's always, for me been like a growth edge and that's been incredibly helpful rather than coping mechanisms that didn't work. Right. Like not so helpful coping mechanisms. And that's all there is, about us building those helpful, healthy ones, things that actually get you the relationship that you, because what you've tried is not working. Yep. So what would you tell somebody who may be in like a high conflict relationship right now and might be feeling discouraged or hopeless or the, you know, they feel like they're destined to fail here. What would you say to them?

Nia Nimmers (32:59):

Yeah. I mean so many things, but one... I think Rome wasn't built in a day, right? Like I think these couples, they, they go through things and so many relational wounds or just, you know, patterns of communication to get to the place that they're in, where they're seeking therapy. And then if weeks after, they don't see a change, um, they're really discouraged and sad. And I understand that, right. Because once you've gotten to the point where you, you really know that you want your relationship to be different, it's hard to see yourself be the same. So I would say just, just recognizing that, like, it's a, it's a tall order, right? Like you're fighting a big battle. It's

not just like the past 10 years of your relationship or the past three years of your relationship that you're fighting against. But also what we were just talking about, right.

Nia Nimmers (33:47):

It's family of origin stuff. It's what you were, what you've been learning since you were a child. And so all of that is a lot to take on, um, and to, to change, to stop those generational curses. Like I think millennials, we've done such a great job. It wanting to be different from our parents' generation, like take the good things, but then figure out how we want to change those things. And most of those things for our future and our children's future. And so we have to give ourselves grace sometimes, which is not very common of us. We are all like pronouns, perfectionist syndrome, you know.

Liz Higgins (34:22):

Oh, dang hard on ourselves.

Nia Nimmers (34:25):

We got to give ourselves some grace. And so I think just recognizing that, like this, this is a really, really tall order. Let's give ourselves some time to, to live up to that and to really change and grow from these things. And I would also say just focus on the commitment, right? Like if you know, the end goal of this thing that also should give you a little bit more peace. So if you come into therapy knowing like we're going to strengthen our relationship, you may not know how to, but focus on that, right. Like know that we are committed to each other, we're going to make this work. So even when we fall short, we're both still working towards the same goal.

Liz Higgins (35:03):

I think that's so huge. And what you just said reminds me of what I kind of think is a really important piece when people are in really high conflict. Um, that they don't jump really fast into threatening the relationship, like throwing around the D word, 'I'm getting divorced. I'm gonna divorce you. If this doesn't get better, I'm going to leave, you know, this doesn't change.' Um, because it's things like that, statements like that, even if they're simply emotionally loaded pain coming out that, um, I think kind of tamper with the security of having a relationship that it's, that's at least secure enough to try and make healthy changes inside of.

Nia Nimmers (35:50):

Absolutely. That's always one of the, the rules. So each of my couples will make rules for communication, right? Balance like follow those rules from this day on forward. And of course, you know, you're gonna fall short. You're not going to follow every rule. Um, but they make them themselves and a very common one is no threats to the relationship. Cause it really just shuts the other person down. And it's like, that is full hindrance to any type of growth or productive conversation. The conversation ends there. Once you say something like that. So yeah, and I,

Liz Higgins (36:25):

I feel like it's worth noting too, that, you know, I think people really can want change and want healthier relationship, but they still find themselves in the same patterns, the same patterns. It's really like, they're really resisting making those changes. And I think it's important to normalize that, you know, because we want to stay in what we know. And a lot of times that means conflict and insecurity. I mean, many people in high conflict relationships didn't have a whole lot of secure relationship templates around them. And so the tendency is going to be to want to

subconsciously stay the same and that could be resisting healthy change. So I love that you call it therapist and accountability partner because you know how to help them lean into that resistance and normalize it, not shame people for it, but help them understand it. Absolutely. So this is really, really cool. I like this conversation. I think this is helpful for people that are in that space, in their relationship. Are there any last comments that you have or any, any tidbits or suggestions for people listening? Yeah. I think

Nia Nimmers (37:44):

One other thing that's common is forgetting why you married the person you married, you know, so often I'll have my couples like sit down and write, write down the identity of their partner. Like who is this person? Because when you get into these negative interactions cycles or these high conflict patterns of communication, I think we often want to change our partner in to us. Right? Like that's also something that's very common with couples. It's like, but why wouldn't you do this? Why wouldn't you just think this? Why are you not acting like me? I would do this in that situation, but we have to be able to let our partners be them. You know, there was two of me and the relationship probably wouldn't work out and I'll ask them that too. Like, so if there was two of your partner in the relationship, what they work out together and they're like, absolutely not, you know, they would not get together. And so

Liz Higgins (38:37):

Yeah, like two of you or two of them would not work out. There's a reason that you made this person and reminding yourself of that and then reminding yourself in those situations or in your conflict to let them be them. Like, don't be surprised by who they are. We forget about those things that we loved in the beginning. Or we, we just flat out don't like them after a while. We're like, I don't like that about you, but we loved that in the beginning. You know? So remind yourself of that as well. Oh my gosh. That's so true. Yeah. I can think of a few things. Um, of course, about my husband that were probably the things that drew me to him that now I'm like, okay, but that's supposed to happen. Like I think what we know about relationships is just so normalizing for like the changes that you experienced.

Liz Higgins (39:24):

And I think what you're saying is so important. It's like, remember to be curious and always be like in tune with who your partner is, not who you want them to be or need them to be, but who they are. Yeah. I would say, let them be them. And you can also always, right. A marriage is a partnership. It is continual growth together. You always want to be making each other better, but at the base of things, you want to be able to let them be who they are. Boom, mic drop. I love it. Thank you so much, Nia. This has been a really fun conversation and I'm excited to just learn more about how you work with your clients and um, yeah. So for anybody that is interested in, in learning about Nia, you can hit up our website, millenniallifecounseling.com. Yeah. Thanks again!

Nia Nimmers (40:13):

Of course. Thank you.