

Preparing for Motherhood? Cultivating a Flexible Mindset to Get Ready for a Baby | Embracing Change in a Blended Family | Coaching Session with Lexi | Ep. 29

[00:00:00] **Markella:** Hi there! If this is your first time here, welcome to the Parenthood and Relationship podcast. I'm your host Markella Kaplani, a psychologist, a Parenthood and Relationship coach, and a parent myself. Together we explore the transformative journey of Parenthood and its profound impact on our relationship with ourselves, our partners, and our children, so that we can be present and show up as we envision without having to do more.

[00:00:26] Let's get into today's episode!

[00:00:28] **Markella:** Hi there. And welcome to today's episode. If you're an expecting mother, a step mom navigating family dynamics, or a mom that's balancing work with the complexities of a blended family, this one is for you. In this episode, we're diving into what it takes to prepare for motherhood with a positive, flexible mindset.

[00:00:49] I'll be sharing a real coaching session with Lexi, who's expecting her first biological child while raising two stepdaughters, running her own businesses, and managing all the curveballs that come with these roles. As you listen, you'll notice Lexi's proactive approach to managing stress and her incredible ability to remain flexible and optimistic even in the face of uncertainty.

[00:01:14] She's a real inspiration. She's achieved this though, not by winging it, but by engaging in both individual and family therapy systematically and even preventatively, which has equipped her with invaluable tools to navigate the ups and downs of family life.

[00:01:32] So this is a little bit of a caveat, a disclaimer, that this has taken Lexi work. And also Lexi notes and recognizes and is grateful for the fact that she has a supportive husband. She has a village, a family that's right there for her to draw from. And so there's that as well.

[00:01:52] So I want us to make sure that while we're listening, we are not comparing. I encourage you to listen with curiosity and an open heart to notice what inspires you and perhaps pick up a few tools that could work for you without this pressure of comparison because it's unfair and it could very well be completely unfounded.

[00:02:14] So keep that in mind while you're listening. We don't all have the same starting point. We don't all have the same support. There are things that we can change and there are things that are just not in our power. So let's just pay attention to those things that are in our power.

[00:02:30] And you will see that Lexi gives a really good example of just how many things we can change if we have the right mindset. If we draw from the strength that we have within. This is all about taking away insights that will empower you, not about measuring where you're at. So let's dive in and see how Lexi is preparing for her growing family while keeping her mental well being and relationships a priority.

[00:02:58] And one more thing, Please bear with me in this session with Lexi there were some technical issues. The internet connection wasn't great, and so some of the words will drag on a little bit, but I've made sure to edit out certain things that did not sound good and did not make sense because of the lost connection, but at the same time, there were things that you could hear and.

[00:03:21] If you just patient for a couple of seconds, you can understand what she's saying and it was really important to keep them in there. So bear with me. It's worth it. I believe. And

[00:03:32] there you go. Enjoy.

[00:03:34] Hello and welcome to today's episode. Today I've got with me Lexi. I want to welcome you for coming on. It's always wonderful to see such a bright smile. Thank you very much for being here, Lexi.

[00:03:46] Lexi: Thank you. That means a lot. I appreciate that.

[00:03:49] Markella: So why don't we get into why you wanted to come today? What it is that you wanted to discuss?

[00:03:57] Lexi: Yeah, so I have been a part of a blended family for the last two years now. my stepdaughters moved in in 2022 and then their dad and I got married in September of 23 and now we're expecting our first ours baby.

[00:04:13] So this will be my first pregnancy and we're super excited about it.

[00:04:18] Markella: That's beautiful. Congratulations.

[00:04:20] Lexi: Thank you.

[00:04:21] Markella: And so with these awesome news, what is it that you want to, I don't know, is it prepare for?

[00:04:29] Lexi: Yeah, I guess. I mean, it's challenging already to kind of balance everything with owning a business and having the blended family, and then adding the baby into it too.

[00:04:39] I know that that's just going to kind of flip everything. And so I'm curious to see what advice you have to help balance it and to help make the transition maybe as smooth as possible. I've been doing all the reading that I can. I'm a big reader.

[00:04:54] Markella: Okay, and what have you read and how much of it has appealed you and how much of it has brought on anxiety?

[00:05:01] Lexi: Yeah, I've got the what to expect when you're expecting book and I bought the journal to go with it. And that's been really neat to kind of document my

journey, and then my partner's been filling in his part too, and I'm excited to have something to look back on that, you know, we get to see how we process the whole way and everything too.

[00:05:20] Um, it definitely increases the anxiety, but the, I think that trying to be as mindful as possible has been the best solution for me. We have a custody court case coming up in August for the stepdaughters. And that has been a major, major stress. I feel like to really focus in more on my inner calm and kind of remind myself, you know, the importance of staying home for the baby and making sure that I'm not letting my stress level get too out of hand.

[00:05:48] **Markella:** Well, yeah, it sounds like you are dealing with a lot. So it's not just the blended family that you mentioned.

[00:05:54] It's the also the dynamic and how it might change. And so what may be the potential change? How are you living now? What's the living situation and? What's the worst case scenario?

[00:06:05] **Lexi:** So right now the girls are here during the school year.

[00:06:08] Um, I'm a teacher myself. I am Orton Gillingham practitioner certified and our youngest has dyslexia. And so I've been able to help her make huge gains. When she first moved here, she was reading at a kindergarten level when she was finishing up grade three. And then last year she was so proud that her report card said on grade level.

[00:06:30] And so that's been huge. And we want that to continue. But their mom wants them to move back there full time. And right now they only see her during the summer and over breaks. And that would be a huge shift because the routines and structure are very different here. It's kind of non existent more on that side. when I first met my husband, I asked him, I was like, tell me about your kids and it's like, oh, they're feral chickens. What do you mean? Because they just kind of run around barefoot. They don't have any rules or bedtimes or anything.

[00:07:01] And I was like, oh, that's very different than how I was raised. But when they are here, they do, you know, they don't really buck too hard on it. I think that they notice what a difference it makes, you know, in their brains and in their bodies. All four of us here have ADHD. So we talk about how our brains are wired differently and how it really, really does benefit us to have, you know, adequate sleep and appropriate screen times and stuff like that.

[00:07:28] **Markella:** Wow. So, so you've invested a lot and you are their step mom. So this is motherhood. And, while being pregnant, that's. way, that dynamic and that beautiful, the improvement that you've made and the way that you've bonded with the girls, the fact that is being challenged, I understand is bringing in stress.

[00:07:50] And so I am very glad to hear that you are being mindful and you are trying to de stress in all of this. And so now I'm, I'm a little bit curious about what it is that you are thinking will happen as the baby comes. How does this play out?

[00:08:07] **Lexi:** I'm trying to have like the lowest expectations possible.

[00:08:11] Um, because I find that if I, you know, make this grand plan of what everything's going to look like when the baby comes, then I'm just setting myself up for disappointment. I'm kind of just putting it out there that we're all going to be. happy and loving and try to have as much grace for each other as we can.

[00:08:27] So we'll have, I'm not due until, um, February. So we have some time when the girls get back, they'll come back, in a month to get ready for school and everything. and then we have court on August 29th. So hopefully everything stays kind of where it is. We're looking to just kind of get some help with transportation or money or anything.

[00:08:47] And their mom is looking to kind of flip it all totally and have them live there during the school year and be with us over breaks. So either way, no matter what happens, we're just going to try to get. Our routines and structures back into place the best we can. Just as much as possible before the baby comes and kind of throws it all out of whack.

[00:09:07] Markella: So you are expecting the baby to throw it all out of whack.

[00:09:10] Lexi: .

[00:09:10] Yes, I know that babies don't necessarily follow schedules and routines as much as I would like, but luckily my parents live next door and they are so beyond excited. This is the first baby on my mom's side of the family since my cousin was born 20 years ago. So everyone is very excited and ready to participate and be hands on.

[00:09:31] So I know that, You know, no matter what happens, if I need help, I have it right there. I have it in my partner. He's super supportive. The girls are going to be excited. We haven't told them yet, but when we do tell them, I think they'll be excited. They both have actually, I think I told you this before we started recording that they both predicted that in 2025, I would have a baby.

[00:09:48] Wow.

[00:09:48]

[00:09:49] Lexi: I'm Really proud of them.

[00:09:50] I'm not worried as how they're gonna feel. Like, I really, I hope, hope, hope that they don't feel like we're trying to replace them or anything like that. Like, we're just adding more love, more happiness, and all of that.

[00:10:00] But we also have family therapy every other week, so that'll be a helpful way to process it all when they're back here.

[00:10:07] Markella: Beautiful. So you're already in family therapy?

[00:10:10] Lexi: Yeah, they both have some, really complex PTSD from their childhoods. And we do family therapy every other week, and then on the off weeks, they talk to her just one on one, just them and her.

[00:10:22] And then on our family therapy days, we do an hour, all four of us, And then they each get half an hour with her to kind of like debrief after.

[00:10:29] **Markella:** That's perfect. And so it sounds like you're all about preparation and prevention and I'm all for that.

[00:10:36] So there is something I want to note here and I'm, I'm biting my tongue just a little bit before I get to that. I want to know a little bit about your business, end of things. You also said you have your own business. Right?

[00:10:49] **Lexi:** Yeah. So I was a classroom teacher for five years.

[00:10:52] And then after COVID, I really found that I enjoyed online teaching, which I didn't expect to, like when we were kind of thrown into it, everyone kind of lost their minds for a minute. And it was, you know, that world upside down and we had to relearn how to do everything differently. And then when we went back in person and how to do both at the same time.

[00:11:10] I was like, I think I like this online piece a little bit better. and I am an Orton Gillingham practitioner, so I really help kids learn how to read and spell. Like, that's my top expertise that I can do. And I can do that online, and it's so much easier for parents to, you know, just put their kid on the computer or the laptop or the iPad for an hour, and then they can go get something done, and their kid's learning how to read.

[00:11:32] **Markella:** Beautiful. Okay. And how is this working for you now? And how do you expect this to happen after the baby comes and throws things out of whack? Like you said, the program,

[00:11:46] **Lexi:** right? Oh yeah. So right now I do in person or online and I'm scheduling through December for now.

[00:11:53] And I'm due in February. So after December, I'm going to shift to online only. I might make an exception for like one or two of my like really old students that I've been with for a while and invite them to my house.

[00:12:05] I'll see how I feel come December and then make that decision and talk to the parents that I work with and everything and I'm hoping that a second business kind of steps up a little bit more. I also teach other teachers how to start their on online tutoring business as well. So I'm hoping that, you know, making the shift to mostly online and then adding in this piece, which I've done twice so far.

[00:12:28] I have two people that have gone through my program. So I'm hoping that I can increase that and kind of balance it out that way. But it's all, you know, hopeful.

[00:12:38] **Markella:** Okay. And it sounds like you have a village, right? I don't know how big it is or how small, but your parents, at the very least, are very excited and they're right next door.

[00:12:47] So it sounds like they would be able to step in along with your partner and possibly even your stepdaughters, right?

[00:12:54] **Lexi:** Yep, everybody is so helpful. And like, I could not ask for better parents and my grandmother still alive too. And she actually lives down the block. So she's right there too. And I actually grew up with my great grandma watching me every day.

[00:13:08] And she actually lived in the house that we're in now. So my parents have lived in their house since before I was born. And my great grandma lived where we are now. And so that was really a unique experience to have that super close relationship with my grandmothers. And I'm so excited to be able to pass that to my stepdaughters and then our future baby as well.

[00:13:29] **Markella:** That's so beautiful. It's really, really important that you're getting into this knowing that you will need support, knowing that you have support, and being very open to it. Because a lot of times, we come into motherhood and the way that our society is, Nowadays, we value individuality so much, and a lot of times, maybe we might even have a village.

[00:13:53] A lot of times we don't, but we might even have a village, but we don't want them to help. And, uh, there is this need that I should be able to do it on my own, and it

sounds like you're not starting from that basis. You know that you don't have to, and you shouldn't be able to do it alone, that a village is necessary, and it's actually a good thing.

[00:14:13] Lexi: Yeah, I actually, my whole business is called Barefoot and Burnt Out because I got very burnt out teaching, especially when we went back to in person and online at the same time. It's hard for me to ask for help and not some work that I've done in the last few years. And so I've been able to, you know, ask my partner for. You know, can you go take the dog for like an hour walk so I can just get a silent nap?

[00:14:35] Because without fail, the second I'm asleep, she's barking. She wants out or she wants attention. So I think that I've done some work over the last few years to really get there, but it definitely took some time.

[00:14:46] Markella: Right, so you, you've done the work on a personal level, you're preparing on a practical level, and so the one thing that I am wondering as I listen to all of this is, what are the expectations of how this is supposed to work?

[00:15:03] Like the dream plan, I, I realize that you understand that it's not going to necessarily play out that way. But it sounds like you do have a dream way of how things are going to pan out on a day to day schedule. Can you walk me through what that would be?

[00:15:19] Lexi: Yeah, so I have kind of worked through a few different online software programs for my tutoring business and for my teacher transformers to make everything as automated and online as easy as possible, because I was, you know, putting in stickers in my planner and sending out Google Calendar invites to everybody, but now I have an online software where it's just all in one place.

[00:15:43] And they just get the automatic automated emails and everything. And has been a huge time saver, and so I've just kind of been taking the time to put in those, uh, steps and practices to kind of make everything run more smoothly.

[00:15:59] Markella: And time wise? So my understanding is you want to be working on your business as much as possible online, but at the same time being a stay at home mom, right?

[00:16:10] So mompreneur kind of thing. And how much time do you think you can devote to this? You got a bit cut off at some point. And so I want you to let me know again. I'm sorry if I'm asking you to repeat yourself about... you said you're expecting in February, you're telling all your clients that at around December, you're going to be ending the sessions and then picking up when?

[00:16:35] Lexi: I'm going to wait until December to see how I feel about like taking a leave at all. Two of my students that I have right now are because they left when another tutor of theirs went on maternity leave. And so that makes me so anxious that I'll lose All of my clients that I have. And so, no, I might take, you know, a month, maybe six, eight weeks.

[00:16:57] I'm going to wait and see how I'm feeling. because also money is super tight with the step kids and then it'll be even tighter with the baby. We don't get any help from their mom. Um, it's all on us. And we've been using a lot of credit cards to kind of make up for that. So ideally, I would not have a gap in the income.

[00:17:15] My husband's a truck driver, so he brings home an okay amount of money, but not enough for us to live comfortably on. So I'm hoping that by doing it online, I'll be able to schedule, even if it's just, you know, two kids a day. If I can just get, you know, my mom to watch the baby for two hours or wait till my husband comes home from work and him and the girls can play with the baby for two hours while I just have my, my two kids a day or however I end up making it work.

[00:17:39] We'll see. It's all kind of a waiting game right now.

[00:17:43] Markella: Yes. So I'm wondering, are you leaving some flexibility in terms of what could happen and what will happen? Because if finances are also tight, it makes sense that you are trying to find ways that you don't stop. But at the same time, I don't know how they match with other expectations.

[00:18:01] Like, for example, are you planning on breastfeeding, for instance?

[00:18:05] Lexi: Yep.

[00:18:06] Okay. So I know that that'll affect my schedule for sure.

[00:18:10] Yeah.

[00:18:10] Markella: A little bit more than not breastfeeding, right?

[00:18:13] Lexi: I definitely have a pump on my to do list. That is something that I definitely plan on using and utilizing. It just also kind of helps the dad and the other girls like if they want to feed the baby too. Like I want them to be able to have that bonding moment with the baby if they want it.

[00:18:27] Markella: Yes, and that's good for them.

[00:18:29] It's good for the family as a bond, for the relationship of the family and the dynamic, but it's also really good for you as well. And not just in order to work, right? Because it's also important that you, you make sure to calculate in at least a little bit of time to yourself somehow for a nap, for, for just about anything.

[00:18:47] It sounds like you want to be a little bit more prepared. And so, The one thing that I could say as advice is, as you are planning all of this, because when we plan, we can't help but have expectations, I think it's really important to consider the fact that after a baby comes, we change a lot.

[00:19:09] Your brain wiring changes and that's a biological change. And for mothers, it's permanent for fathers. Not so much. It really depends on how active they can be at the beginning stages. And because paternity leave is even worse than maternity leave. A lot of dads don't get to bond as much with the baby, even though they want to.

[00:19:31] And so it's a little bit different there. And also we change physically. We change. socially, the, our finances change and a lot of women find that they have changed

so much in their identity. So motherhood is really perceived in our culture as another, yet another role that we take on. And so since I've been so successful at being a stepmom and I've also been successful as a wife and I've also been successful as an entrepreneur and I've got two different businesses and I do all the things.

[00:20:01] Then this is an extra thing that I'll be able to take on. And I mean, that's a, that's a fair thought. But what happens is When a baby comes along, our identity shifts, and everything else revolves around that identity shift. It's not just an added role, and so that will adjust to how we are. And as we try to go back to normal, a lot of times, like, okay, now I need to go back to my normal work schedule, or I need to go back to my normal routines in XYZ.

[00:20:29] We force ourselves to get into specific boxes. when we are changing. So there are a lot of mothers that said, I want to go back to work. I'm already deciding that as I become a mother, I'm very interested in my job and my career, and I am going to go back to work. And then they find themselves not needing that anymore, not wanting that, having studied so much and having put so much effort, having climbed the ladder.

[00:20:56] And then they can't accept the fact that a part of them really just wants to stay home. And I've seen the reverse. I've seen women decide that I want to be a stay at home mom because for example, my finances allow it. And then they find that, you know, I'm not as fulfilled as I thought. And there's a part of me that's nagging to express myself and to contribute in different ways as well.

[00:21:19] Right. And so I'm wondering if you have thought about the potential that as you are planning all this out, that. You might change.

[00:21:29] Lexi: Yeah. So as a planner and as the, you know, overthinker that I have always been, when I was with my first husband, I had originally planned on switching from teaching to tutoring after I had a baby so I could have more time with the baby.

[00:21:44] And then when I. stopped teaching in person and started doing my tutoring business instead. I ended up doing that because while I was teaching, my whole body

was just shutting down. Like I, my, I stopped everything. I was sick all the time. I was so tired. I was on so many different anxiety meds and anti depression meds.

[00:22:06] And it just wasn't, it was my body telling me that I needed to do something different. And so I think that because I've had that experience already, I am more willing and able to listen to my body. I'm working on an ebook too. So hopefully if I'm able to get that done and get that up and running, that that will be something that I can be totally hands off with, you know, I don't have to meet with.

[00:22:27] The people that are reading my ebook every week. I just can put that out there and that can hopefully be another stream of income as well.

[00:22:35] **Markella:** Wow. You are a planner. That's for sure. Okay. So what is your biggest concern when it comes to baby coming along in your life?

[00:22:46] **Lexi:** Just about how they're going to feel about it. Um, I'm really making sure to not tell them while they are with their other side of the family because they are told. A lot, how they're supposed to feel about me. when they're there, they're not allowed to tell me that they love me, but when they're here, we say goodnight and I love you every single night.

[00:23:06] And so I don't want to add any more stress or dualities to their life. I'm hoping that, you know, when they're here, we're able to kind of process it together and have, you know, our family therapy sessions and stuff too, to kind of work through that together. But right now I think that that's where my biggest piece of anxiety is.

[00:23:24] **Markella:** Do you worry about how you will be able to handle a baby that needs you to be very hands on and whether you'll be able to show up for them the way that you had before? Is that what you're saying?

[00:23:35] **Lexi:** Yeah, and just their own internal feelings as well. Both of them have really, poor self confidence. So we've tried to get them involved in as many things as they can.

[00:23:45] Um, the youngest is in, in dance. The oldest is in band. and so we try to get them as involved as they can. And, you know, once the baby comes, I might not be able to take them to all their practices and stuff. And like, I really love those, those car ride conversations because we don't have the eye contact.

[00:23:59] while I'm driving and I feel like those are when we have our best conversations and they're able to open up and just be more comfortable with me, without having that, you know, the extra eye contact or the pressure of it just being that conversation, you know, they could always say, Oh, I like the song, or we can switch really easily to different topics and conversations.

[00:24:17] Hmm.

[00:24:19] **Markella:** You have this instinct to be there for everyone.

[00:24:24] **Lexi:** Yeah.

[00:24:25] **Markella:** Do you have the same instincts for you?

[00:24:27] **Lexi:** Probably not. Um, I definitely put myself to the side. I think that the, being there for everybody else has always been a part of me. More so than just my anxiety of wanting people to be happy and wanting people to like me and to get along and everything. I do try to put more effort into myself more recently. Like I love yoga. And so I go to yoga on Saturdays and Sundays and I even had it scheduled.

[00:24:51] So on Saturdays I would drop the youngest off at dance and then go to yoga and then go pick her up right after and like it worked out perfect but we'll see.

[00:25:00] **Markella:** Okay, it might not work quite like that, but the reason why I'm bringing it up is because you're, when I asked you what your biggest concern is, your biggest concern sounds like you want to keep everybody around you happy, which is wonderful, there's nothing wrong with that, but at the same time, I'm wondering to what extent are you going to push yourself in the direction where you need to keep on giving,

and Whether there are any self sacrificial kind of traits that you may trace back even before becoming a stepmom.

[00:25:32] Do you have any of those?

[00:25:33] Lexi: Definitely. Um, I'm five years older than my brother, and so I feel like I was always, you know, just be there for your brother. He's younger than you. Do what you can to pacify him. He is not really in my life right now. Um, him and his wife have kind of went no contact with our family.

[00:25:52] They don't like the way that we were raised, and they have made it very clear that they think my parents, you know, could have done differently. and as, you know, someone who is super close with my parents, that's super hard on them. And then that weighs on me. And so it's just kind of easier to not engage with all the negativity.

[00:26:10] Um, So, yeah, we haven't spoke in like a year and a half. It was not this most recent Christmas, but the Christmas before. And you know, after that I said happy birthday to him and he didn't really respond. And I was like, all right, if, if he wants to come back into our lives, he will. If not, just let him have his peace.

[00:26:26] I've got cousins that I'm really close to that, you know, my kids call uncle and aunt and everything, so,

[00:26:32] Markella: but as I hear you and as I see you, it sounds like this is a pain point.

[00:26:37] Lexi: It is. It's hard. Um. We used to be super close and he's just, he is also somebody who kind of puts others before himself and he just really does not like our family, and that's so hard for someone who is so close to our family. Like we go on vacation every other summer, we get a big beach house with all 40 of us. Like it's a huge thing. Like we're a big Italian family. I know only my German shows, but my mom's side of the family is Italian.

[00:27:03] And so we, you know, have a lot of meals together and lots of hugs and love, and we're very. Outward of showing our love and affection, and that's not how they live

their lives, and so it's It's different, and it's a weird, uncomfortable part, and I don't like that feeling, so I try to, you know, just give him a space, and if he wants to come back, he can. You know, I've made it clear that, you know, I'm here to talk to whenever, and

[00:27:26] **Markella:** Hmm, At some point, it sounded the way that you were describing it, and correct me if I'm wrong, that you felt as if you were a little bit of a mother figure to your brother.

[00:27:37] **Lexi:** Yeah. He, um, like, every night would come into bed with me in the middle of the night. Like, neither of us ever went to our parents.

[00:27:44] He just came into bed with me, and he, like, What's snuggle up and I've always been a super deep sleeper, so it didn't really affect me much and I was able to kind of just keep sleeping. And so we grew up really close. Um, and then even when I went to college, like anytime I'd come home, we'd go to Dairy Queen and have our little like ice cream dates and just kind of talk and catch up.

[00:28:03] And so that was a pretty big shift going from that to not talking at all.

[00:28:09] **Markella:** And it somehow coincides with the time, almost the time you became a stepmom or no?

[00:28:15] **Lexi:** It was a little bit before. Um, and then when I got divorced, I was talking to him a little bit more and we seemed to be, mending our relationship. And then we, I planned a Christmas to have everybody here for my first one with the stepdaughters and everything.

[00:28:30] And we were celebrating Christmas before Christmas because they were going to be with their mom. I was super excited. It was going to be the first time we had everybody like my parents and my grandma. And he came in. Yelling at my dad and him and my dad just yelled at each other and both of my daughters have pretty complex post traumatic stress disorder And so they were instantly in tears

[00:28:50] and you know And my husband's like pacing the hallway and he's looking at me like I don't know what to do

[00:28:55] And I was like you can say something like go for it. And so he was like get out this is not how we talk in this house

[00:29:01] and Big you as he stormed away

[00:29:05] **Markella:** Okay, these things happen in families. They happen more often than not. I don't know if you have other examples of friends who may have these kinds of things happen to them, or if you feel like it's something that has happened only to you.

[00:29:22] **Lexi:** Yeah, one of my childhood friends, they actually have gone no contact with her whole dad's side of the family.

[00:29:28] and that was really hard on them, and they did that while we were still in high school. And so I was able to kind of see her go through that, and I understand, and I get that it's hard, and I get that, you know, everyone's different and has their own experiences, and, you know, there's three sides to every story, so, you know, we're not going to have the same memories of our childhood as the other person did.

[00:29:50] It's just, it's hard when I know that, you know, my parents care so deeply and it affects them so much.

[00:29:56] **Markella:** So as you become a mom of your baby, your biological baby, and as you are also a mom of your stepdaughters, I wonder when you are thinking about the complex relationship right now between your parents and your brother.

[00:30:14] And how you perceive your parents having given so much to your brother and how he has perceived it. Does that affect the way that you show up to your stepdaughters and how you intend on showing up for the third member?

[00:30:29] **Lexi:** For sure. I, I talk about everything. my husband and I had like started our relationship on 100 percent open, honest communication, you know, every night at dinner,

we talk about, you know, what went well in our day, what was hard, what could have made it better.

[00:30:45] like I said before, we do a lot of family therapy, and then my husband and I both have our own therapists too. And so there's a lot of, you know, talking and processing that happens. And, you know, as a teacher, I teach my students these things, like how to process their feelings in a healthier way. And it's crazy to me to see how many adults have not had that in their lives.

[00:31:04] They don't know how to process their feelings, and they don't You know, they can't talk things out in an appropriate way, they just start yelling and I'm like, Whoa, we're grownups now. This is not how we can handle things. Like, let's just talk. And that's something that I've been trying to really instill in both my stepdaughters and I hope to instill in the baby as well because you can't be around me and not talk about stuff.

[00:31:28] **Markella:** Yeah. And are you open with your parents about things that maybe you had not said as a child?

[00:31:38] **Lexi:** Mostly, I try not to dwell too much on any of the negatives because I know they feel so much negative about my brother. but one of the things that I've addressed pretty strongly is body image. I read a study about how it's your mother's body image of herself that affects the child more so than the mother's body image of the child.

[00:31:58] And so growing up, I had a really high metabolism. I ate a lot. everything in sight, but I stayed super skinny. Well, it didn't last forever. And now I have to, you know, be more mindful of what I eat and do some yoga and move my body more. And I've talked with my mom and my grandma both. cause you know, they've been on Weight Watchers for years, and I've gone to Weight Watchers meetings with them.

[00:32:19] And we talked a lot more in our house here about the foods that we eat and how they help our bodies more so than, you know, Oh, I need to lose five more pounds. Like, there's not even a scale, like there's one scale in like the corner of our bedroom and it's so far like out of the way versus, you know, there was one in the main family bathroom and you were expected to kind of like keep track of it and make sure where you were and

so we've talked a lot about that and I've laid a pretty hard boundary that I don't want to talk about.

[00:32:47] I'm not gonna put a funny image or weight in front of the kids at all, because they get enough from the media and everything that they don't need any of that from us.

[00:32:54] **Markella:** I really like how you're very aware of all these things, and you're doing super well, you're trying really hard to break the generational trauma that is there, because trauma is a loaded word, but There are tiny traumas that we all go through and so you might not feel like it's a traumatic experience that you have some kind of a concern with weight because you saw your mom and your grandma be very concerned with their weight, but you did have an opinion about weight that you've worked actively to change and now work actively to not pass on to your children.

[00:33:31] And so it's, it's very important that you have come to realize certain things that underlie the way that you felt so that you can be conscious of them. It sounds like you've become already quite aware of things that you don't want to pass on, of things that bothered you and you want to make sure don't bother them and you're doing a good job by Um, being in therapy personally and as a family so that you can ensure that you catch these things before they manifest.

[00:34:03] Because a lot of times what happens is that we think we've worked through stuff and we expect that since I haven't thought of this much and I, that it doesn't seem to be affecting my life, it's not going to come up. But what motherhood does is that it brings it up to the surface. And so a question for you is.

[00:34:20] As you became a mother, you entered parenthood a couple of years back, right? And I wonder whether, at that point, when you first entered motherhood, if things came up for you that you didn't expect to come up.

[00:34:34] **Lexi:** I think so. I think that the Like, being mindful of my time and my interactions with the girls has been something that I noticed a lot.

[00:34:44] Like, you know, we're so glued to our phones and things like that, or we're so busy. Like, I do, I run two businesses, that takes a lot of time and energy. And so, sometimes if they want me to, like, do a craft with them, or read a book to them, like, my eyes actually get so tired. This is a lazy eye. And so, at the end of the night, they kind of are not working anymore.

[00:35:05] And reading to my kids every night was something that I really wanted to do. And so we listen to audiobooks together instead. And I've tried to, you know, make shifts like that, because, you know, if they're in bed by 8.30, I can read to them from like 8.30 to 9, but if they take a little bit longer to brush their teeth and get done for the day, then my eyeballs are just not gonna cooperate.

[00:35:27] So we'll just kind of snuggle up and listen to an audiobook instead. I try to, you know, make those shifts to make it work for everybody.

[00:35:35] **Markella:** It sounds like you're very flexible, and that's actually extremely important and indicative of someone who is at a, you know, good emotional state, basically. Thank you.

[00:35:45] Done a lot of work to get there. It sounds like, because you're able to, instead of go back and say, but I've really wanted to be able to do this for my children. And oh my God, I'm so tired and so exhausted. I'm not able to do it. And then guilt yourself and shame yourself about the fact that you aren't at a state where you can do it.

[00:36:04] You are able to say, okay, what's the workaround? How can I find a way that I can still offer what I've wanted to, but not push myself to the limits either? Because a lot of times we have a very set way about what we want to do and that in this example it is I want to be the one reading to my kids and so we either can't do it and we shame ourselves for not being able to do it and we count all the times that we weren't able to show up in that way or we do it at the expense of our health or our psychology but what you've done is the exact thing that we're supposed to do.

[00:36:43] You've, you said, what's good for them? What's good for me? What's the actual situation here? It's really late and my eyes aren't cooperating. How can we find a

way to work around that? And I believe that this is the biggest advice I could give you is to just have that in mind when things get tough with three children now, uh, when, when we're going to be with, with a baby, that's going to be needing you a lot, especially in the beginning.

[00:37:13] It's really important to keep in mind this kind of flexibility. How can I be flexible? How can I avoid becoming self sacrificial? How can I avoid guilt tripping myself into things? How can I use my strength in awareness and in flexibility to my advantage?

[00:37:31] Lexi: I do think that that's going to be so important.

[00:37:34] I do worry that I am going to, you know, You know, give too much of myself, but I have noticed that my body has a way of letting me know when it's past that point. And if I will, like when I was in the class, I would get so physically ill. Like I had to get my tonsils out cause I was getting strep throat all the time.

[00:37:51] And I would just sleep for like three days. And I was like, well, when I have kids, I won't be able to just sleep for three days and recover. And so I've kind of learned how to step in before I get to that point. When I noticed my body getting kind of worn down and giving me those flags saying, Hey, we need some attention here.

[00:38:07] And I'll try to go to yoga extra that week or take an extra nap or, like ask my husband to take the girls on some kind of Friday night, fun night. Like they'll go to a trampoline park or something. So I can either. Get some work done or go take a nap and try not to, feel down on myself for needing sleep.

[00:38:25] I think that that's something that I've worked through a lot because I've always been a really big sleeper. And that's not something that I've been comfortable with before. So I'm trying to have more grace for myself and giving my body what it's telling me it needs.

[00:38:40] Markella: The fact that you're listening to your body is very important because I think we can all hear our body and it gives us the signs, but we wait until they're really intense to do something about it.

[00:38:52] And if we start to listen in more closely, we can avoid getting to that point of burnout and having severe psychosomatic symptoms in order to be Forced to stop because that's, that's exactly what the, the thing is. And so when we started this conversation, you were talking a lot about planning and how you expect things to be and how you want to put things in place and all these things.

[00:39:15] And my only concern in anything that you said throughout this call today is, was, Oh my gosh, but like with so much planning, she might be let down. Because too much planning and overthinking makes us inflexible. We start to believe that there is some kind of manual, some kind of, uh, a way to go through this, a guideline.

[00:39:37] And so when baby comes along. and throws everything off. If we are at a point where we expected things to go our way because we did such a good job planning, then it can be very hard to recuperate from that. And a lot of times we internalize it and we turn it against ourselves. And the inner critic comes up and says, well, you probably didn't plan correctly, or you're not cut out for this.

[00:40:02] You should have been able to handle it. You had the plan all laid out, and if it's not working, it's you. And that's the problem with being inflexible, but when we're flexible, we can avoid that inner critic becoming loud. We can avoid turning against ourselves, and we can say, Okay, you know what? It was a plan.

[00:40:19] It was nice. it made me feel good to do it, right? Because I am naturally a planner, but I can accept the fact that things aren't going to work out always the way that I want to. And sometimes maybe that's best. Maybe there's another way that I didn't consider.

[00:40:34] Lexi: Yeah, that's definitely something that I picked up a lot becoming a mom like overnight, basically, um, my husband moved in in February of 2022.

[00:40:45] And he moved from Wisconsin to Ohio, and it's a 13 hour car ride. So it's not a close trip. And there's no airport nearby where their family lives. And so flying isn't really an option. Because it's three hours of driving that you would then have to rent a car and do on top of the flight, and so we always drive instead.

[00:41:03] Um, and originally when he moved in, the divorce of him and his ex wife was that he would have the girls over summer and school breaks. And she would have them during the school year. it was the last week of April, so he'd only lived here for two months. And the last week of April, she called and said, I can't come get the girls right now.

[00:41:22] so we went that weekend and added two girls to our tiny condo. That was just for the two of us. And a lot changed overnight. And I had to be really flexible. And there was the Like, week before they were moving, I was trying to get everything ready, trying to plant as much as I can, because it's me, um, got their bedroom all set up and everything, and then the water pipe broke in our condo, so we had no water for, like, three days.

[00:41:50] We couldn't wash all the clothes that I had gotten for them, we couldn't, like, there was a huge hole cut out in their bedroom wall to deal with the plumbing issue, and then our landlord sent Different plumbers who weren't able to fix it, and I was having to learn how to stand up for myself and talk more boldly to the landlord and the plumbers, like, We have to fix this.

[00:42:09] We can't not have running water with the kids here. This is a pretty big deal, and they're coming from a pretty traumatic situation. Their family had burned all of their childhood belongings. So they came here with a box of markers and that was all they brought. And so that was not something that I was willing to compromise on, was their comfort needed to take precedence.

[00:42:33] Like I wanted them to feel so welcome and so comfortable here. And then that fall is when my parents had us move in next door. And that has been so great. it's been great. Been a game changer to have that support and to, you know, look back on all the plans that I had and then how I shifted and kind of draw on that.

[00:42:52] And anytime that I get so overwhelmed and like, I'll talk to my partner about it. I'm like. Oh, but we made it work with no water and a hole in their wall, so we can make it work.

[00:43:01] **Markella:** Exactly, exactly. You can always use that as the example of how you made it work and to be able to just take a deep breath and remember and trust because a lot of motherhood and fatherhood, it has to do with surrendering.

[00:43:19] And releasing and a lot of times when it becomes difficult to be a parent is because we don't surrender and we don't release, we look for control and we look for ways for things to be done in ways that we can feel safe with and when we're searching for safety instead of releasing, we start to become very controlling in order to have things be done a particular way, assuming that we can get a guarantee.

[00:43:44] And that is completely opposite to what motherhood asks of us, which is to be in flow, to listen to our intuition, to hear our inner wisdom. And so it sounds like you have a very good, it's like, um, like a symbol or a code word that can lead you back to going back to flow when things get stressful and the natural tendency of the brain is to say let's let's look for a way let's look for a formula

[00:44:12] **Lexi:** I was having a complete breakdown in the middle of Home Depot on the phone with one plumber while my husband was on the phone with another one and I just think back to that moment I'm like okay we we got through that we made that work . The girls came. They're happy here. They're safe here. And that's so huge and I just keep going back to that and like, we made that work. We can make anything work.

[00:44:34] **Markella:** I can see that. I could be talking to you all day. You are such, so bright and so positive. It's beautiful to see. I would love it if you'd keep in touch and you'd let me know how things are going for you.

[00:44:49] **Lexi:** Of course. Thank you so much for having me This's. So awesome.

[00:44:52] **Markella:** Oh, thank you. Thank you for coming. And I want you to share a little bit if you'd like to, I would like to give you the opportunity to share about your businesses because I think that they're both very valuable. And so if you would like to tell our listeners about what it is that you do, because I think that a lot of them are going to be very interested.

[00:45:11] Lexi: Thank you. Yeah, so I tutor one on one with students online or in person; online is where I'm shifting to more I will not be accepting more in person students. But I am specifically, certified in helping teach kids learn how to read. So if your kid has dyslexia or if they're really struggling to read at like the right pace or have the right intonation in their voices, like that's something that I can do really well and I can do it online and I do it in a multi sensory way.

[00:45:39] So it sticks in their brains a lot more. I worked with kids with dyslexia and ADHD for years and just the more senses that you can engage, the better results you have. And so even though it's online. I use things like online sticky notes and we do word sorts and we build words using different tools and online softwares and things like that.

[00:45:59] So it's still really engaging and they're not just sitting there staring at a screen, you know, for the whole hour. and then my other business is teaching other teachers or parents how to do the same thing as well, because a lot of parents want to help their kids but aren't really sure how to help them or what the best thing is.

[00:46:15] and so I help other teachers and parents as well learn how to break apart the pieces and parts of the science of reading to really understand the best ways to help your kid learn how to read.

[00:46:26] Markella: Yeah, because there's so many choices out there. And both as an educator and as a parent, you don't know which way to go.

[00:46:31] So that is really important to know what the foundations are so that even when there are more. apps and things like that. I can choose for myself what is best. So if someone is interested, where can they find you in order to get either or of your services or both?

[00:46:48] Lexi: So on all social media, I am barefoot and burnt out as one word.

[00:46:52] And then I will also send you a link if that's okay to my online booking call. So I've got a 20 minute free phone call that anyone can book. And you can choose Zoom or a

phone, whichever is easier for you. And then we can talk about what is best for you and your family and how I can best help you.

[00:47:09] **Markella:** That's awesome. I'll definitely include that in my show notes so that people can come find you.

[00:47:14] **Lexi:** Thank you. And I'll also include a free reading tracker. I've got a monthly reading tracker of, you know, how many minutes did you read And it's got a page two about, you know, what kind of goals you can set.

[00:47:25] So if you just read 20 minutes a day, you read 600 minutes in the whole month. And that has a huge difference. The kids that do this they're likely to score better than 90% of their peers. And so even if reading is really hard for you, like listening to audio books or reading magazines or reading the menu at the restaurant, just all these little pieces and parts that you wouldn't necessarily picture reading, you know, it's all these little ways that you can kind of squeeze it into your life to help your kid out.

[00:47:53] **Markella:** That's awesome. Thank you for sharing all of that with us.

[00:47:56] **Lexi:** Yeah. Thank you for having me.

[00:47:57] **Markella:** Thank you.

[00:47:59] **Markella:** And that wraps up today's episode with Lexi. We covered a lot of ground in her journey. And as we unpack her story, some key themes emerge. Lexi's journey to motherhood isn't just about expecting a new baby. It's about navigating the responsibilities of a blended family, managing personal expectations, and handling financial pressures. All the while trying to balance self care and mental well being because Lexi understands the importance and knows that that also needs to be at the top of her priority list.

[00:48:31] Lexi's instinct to take care of others runs deep, rooted in her experiences growing up and her relationship with her brother. This has shaped her into someone who feels responsible for everyone's well being. And we see how this caregiving role can sometimes lead her to put her own needs on the back burner and how she needs to be mindful of that.

[00:48:53] Lexi faces the pull between wanting to do something do everything to be fully there for her stepdaughters to continue her work because it gives her meaning and she's really good at it and to prepare emotionally for the new baby while grappling with concerns over finances and the constant drive to do more to make things work as efficiently as possible.

[00:49:16] This is a reminder of the pressures that many parents face, where the desire to provide and to hold it all together, because that's what we're supposed to do as parents, well, it can sometimes create overwhelming demands on time, on energy, and on our mental health.

[00:49:33] Therapy has been fundamental in helping Lexi recognize these patterns. Through her work in both individual and family therapy, she's gained a unique level of self awareness that lets her spot when she's taking on too much or when her desire to control situations is in conflict with reality.

[00:49:50] She's also working on receiving support openly, a skill that's essential, but often overlooked, especially for those of us who tend to prioritize others.

[00:50:01] Lexi is lucky enough to have a village of support around her and to be able to draw on help from her family and from her spouse without feeling guilty, without feeling like she's being a burden. But that's also a mindset thing, right? Because if we're talking about someone who doesn't have a village, now that's a whole different story -the practical part is missing (although we can create a village through friends, through other people that can help us, through experts, through support groups, right?) So it doesn't have to be something that burdens you financially either.

[00:50:33] But a lot of times what I have come to see in my own practice is that people do have some kind of a village, maybe not as big as Lexi's, but some kind of a village, but there is a block there that doesn't allow them to draw from this village. Maybe they feel like they are burdening people. Maybe they feel like they should be the strong one that doesn't ask for help. Maybe they feel like if they ask for help, it says that they're failing. And so there's a lot of people that have some kind of support, but they don't draw from it. And this is a mindset thing.

[00:51:03] This is something that Lexi has obviously worked on because she shows the tendency to want to do it all. She is a person that seems ambitious and seems like the go getter type, but she is allowing herself to receive support. She allows herself to ask her husband to take out the dog or to take care of the children when she needs some time off. And she does it unapologetically. But again, She's done the work to get there.

[00:51:32] So it's important to make sure that we understand that some of us have a different starting point and some of us will begin with different practical privileges than others. However, it's also important to not always just have that as our excuse because there are things that we can do mindset wise that can help us draw from others.

[00:51:53] We can have a neighbor watch over the child, But we can only do that if we don't feel like we are going to be judged by this neighbor for asking for help. We can make our lives easier, even though we want to do the best for our children, by having the audiobook read out loud on those days that we are completely exhausted, but we still want to have a story read to them before they go to bed. This is the kind of flexibility that I don't see enough of.

[00:52:18] And the inflexibility where I just, I have to do this. I have to follow all of the things I have to do the program and it has to be perfect. And all of this pressure is what ends up leading to an experience where we feel very, very overloaded in parenthood, both physically and psychologically.

[00:52:38] And so, if you're going to walk away with something from this episode, I want it to be this mental flexibility that Lexi portrays. And if you're not there, that's okay. And if it's difficult for you to get there, that's also okay because Lexi didn't just get there on her

own and she wasn't born with it. She worked hard on it. So you can get there, but it does require you to be mindful.

[00:53:01] And If therapy isn't an option for whatever reason, I'm hoping that somewhere in your country, in your state, wherever you're listening in from, there are resources, because here in Greece, where I'm at, there are places in the municipalities where you can get therapy for free. And when I was an intern, I was seeing people once a week the way that I would see them in my office. There are, I'm hoping, resources that if therapy isn't an option due to finances, that you can go get it. Try to remove unnecessary blocks from your way. And do the work. And if you keep on finding blocks, it's important to also assess your readiness level and be compassionate with yourself if you're not there yet.

[00:53:45] So for you, my dear listener, it's important that you watch out for patterns similar to those that we talked about with Lexi, of not putting yourself first, of wanting to do it all, of wanting perfection.

[00:53:56] So let's assess this. Ask yourself, are you frequently feeling exhausted from trying to take care of everyone else? Do you feel the urge to keep everything in order, to keep stability or peace around you, even at the cost of your own well being? Or perhaps you find yourself driven by financial stress or responsibilities, pushing you to do more than what feels sustainable. These signs can indicate that it's time to evaluate the support available to you and to start placing value on rest and personal boundaries.

To reflect on this and find balance in your own life, here is a journaling prompt.

In what areas of my life am I feeling stretched thin? What are three small steps that I could take to seek support, create flexibility, or let go of unrealistic expectations?

This reflection is designed to help you see where you can introduce some breathing space and allow for a gentler approach to the challenges you're facing.

[00:54:53] If you try it and if you find it helpful, I would love for you to let me know. DM me on Instagram @Markella.Kaplani or email me at info@MarkellaKaplani.com. If you like

this episode, make sure to share it and to leave me a review on Apple Podcasts. You will find all the links and all the ways that you can contact me in the show notes below.

[00:55:13] Thank you for joining me today. And remember that taking care of yourself is essential for showing up fully for others as well. Until next time, be kind to yourself. See you next week.