

Episode 27

# Having an Identity Crisis as a Parent? 6 Strategies to Finding Yourself after Motherhood and Fatherhood to Maintain Your Marriage after Children | Episode 27

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

[00:00:28] Welcome back to another episode of the Parenthood and Relationship Podcast.

[00:00:32] Have you ever felt like going into parenthood, you've lost yourself? Well, this is something that I hear often. I hear it in conversations with friends, I read it on Facebook threads, I talk about it and people are in awe, they feel seen and felt deeply. When I start to talk about the loss of identity or the identity crisis that we face as parents, as mothers, as fathers, when we enter parenthood and as we keep on journeying through parenthood.

[00:01:02] So today, as you can tell, we're going to talk about this very relatable topic, the idea of parenting without losing yourself. Because Even though we want to change, even though most of us have welcomed parenthood into our lives, most of us did not expect that we would feel so lost in parenthood; especially because we wanted it, especially because we entered with our will, especially because we had an idea of just how much it will take from our psyche, from our energy, from our everything, our finances our time, everything, we were aware that things would change and yet we

still find ourselves feeling lost. We still find ourselves feeling like we are struggling and feeling a little bit surprised at just how much we are changing.

[00:01:55] For me, at least, it was very disheartening that I had a very good idea, or so I thought, of what it is that I am entering into. I felt like I knew how tough things were going to be. I never thought that just because of my background in clinical and counseling psychology and my work with couples and parents and children that I would have some kind of advantage necessarily into this whole thing.

[00:02:22] So, This was not my surprise; that I will make mistakes. I knew that, but what did surprise me is the fact that I felt like I was aware of how tough things get for parents because I have empathized so much with them way before I ever even decided to become a parent myself. I realized that things were going to be hard, that they were going to be very different and knowing that different, even if that different is good, even if we seek out this change, which was the case for me- I wanted to be a mother, I was ready to become a parent when I did- big change is always going to bring tension. It's going to always rock our world. It's always going to create some kind of chaos that we need to deal with. And so being aware of all of that, I did not expect to feel so lost in parenthood. I did not expect to struggle so much with my identity. And so because I keep on talking about this on podcasts that I guest on and with friends and in Facebook groups and in conversations with my clients, I wanted to bring this forward and I wanted to discuss this very openly because I believe that it will bring value to anyone listening. And most of all, I think it's also cathartic for me to just get it out there.

[00:03:41] I wonder, have you heard those stories, or maybe lived it yourself, where life before kids feels like a distant memory and suddenly all that we have become is mom or dad?

[00:03:53] Maybe you wonder, who am I now? Or maybe in your discussion with friends and other parents, you have heard them ask that same thing. If you felt this way, or if you're feeling it now, you're not alone. And today we're going to talk about what it means to parent without losing ourselves why it happens to so many of us and most importantly, how to reclaim our sense of self while still being the wonderful devoted parent that we want to be, that we are.

[00:04:21] Because, you don't have to choose between being a good parent and being you. These do not go against each other and who you were before becoming a parent is still a very valuable piece of who you are and what you can bring to the table for your kids.

## What does it mean to lose ourselves in parenthood?

[00:04:38] So, what does it actually mean to lose ourselves in parenthood? It's a phrase that we hear a lot, but sometimes it's hard to pin down exactly what this feels like. At its core, Losing ourselves means that the person that we were before becoming parents starts to kind of fade in the background.

[00:04:58] The hobbies that we once enjoyed, the goals that we set for ourselves, the dreams that we had, these things can feel like they belong to someone else, someone from a past life our identity becomes almost entirely wrapped in the role of parent.

[00:05:16] This is involved in the process that I talk about a lot on my podcast: matrescence and patrescence. It is actually a very normal thing. It's our rite of passage into parenthood. It is the psychological birth of us as parent.

[00:05:32] But even though it is normal, even though it is expected, and even though to an extent and in certain degrees and areas, it will happen to all of us, a lot of times, just like with everything, there is a way that this can become dysfunctional in a sense, or this can become a problem.

[00:05:49] And this is what I'm here to talk about today.

[00:05:52] Because while it is expected that we are going to change, and while we want to change, there are things that we want to do differently now as parents, so that we can be more present for our children, so that we can be more protective of them, right?

[00:06:05] But if we allow parenthood to become all encompassing, to consume all of who we are, all of what we do, all of what we care about, then many parts of us feel completely sidelined, completely hushed.

[00:06:19] And this is bound to backfire. The sheer mental load, the constant needs of our children, the logistics of family life, it's really hard to prioritize anything beyond immediate demands of caregiving. We're not only managing schedules, meals, and bedtimes, but we're also managing the emotional needs of our children, and, For those of us who may have partners, their needs too. It's like running a marathon that never ends. So it gets very easy to get wrapped up in this whole thing alongside our wish to change in certain ways. In the beginning, what happens to many parents, is that we might not even mind this shift. There's this intense focus on caring for our newborns; an instinctual need that drives us to be there, but Over time, if our own interests, ambitions, and needs are consistently put on the back burner, this disconnection grows. It can leave us feeling like a shell of who we used to be, with very little left of ourselves by the end of the day. Where does this pressure come from though? Well, there are several sources.

[00:07:27] I think you know what I'm gonna say if you've been a listener.

[00:07:30] It's societal expectation, of course, especially for women. And what's this expectation? It's that parents, and mothers in particular, are supposed to sacrifice everything for their children.

[00:07:42] It's deeply ingrained in us, this idea that good parenting is synonymous with constant self sacrifice. And if you take time for yourself, if you nurture your own passions, or even just take a break, it's seen as selfish or indulgent. Sometimes, many times, most times, we have to excuse ourselves and say, "I love my child, but I need a couple of hours for coffee with my friend without the baby coming and crying and demanding all of my attention." We have to excuse ourselves for trying to keep part of what makes us us and what makes us whole. Think about how society praises super moms or super dads, these parents who seem to do it all flawlessly.

[00:08:28] The messaging we receive basically tells us that being a good parent means being entirely devoted, never complaining, and always being there for our children regardless of our own needs. Of course, this ideal is unrealistic. It sets us up as parents for failure and lots of guilt tripping, which then leads us to be Overextending ourselves even further, deepening our sense of loss.

[00:08:56] And it doesn't just come from society though. I want to note that. It can stem from within as well. Many parents, myself included, have internalized these beliefs about what it means to be a parent. Maybe we grew up with parents who sacrificed everything, like what Devan was discussing a couple of episodes back- and if you want to go and listen to that episode where I coach Devan on this issue, you'll find the link below.

[00:09:22] So it could be that we've taken that as our ideal, as the role model, or maybe we have this strong internal narrative that says, "I need to be everything for my child," or "I can't have needs of my own right now; that's not what being a good parent looks like." These kinds of beliefs run deep and they can shape our daily decisions, often without us realizing it. It's important to note that this feeling of losing ourselves isn't just emotional. It's often physical and practical, too. The demands of parenting leave little time and energy for self care or personal fulfillment.

[00:10:00] Maybe you used to enjoy reading, hiking, going to a class, working on a project that you were passionate about, but now these activities seem impossible to fit into your schedule. When every moment of your day is accounted for, between work, childcare, and household tasks, where do you fit in?

[00:10:19] And now, let's not ignore the mental load, something which disproportionately affects us as women. But fathers are feeling it more nowadays too, because expectations of what fatherhood should look like are also changing. The mental load refers to the invisible, never ending list of tasks that parents, And again, this is especially true for mothers, carry around in their minds.

[00:10:44] This isn't just about the logistics of family life, like remembering doctor's appointments or making sure there's milk in the fridge, getting the snacks ready, but

it's also about carrying this emotional burden for the entire day. You're the one thinking ahead, you're the one planning, you're the one who's anticipating needs, you're solving problems before they can even arise.

[00:11:07] This is an emotional task as well. Over time, this mental load can feel crushing. And it's one of the biggest contributors to feeling like you've lost yourself.

[00:11:17] Another aspect of losing yourself in parenthood is the loss of autonomy. Parenting, by its very nature, is full of compromises. You can give up sleep, personal space, time, or even career opportunities, all of which is for the well being of your children.

[00:11:34] And while many of these sacrifices are made out of love, and they're absolutely worth it, if it's something that you truly wanted to be doing. It's undeniable that losing autonomy can lead to a sense of personal disconnection. So even for those things that you felt were worth it and you really wanted, like for example, bypassing a career opportunity, you may feel really good about the choice that you made, but that doesn't negate the fact that you're probably mourning that loss.

[00:12:02] That maybe a part of you is thinking, what would have been if you were able to take that opportunity? You know now that if you did, you'd probably feel very guilty and shameful and it would go against your current value of being there for your family. And so you know for a fact that you've made the better choice.

[00:12:21] But it is also very normal to wonder what that would have been like, because the other choice is something that you would have loved in the past. The other choice is still something that a part of you really would have been excited about. And so instead of ignoring that part, instead of feeling like, I shouldn't be feeling this way, it's important to recognize that These sacrifices that we make, even when they're conscious, and even when we do them out of love, and not because of societal expectation, we are still going to mourn the choice that's lost.

[00:12:55] So basically what happens in parenthood is that suddenly your schedule isn't your own, your time isn't your own, your decisions are even not entirely your own.

They're often made with the well being of your children in mind first and your own needs somewhere down the list.

[00:13:14] This loss of autonomy for many of us is one of the hardest parts of adjusting to parenthood.

[00:13:20] We have been conditioned to seek out control. That's something that I see very often and work on with people in my private practice. And parenthood comes in and there is a sudden sense of loss of control. Because there are so many things that can't go exactly the way that we plan.

[00:13:39] It's not that we don't want to be there for our children, it's that the trade off sometimes feels imbalanced. We're giving so much of ourselves and there's nothing left. We're giving up so much control and there's not necessarily a reward that is externally expressed, that can be counted in numbers as it is in other areas of our life, as we have been used to receiving for the things that we do.

[00:14:07] What often happens next is a slow buildup of resentment and frustration, whether directed at our partner, our kids, or even ourselves. And this is where things start to get tricky because resentment doesn't mean you love your family any less, it doesn't mean you've regretted your choice, but when the sense of self is eroded, in a sense, it can lead to feelings of dissatisfaction in other areas of life. So it can trickle into how we feel about our relationship, how we feel about friendships, how present we can be in our social life as much as we want to, or even it can go into how we deal with our work and our career.

[00:14:48] When we get to a point where we feel lost in parenthood, this isn't a simple issue and it's not a superficial level type of problem. It's deeply emotional and very tied to our sense of self worth, autonomy, and identity. And it's something that many of us experience whether we fully recognize it or not.

[00:15:10] So if you're listening and you're on the fence, you are not sure if you've really felt lost in parenthood, it is a good idea that you journal about it; that you think just how much You've allowed yourself to recognize the changes that are happening

and besides the gratitude that you feel for having become a parent, beside the love and the happiness and the joy that you feel about your children, have you allowed yourself to It's a mourn for the parts that have to take a backseat.

[00:15:40] Or maybe you've taken time to honor this change, to honor the fact that some things will have to stay in the sidelines for just a little bit. And you have created that room for yourself to, on the one hand, celebrate this new phase of your life- celebrate becoming a mother, becoming a father, but also have given yourself the opportunity to mourn for the things that aren't anymore.

## Impact of Identity Loss in Parenthood

[00:16:07] Now that we've explored what it means to lose ourselves in parenthood, let's talk about the impact that this has not just on us as individuals, but also on our relationship and surprisingly on our children as well.

[00:16:19] So for one, let's start with the individual level. When we lose touch of who we are outside of being a parent, the emotional toll can be very significant. One of the most common feelings is frustration; frustration that our life doesn't look like or feel like the way that we imagined it would. Before having kids we likely had ambitions, interests, dreams that were a central part of our identity. I know that this was the case for me and I know that this is the type of listener that I have. I know I am speaking to you right now because that's who tends to feel this more deeply; that is the type of parent who feels the urge to let go of all other identities, all other parts, in order to be fully there. It is part of our ambitious nature. It is part of our tendency to over deliver, our tendency to want to do our 100%, our perfectionistic tendencies in many cases. And so, Part of being a perfectionist and being devoted and being ambitious, something which is great in the work setting, and it could work really well in the relationship setting as well, in many cases, well that becomes problematic when motherhood comes along or fatherhood comes along because if that is how we approach parenting with this Notion that we have to do everything by the book, follow the manual, overextend ourselves, be perfect, do all the things, well, then there's not enough time in the day, even if we just do parenthood let alone having a job, or doing the household tasks, or paying attention to our relationship and how that is changing. .



[00:18:04] So as parenthood takes over the dreams that we may have had, they shift or in some cases they may even disappear completely.

[00:18:13] Whether that is a conscious decision or unconscious is actually not so relevant. What is relevant is that this creates a disconnect and it can lead to a deep personal sense of dissatisfaction.

[00:18:26] Then there's low self esteem, which is another common outcome that I see very much in parents, something that I experienced myself, a big dip in my confidence. And that's because we start to lose sight of who we are. We start to feel less capable, less important, less valued. Because, let's face it, Like I mentioned in the previous episode, parenthood is revered but at the same time, it's not really valued. A lot of things that we do in parenthood, and yes, especially motherhood, are taken for granted. Because there are things that dads do, and we applaud them for it, and we make note of it, but then when moms do the same thing, it's kind of like, yeah, okay, so all moms in the world do this kind of thing, do you expect an applause?

[00:19:12] So, when we focus on parenthood, when we make it our basic identity or rather our only identity and our worth becomes entangled in how well we perform as a parent, things will inevitably not go perfectly and what does that mean about us? It can feel like we are failures. In this state, we might start to wonder, who am I now?

[00:19:36] Am I still important if I'm not hitting goals and I'm not able to have something to show for what it is that I do all day in this parenthood gig?

[00:19:45] And of course, I'm sure that as I'm speaking, you're thinking, and you know, that inevitably, this will lead to resentment. And this comes as a result of giving too much of ourselves without replenishing that energy with some kind of self connection.

[00:20:03] And right here, I do want to make a side note. I have a self connect calendar, which is designed to give you ideas for a full month, 31 days that you can choose from, or you can follow exactly as they are. They are truly manageable strategies that you can apply in a day even if you are super busy, even if you are in the phase where baby won't leave your shoulder, even if you're working. These are not going to be things that

you see in mommy self care guides that make you feel more guilty because now you're supposed to apply self care, but oh my god, it's not realistic. But if they're posting it, and if they are sharing it in their guides, and if they're suggesting it, and you see it left and right, then it must mean that other people are achieving this thing, right? And so if I can't fit it in my schedule, if I can't get myself to do these things, if there's no time, or if I don't have the energy to, now that adds on to the guilt. So this is not what I've done with my self connect calendar because I am very much opposed to this whole self care movement for parents and for mothers. I've created a calendar that has ideas. You don't have to follow it by the book and you don't have to do all the things, but if you choose to, they are small things like lighting a candle at the beginning of the day. That's one example. And just because you know that this is your exercise to connect with yourself it is going to have a much greater impact. The coziness of the candle and the scent of the candle itself will make a difference; it is a form of caring for yourself, but it's also the intent by which you approach this activity that is going to help as well. So if you want to get access to this self connect calendar, it's free and you will find it on my website at [markellakaplani.com/selfconnectcalendar](http://markellakaplani.com/selfconnectcalendar) I am going to have the link below. So feel free to just, after you finish this episode, go down in the show notes in the description on YouTube, wherever you're listening to this and get yourself that self connect calendar. And let me know. Contact me on [info@markellakaplani.Com](mailto:info@markellakaplani.Com) and tell me what you thought of it. Did any of the things work? Did you follow it? Was there any noticeable difference in how you felt? Not some kind of statistic, not a number, but how you felt while you were trying this out.

[00:22:31] So going back to what we were saying, resentment can come from a place of feeling trapped, of feeling undervalued. You might find yourself resenting your partner who seems to have retained most of their personal identity. This is very common. We look at our partner who will still go to the gym after work like they used to, and will not feel the urgency to spend every non-working moment with the children and we will resent them even if we are making the choice that we will spend every minute with our children. Or maybe there's resentment toward social expectations that pushed us into sacrificing so much. Perhaps we even find a twinge of resentment toward our kids. Though it feels too shameful to really admit that out loud, it is something that we might be feeling, and it's totally okay, by the way.

[00:23:24] This emotional complexity is one of the most challenging parts of parenthood. How can I absolutely adore with all my life and all my might my children, but then also feel resentful because their existence means my demise?

[00:23:39] And so that's where it gets really important to disconnect their existence with losing ourselves, tending to our identity, tending to our other parts becomes something that is critical for our relationship with our children. And so I've seen a lot of mothers and fathers be very helped with this reframe, because a lot of us feel very guilty to focus on ourselves when now as parents we are child centered.

[00:24:07] And what I help people understand is that you're not selfish if you're looking at how you can reconcile your old identity with a new one. You are helping your children. Because the most important thing for you to have happy, resilient, healthy children who grow up into well adjusted adults is your relationship with them.

[00:24:28] And if you're carrying resentment, as much as you think that you're not showing it, it shows, it comes out in subtle ways. It does. And children are way smarter, way more intuitive than we ever give them credit for. It's therefore significant that you do focus on this part of your identity so that you minimize resentment and so that you can connect with your children because they're not the source of your mourning. They're not the source of your loss.

[00:24:58] **This can shift so many things.**

[00:25:01] And so now it becomes clear that there's a mental and an emotional exhaustion involved in becoming a parent and in ignoring a lot of our other parts because this becomes a natural byproduct of constantly putting others before ourselves. This can manifest as burnout, where the exhaustion becomes so overwhelming that we feel emotionally drained, even when we have Some moments to rest, we might lose patience more easily or find it harder to muster enthusiasm for activities that we used to enjoy.

[00:25:34] And to back up the reframe that I said before, let's talk about the kids as well. Have you ever found that you're playing with your children, but you're not really

there? You're not very happy to be there. You're not your usual playful self. You're not fun. You're not engaging. And you're wondering why? Well, this is why if you're mentally exhausted, if you're emotionally drained, and if there's resentment there that "I have to be doing this while my whole body and my whole mind, they are screaming that I need some time to just connect with myself. I need to relax my nervous system. It is so uptight. It is so activated in all directions the draining ways," but you are not listening to this- you're not listening to your mind; you're not listening to your body; you're not taking in the cues- it's not going to let you be focused on the activity that you're doing.

[00:26:30] It's not going to let go and release and be playful. Do you see how irrational this expectation gets? You're drained and you're tired and you're so depleted, but you expect yourself to sit there and enjoy an activity that requires that you let go and that you are in flow and that you're relaxed and that you're free. These can't really go together. I can't force you to be playful. I can't force myself to be playful because playfulness requires a sense of release. It requires a sense of lightness. And there's no lightness when we start to become emotionally disconnected from ourselves.

[00:27:14] When we lose our sense of self, we not only feel distant from our own emotions, but we also struggle to connect with others on a deeper level. And over time, this emotional disconnection can seep in how we relate to our partner, how we play and communicate with our children, and even how we address our own needs. It's as though we've put ourselves in autopilot, going through the motions of parenthood without really engaging.

[00:27:41] Next, I want to talk about how all of this, how losing ourselves impacts our relationships, particularly with that of our partner. But a lot of this you're going to see that it does relate to other relationships as well. It could be the relationship we have with our parents, our siblings, our friends, parenthood as we know it brings about emotions and shifts in dynamics. When one or both partners lose themselves in parenthood, it can really bring a strain in the relationship in many ways that we may not have imagined.

[00:28:14] One of the most common issues is emotional distancing. If you no longer feel like yourself, it's hard to connect with your partner in the same way that you once did. The conversations that used to be about shared dreams or interests or future plans might now focus solely on parenting logistics. Who will pick up the kids? What time is the next doctor's appointment? What's for dinner? Without the meaningful connections outside of parenting, partners can start to drift apart emotionally.

[00:28:45] This also leads to an imbalance in the relationship. In heterosexual couples, for example, we frequently see a pattern where the mother takes on more of the emotional and mental labor, while the father may retain most of his individual identity. And this kind of imbalance can breed resentment and feelings of inequity. Whether we talk about it or we take it as a disappointment, but 'hey, it is what it is, this is what usually happens, I should have known better,' when one partner feels that they've sacrificed more of their personal identity for the family, it creates tension. And this tension is difficult to resolve without honest communication. If our partner is still able to pursue their hobbies or take time for themselves, if it doesn't seem like they are so ridden by guilt or shame, while we would have wanted to be happy for them, are we really? Or are we feeling that this is unfair? That our own ways to connect with ourselves, our own self care, what used to be us, has fallen by the wayside. And so this creates something that, is so, so common and so difficult to break out of unless there is concentrated effort, which is to start to compare how much each of us is giving and taking, leading to unspoken frustration and arguments. I did this, you did that, you didn't do this, but I did more, and we start to focus on these practical things when there's a lot of emotional background that needs to be expressed.

[00:30:21] And of course, this will inevitably lead to physical intimacy taking a hit. When one partner or both feel emotionally drained or disconnected with themselves, it's hard to foster connectedness and closeness in the relationship. Physical affection and intimacy can fall to the bottom of the priority list when we're struggling to stay in touch with our own body, with our own emotions, with our own selves. And if we have become resentful with our partner, and if we're not talking about it, then physical intimacy will be very, very hard to maintain.

[00:30:56] The key takeaway here is that losing ourselves in parenthood doesn't just affect us. And if we're willing to take the hit because we want to focus on our children and we want to focus on our marriage because having a healthy marriage and maintaining the relationship will help our children -we want to do as much as possible to maintain a home with both parents- we really need to recognize that all of this begins with us. It begins with our relationship with ourselves. So when we put ourselves in the background, when we put ourselves at the end of the priority list, because we feel that we're supposed to, and that it's the good thing, maybe we feel noble in putting our children first and putting our partners right after that, because then all of this maintains a good home for our children what we don't recognize is that by putting ourselves last, we are risking all of what we are fighting for, all that we care about. We are risking our children's wellbeing. We are risking our relationship and communication with our children. And we are risking the relationship with our partner, the marriage and the united front that we want to create, the family unit that we want to support.

[00:32:12] So this kind of leads into the third point, parenting; the impact on parenting itself. It might seem counterintuitive at first, but losing your sense of self will hinder your ability to be the best parent that you can be.

[00:32:26] When we lose touch with our identity, it can be very hard to model healthy behaviors for our children. We all know that kids learn by watching us, and if they see a parent who is constantly overwhelmed, disconnected, unhappy, they may internalize these behaviors as normal. For example, if you struggle with setting boundaries or taking time for yourself, your children might grow up with the belief that self care isn't important or their needs should come second because that is what love is; that is how my mom expressed her love to me. She put herself last. They might also learn that emotional disconnection is natural as a part of parenthood. And so this can affect their emotional regulation. It can affect their relationship in the future, and it can affect whether they will want to become a parent in the first place, or if they do want to, become a parent, then it will affect the way that they show up as a parent. They will be predisposed to think that the minute I become a parent, I am going to have to be this way. And naturally this is either going to completely deter them from wanting to

be a parent or it's going to create a lot of pressure once they do because that is what they think they should become now.

[00:33:45] Additionally, emotional exhaustion can impact our ability to engage fully with our children. Like I mentioned before, when we're drained, it's harder to be present, which is something that I hear as the top goal for parents. I've talked to a lot of mothers and when I asked them what they would want, everyone has different desires, but the one thing that keeps coming up is **being present** and feeling that they're not present enough and blaming themselves for not being present when what's really happening is that they are so exhausted, they are so irregular in their nervous system, they're so drained that naturally you cannot be present, your body is fighting for its life, your mind is trying to settle.

[00:34:30] And other than not being present, **we can't be patient** either. That's where we snap and we wonder, my god, I am practicing all the gentle parenting and I read all the books and I'm trying so hard and I wake up with great intention, why do I end up yelling at my kids midday? Well, of course you're gonna yell. You're a ticking time bomb because you haven't taken care of yourself. You feel lost. Parts of you internally are having a war with one another, because those parts that you think you can hush, those parts that you have exiled because they no longer serve you, because they aren't good enough to be around now that you're a parent, they're not the best example, whatever it may be; maybe that ambitious self that wanted to hit all the goals and wanted to be the best at work. Maybe that self has to completely hush because now you're not supposed to think about goals and you're not supposed to think about work. But do you think that if it's been a part of you for 20, 30 years, it's just going to go out without a fight? I hope this kind of gives you perspective.

[00:35:37] And then, of course, **can we really be empathetic with our children** when we have no empathy for those parts that we're exiling, when we have no empathy for our old self that is looking for a way out, When we have no empathy for our body that is seeking time for itself, our mind that wants to just take a breath.

[00:35:59] When we find ourselves going through the motions of parenting and getting all the stuff done and feeling really good because we got all the errands done

and we got the meals made and we ran the bedtime routine, we didn't skip the program, we did all the good things, because we followed the program that the book suggested, but we've taken no time to emotionally connect, then we're not as satisfied about all those goals that we hit in the day and all the things that we did.

[00:36:27] There needs to be balance there. The emotional disconnection will lead to shorter tempers. Frequent feelings of irritation, guilt, frustration. So then we blame ourselves for losing our patience and for snapping. And while this is a normal part of parenting, it becomes a vicious cycle. The more disconnected that we are from ourselves, the more likely we are to struggle with patience and compassion in our parenting. And then when we become really aggressive and vindictive and angry with ourselves, again, we're going to feel even more disconnected. And then we're going to snap more. We're going to be less empathetic. And around and around it goes.

[00:37:07] What's more, when we're not in touch with our own identity, it can be really **hard to guide our children in developing their own**. Parenting with confidence requires a strong sense of who we are and what values we want to impart on our children. But if we've lost sight of our own identity, it becomes really challenging to model independence, resilience, and confidence. We might be putting in place a lot of things, but even if we're overly focused on our children's needs this is at the expense of teaching them the importance of nurturing their own interests and boundaries.

[00:37:43] And finally, let's not forget about joy. When we're disconnected from ourselves, **we miss out on some of the pure joy** that parenting can bring. I alluded to this before: instead of being fulfilled by the small and beautiful moments with our children, we might just be trying to get through the day. And this is not because we're bad parents and we are not grateful for having our children and we don't love them, but it's because how can you feel joy when your whole being is screaming to be acknowledged? So this lack of joy is not just hard on us, it can be deeply felt by our children who are deeply attuned to their parents emotional states.

## 6 Ways to Reconnect with Ourselves



[00:38:22] Okay, so I don't want to leave you with all of this impending doom kind of information. I want to make sure that while we've explored how Losing ourselves will impact our identity, our relationship, and the way that we connect with our children. I do want to go into some solution mode. How can we reconnect to ourselves while still embracing our role as parents?

[00:38:46] The key here is balance. Finding ways to nurture both our identity and our responsibilities as parents without one overshadowing the other. Our identity and our caring for ourselves doesn't have to become something that will be in place of being the good parent that we want to be, not the perfect parent, the good parent that we want to be.

[00:39:10] The good news is that this is entirely possible. It doesn't happen overnight. It requires intention, but with the right strategies, you can start to feel more like you again. So, let's dive into some practical step by step ways to prevent or reverse this identity loss.

[00:39:28] One of the first and most powerful steps in this process is reclaiming time for yourself. It may seem impossible, especially if you've been juggling kids and work and all the other demands of life, but carving out time for yourself, even in small pockets is essential. Let's be clear, this isn't about finding hours of free time every day. It's about just creating some intentional moments. You can start small, set aside 10, 15 minutes in the morning before the kids wake up. Or, if that's not the case, because that wasn't the case for me, I never got enough sleep and I woke up when my son woke up, there isn't that time, those 10 15 minutes never existed, but Perhaps what you can do is after they've gone to bed at night to just try to do something for you. Or that example that I gave you from my self connect calendar, light that candle in the morning and then give yourself those five minutes at night. It could be even as simple as sitting quietly with your cup of coffee or Chamomile, reading a chapter of a book, or a page of the book, or listening to the music that you love. One song. **The goal is to remind yourself that you matter**, and your interests and passions deserve time and attention. If your children are old enough, you can even involve them in this process. For example, you might explain that "this is my time to do something that I love" and show them that it's important to make space for personal enjoyment, even for grown ups. This also

teaches them the value of personal boundaries and self care from an early age. It also teaches them to distinguish love from enmeshment. For longer stretches of time, consider scheduling it literally. Put it on the calendar just like you would any other commitment. Maybe it's a weekly evening where you take a class. Maybe it's meet up with a friend or simply spending just some time on a hobby. When you schedule this time in advance, you're more likely to honor it. You've put yourself on the calendar, and you don't feel guilty about it. This is the time that you need to be a better parent, a better partner, a better person. And this is to the benefit of everyone.

[00:41:47] Secondly, I would like to talk about hobbies and passions, those things that you used to love before kids entered the picture. Whether it was painting, writing, gardening, playing an instrument or working out, there's something incredibly rejuvenating about engaging in an activity that's purely for personal enjoyment. Reclaiming these hobbies is not only a way to feel like ourselves again, but it also gives us a creative and physical outlet where we get to express emotions, relieve stress. If you're thinking, I don't even remember what I used to enjoy, that's okay. Start by reflecting on activities that used to bring you joy or even try new ones. The goal isn't to be productive in any way. You're not supposed to create something with these activities. Do not make it a way that you can generate some side money or something practical for the home. If you enjoy exercise, perhaps you just go on family walks or on bike rides. This not only allows you to engage in something meaningful, but it models for your children that adults, too, need outlets for creativity and self expression. And even if it's something that you have to do or you get to do all by yourself. Again, this is something that will model to your children what it's like to be a healthy adult that has a well rounded life, that will make some time for themselves, and they'll do it unapologetically.

[00:43:18] **Number three, boundaries.** Setting boundaries is crucial when it comes to protecting our sense of self; one of the most empowering things you can do as a parent. This might mean saying no to extra commitments, whether you're volunteering at your child's school, attending a family gathering, or taking on additional work responsibilities. Many parents, many. Parents feel immense pressure to say yes to everything, thinking it's part of being a good parent. But the reality is that when you

overextend yourself, you risk burnout and that makes it harder to show up fully in areas that matter most.

[00:43:57] I remember holding this seminar for parents at a school that I worked in. Um, it was about how to communicate better with your children. And there was this mom who had three daughters and she was talking about the fact that basically her entire afternoon and evening, right after she picked them up from school, was her acting like a cab driver. She would take each one to the different activities that all of them did. They were all either preteens or teens. Then she would drive them to their friend's place, and then the one activity, and then the other lesson, and all of these things. And she felt completely burned out. She had to somehow coordinate all these things. I have one child and young. And this year, his second year of school, we have added a couple of more activities and my God, it's already feeling like a lot to coordinate. So I don't know how she did it, but I did make a point at that moment to tell her that it's beautiful that she does all of this for her kids, but that she needs to take care of herself as well, and figure out ways where she can lighten the load, where she doesn't have to be the person that's driving them around all the time, where they get to also be responsible for how they're going to get places because full transparency, she asks me in that moment, are you a mom? And I wasn't. I think I was pregnant. I was very early into my pregnancy at that point but I didn't share. But of course I didn't know what she was going through experientially. What I did know is that there were other ways and that there were blockages in the way that she saw how she needed to serve her family. And I noticed a mom that was very invested in doing the very best for all her children to ensure that all of them get equal treatment. But also I saw a woman who did not do anything else besides parenting. And so while she basically was trying to make an argument that I don't know what it's about and I don't understand, what my response to her was is " I know that you want to provide everything for your children and I'm not saying you should stop," because that is how she interpreted she actually asked me she's like " but then how do they get to do the things are you saying that they shouldn't be doing all these things that I should rob them of the opportunity because I need more time to go do my nails or to take care of myself or at the very least not to be a taxi driver?" And it felt to her like that was overindulgent and that she'd be depriving her children. And so my response to that was, " no, they get to keep everything. But if they are unwilling to budge, something that she shared, on what it is

that they do and how it is that they do it so that at the very least when it's something that can change, like the time that they get to meet a friend so that she doesn't have to go in and out of the house a million times, maybe they can coordinate their friend meetup so so that at least on the weekend, she doesn't have to drive six times back and forth with each and every one of them, they would have to figure out a way to take on certain things that are safe for them to take on. And they would also have to find a way that the parents amongst themselves can basically do a carpooling system. And so I saw in her eyes that it started to click. I can protect parts of me. I can protect my time at least a little bit more without that having to mean that I am depriving my children.

[00:47:43] And so it's very important to stay open to the idea that providing for my needs, taking care of myself, does not have to be at my children's expense. Because I do think that at the very back of our heads, there is some version of this fear, that if I start taking care of myself, maybe I'll lose control. Maybe I'll become super selfish and not even notice. How do I know what's the limit between what's that thin line between being a good mother that is caring and gives all the opportunities possible to her children and becoming selfish? What is that balance, that space in between where I can be both?

[00:48:26] But I don't know that there is such a well defined space. And a lot of times, the difficulty in figuring that space out has to do with external circumstances and external peer pressure. Anyway, but that's a different conversation.

[00:48:40] So if you find that you might be in such a dilemma, start small. Maybe you set a boundary with your partner or co parent that ensures you some quiet time, a quiet hour on the weekend to recharge. Or perhaps you establish a routine where you have a no interruptions rule during certain hours of the day to focus on personal stuff or work related tasks, communicate these boundaries clearly with your family so that they understand that it's not about shutting them out. It's about creating balance for everyone's well being.

[00:49:13] Tip number four: **accepting help**. As parents, we often feel like we need to do it all. There's this ingrained belief that asking for help is a sign of weakness, a sign of failure, of not being a good parent.

[00:49:26] But the truth is that accepting help and even seeking it out ourselves actively can be the key to reclaiming our sense of self. And if we're being honest, it takes way more strength to ask for help and to accept help than it takes to do it on our own. The courage that it takes to set aside our pride or to go against that part of us that has been really hurt and has been told that they have to achieve everything in order to be worthy and to disrupt that pattern and to be able to say, "no, I will ask for help. And I am still worthy," now that is strength. So whether it's asking a partner to take on more household tasks, or leaning on family or friends for support, there's no shame in sharing the load. If it's within your means, consider outsourcing tasks that drain your energy, like hiring a babysitter for a few hours, ordering groceries online, or getting help with cleaning. For those in partnered relationships, this is where clear communication comes into play. Have an open conversation with your partner about the mental and emotional load that you're carrying and how the two of you can share responsibilities more equitably. Explain that by lightening your load, you'll have more energy to bring back to the relationship and to the family. This can shift the household dynamic and allow you to reconnect with yourself.

[00:50:51] And I am going to make a side note here because I am starting to see a pattern in many relationships and with many couples that I work with.

[00:50:59] The struggle is real. There rarely is an equitable sharing of responsibility when it comes to household and parenting, and there is some kind of resentment that we inevitably, have to uncover and work on to resolve. But I'm going to argue that the imbalance itself is not the issue. The issue is the way that we feel about this imbalance, because it starts to mean that my work, the things that I take on that are way more than you do, are considered as less valuable. And that must be the reason why you think it's okay to dump all of them on me, because you think you're doing more, you think you're doing something more important, you think you're doing better.

[00:51:42] And so there's a lot of reframing that needs to be done, but also there's a lot of trust that needs to be rebuilt that we both value each other. And within that, the side note that I want to make is. Your partner may realize that what you're doing is very important, and they might tell you that they are willing to take on the cost and outsource help. And I've seen many partners usually women, but also men who will refuse this solution. So if I am arguing that I am not getting enough help around the house and my partner says, well, let's get someone to help you. Let's see how often that would be once or twice a month, once or twice a week, let's figure it out- I'm willing to pay for it because honestly, I am not willing to take on housework. I work way too long. I am very tired and I don't want to do it. I've never done it. I'm not going to be good at it. You're going to then nag at me for the things that I haven't done the right way. And so I think it's going to be a bigger strain on our relationship because I'll be more tired than I'll feel pressured and you won't actually be happy with the outcome of what it is that you've assigned me. So I'm willing to pay and there, the partner does not accept that. The solution and the reason becomes that this is the principle of the matter. I want you to be the one that helps me. I want you to want to contribute. This shows me that you don't care about our family because you don't want to be part of the household things. You don't consider them worthy enough of your attention. And that's why you're outsourcing. When the person who's outsourcing is just simply saying, "I see you, I know this is tough. I know it's a lot and I know you need support. I am not going to be the one that provides it physically. I'm not going to be the one who does this, but I am showing you that I value it enough to invest in it with my money and to take it out of your hands."

[00:53:42] So if you run into this kind of trouble where you are asking for more help and your partner is saying, I'm willing to pay for it. If that irks you instead of satisfying you, then it is something for you guys to explore and put out in the open. And this is not just women. I've heard men say that the fact that my wife decided to go back to business and she has hired someone to be cooking for our family.

[00:54:10] It really irritates me. When we started looking into why that is, it's because he had connected food and cooking as a process with a way of showing that you care. That is one of the main ways that in his family, his mother showed everyone that she cared. She took time to cook and to pick the best materials and to think of the recipes

and to then gather everyone around the table. It was a whole ritual and then people tasting her food and commenting on it. That's beautiful. But because of this, lived experience and because of the association that he had made with cooking, food and that being a display, a demonstration of caring and love, he was misinterpreting his wife's way of organizing her time and outsourcing some activities so that when she gets back she can be productive. present with him and the children. He was misinterpreting it as lack of care when it was the exact opposite. It was, " I care to have time with you. If I come back from work and I'm stuck in the kitchen to cook, to clean, to gather, to do all the things I am not going to be able to see you guys."

[00:55:22] And so it's really important to. Talk, to communicate about all of these things in a nonjudgmental way, in a safe space where we can actually say, " as you say this, here is what I am interpreting. Here is how I see it." I statements, right? And then the other person doesn't get triggered and they can say, well, I see how you see interpret it. And I wonder where that might be coming from. But here is why I do it. And this can slowly lead into a conversation that we can both stand to have, for one, and that can eventually lead to a resolution.

[00:56:02] For this very reason, I've created a communications checklist for couples where it's basically a one pager that you download and it has a pre conversation plan, a within conversation checklist, and a post conversation reflection and questions to consider so that you prepare for a tough conversation. You have all the skills like fresh in your mind in that moment. And while you're having the conversation, both you and your partner have this checklist in front of you and you make sure that you're following and you are on track with the best tips for effective communication. One of them, for example, being keeping the conversation into I statements so that when you see that you drift off into, "you did this, you make me feel," as you glance at the checklist, you can look and say, Oh, Oops. Okay. Let's try to turn that into I. You vocalize that to you and you say, okay, look, I'm starting to use you statements when I want to be using I, I don't want to be blaming you. So let me try that again. And this has been shown to - not magically but steadily- reduce the tension in couples when they are having tough conversations. So if you're looking to download that you're going to find it at [markellakaplani.com/couples-checklist](http://markellakaplani.com/couples-checklist) where you either get access to it immediately for \$5 or you get to have it for free if you send me a screenshot of your five star rating and

review of my podcast, something that I so appreciate that I am going to manually send you the checklist for free.

[00:57:35] Moving on to **tip: number five therapy and self reflection**. So sometimes, let's be realistic here, reclaiming our sense of self requires a deeper dive into the emotional and psychological factors that led us to lose it in the first place. This is where therapy can be a powerful tool. I have used therapy as a tool for this and this is exactly why I understand the Great importance of this tool. A good therapist can help us untangle these internalized beliefs and these expectations that have shaped how we identify as a parent; guide us toward creating a new narrative that integrates both our role as parent and our personal identity. But because a lot of times, not always, but a lot of times there is this very harsh inner critic, I know there was in my case, that gets in the way, That is very demanding that creates a cycle of shame and guilt that then keeps us in the loop of feeling like failures of feeling like we're not enough then what therapy does is it brings that inner critic forward, it understands why it's doing the things that it's doing, it starts to untangle the protective role that it has, where it's coming from, how it stemmed into childhood, we access the inner child, we talk about all these things, all these thoughts that are creating our overwhelm, our actions, our need to do certain things, otherwise we feel unworthy. So that they are no longer unconscious and driving our behavior. You might explore questions like, what are my core values? What do I want my life to look like beyond parenthood? How can I honor my needs while still being present for my family? What's really important is that we have this space, where we are held, where we're given the opportunity to reflect and process and build new strategies for maintaining a balanced identity.

[00:59:35] But even if therapy isn't an option for you, there are self reflection practices like journaling or mindfulness that can offer similar benefits, and you can start doing that today. If you want to do that, here's what you can do. ***Take time each day or even once a week, because I know each day is a lot for some people and I am some people, but take some time at the very least once a week to check in with yourself. How are you feeling? What do you need? What is missing? This kind of intentional reflection can help you stay connected to your inner self, even in the midst of a busy parenting life.***



[01:00:13] And that is why you will see in all of my episodes that I give you the opportunity to journal, that I give you prompts that you can use in order to journal. I believe that one way to connecting back with yourself is listening to this podcast, and it is after doing so, to answer the journaling prompts.

[01:00:32] And finally, the **sixth tip is to reconnect with your partner**, which can be a significant part of reclaiming your identity. Parenting will shift the dynamics in a relationship. And sometimes partners can feel like they've become more like roommates or co parents than romantic partners. If you feel like you've lost touch with your partner, take steps to rebuild that connection.

[01:00:57] Because when you're stronger as a couple, it's easier to give space for yourself. So you can work backwards in that sense. Again, it's vital that you start small, but be intentional. Regular check ins, whether it's weekly date nights or just a 20 minute conversation after the kids go to bed every other day, these things can work wonders in maintaining your connection.

[01:01:20] Use this time to talk about your personal feelings, your challenges, what you're enjoying. Share how you may be changing, what your identity feels like, the roller coaster of emotions you're potentially feeling. Don't focus solely on parenting logistics. That will not do the trick. When you and your partner are on the same page, you're more likely to feel supported in taking time for yourself, and you can offer that same support to your partner in return. It's all about creating a dynamic where both partners identities are valued and understood. Nurtured, not just as parents, but as individuals.

[01:01:57] As we come to the end of today's episode, I want to take a moment to reflect on everything we've discussed. Parenting with all its joys and all its challenges can sometimes feel all encompassing and it's so easy to lose touch with the person we once were before children. There is no judgment there. In fact, I understand this topic more than I can express in words. But the truth is, we don't have to lose ourselves in the process of becoming a parent. And this is something that I figured out along the way, and this is why I've become very passionate in sharing this with other parents. We

then talked about what it means to lose ourselves, how this impacts us emotionally and how it can affect our relationships with our partner, as well as with our children.

[01:02:44] In that light, we discussed how important it is that we do take care of ourselves on an individual level, and we reframed what it means to prioritize ourself and how this is actually the way that we remain child centered and relationship centered and family centered.

[01:03:01] Finally, we explored strategies. Real, practical, structured strategies for reclaiming our sense of self, whether that is carving out personal time, nurturing our passions, setting boundaries, or seeking help when we need it.

[01:03:18] The takeaway is clear: maintaining our identities as parents is not selfish. In fact, what I've been arguing for this entire episode is that this is the most selfless of things that we can do, because when we are more connected to ourselves, we're able to bring out our best, most authentic self to our family. We're modeling for our children what it looks like to lead balanced, fulfilling lives. We're fostering a healthier relationship with our partner. And most importantly, we're finding joy in our role as parent. Without losing the core of who we are, we are not compromising our happiness over theirs or their happiness and fulfillment over hours.

[01:04:03] So in closing this episode, I want to challenge you to take one small step this week to reconnect with yourself. Download my self connect calendar at [markellakaplani.com/selfconnectcalendar](http://markellakaplani.com/selfconnectcalendar) and get some ideas of what you could do and what fits your schedule and your lifestyle and your values. Maybe it's just finding 10 minutes a day for something that brings you joy. Maybe it's having an honest conversation with your partner about the mental load and the emotional load that you're carrying. Or maybe it's setting a boundary that allows you to have space and the time that you need to feel more like you again. Whatever the step may be, I encourage you to do it. Take it unapologetically, and with the confidence that you are doing what's best for your family, that you reconnecting with yourself has a ripple effect of true, authentic, strong connection and attachment with your children, with your partner, and for the entire family and for generations even to come.

[01:05:05] Remember, it doesn't have to be perfect or grand. It just has to be intentional and regular. Over time, these small regular actions that we take, they stack up and we start to see changes. I bet you, if you do this, you will see changes in how you feel about yourself, in how you feel about your parenting and your relationships, including friendships as well. If today's episode resonated with you, I'd love to hear your experiences.

[01:05:35] If you're trying out the self connect calendar, if you're downloading the couple's communication checklist, let me know how it goes. Send me a message, share your thoughts, or describe to me what step you're going to take this week to reclaim a bit of your identity. If you want some accountability, I have a free Facebook group that you can enter and you can let me know about it.

[01:05:56] And if you're feeling lost or unsure of where to start, consider reaching out for support. Therapy or coaching are one tool that can help you explore these issues more deeply and I'm always here to guide you in that process.

[01:06:10] Thank you for joining me today. And for those moments that you feel lost in parenthood, just remember, being a great parent doesn't mean losing yourself. It doesn't mean exiling parts of yourself. It means bringing all of you, all of who you are, into the journey of parenthood.

[01:06:28] I'll see you in the next episode.