

Separation & Self-Worth: Redefining What It Means to Be Enough

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Hi and welcome to *You Keep Me Sane*. I'm Aileen, and I'm Julie. We're two friends navigating life's ups and downs together from opposite sides of the world.

Hi and welcome back to *Keep Me Sane*.

Hi, Aileen.

Hi, Julie.

How are you?

I'm good, I'm good. And I'm really looking forward to today's conversation because we're diving into a topic that so many people wrestle with, and that's relationship self-worth and what happens when those relationships end.

I've had a lot of discussions lately in the community with friends and friends of friends. There have been a lot of separations.

Yeah, I've seen a few myself, and I've been one of those. Our self-worth is so often tied up in our relationships, whether it's being a good partner, holding a family together, or simply feeling chosen. And when a marriage or a long-term relationship ends, it can really shake everything we thought we knew about ourselves.

Exactly. Divorce or a breakup isn't just the end of a relationship — it can feel like the end of an identity. I've definitely felt that in past relationships, especially long-term ones. It's like, who am I without this role? When it ends, you start wondering, was I enough, and will I ever be enough for someone else? These are the kinds of questions so many women face, particularly when a long-term relationship ends in midlife, and it can cut deeply into our sense of worth.

I remember being terrified when my marriage ended and I went to live on my own. Really terrified. But after about six months, you get used to it.

It is time, isn't it?

It is time.

That's why we're so excited about today's guest. Kate Daly is the founder of *The Divorce Podcast* and co-founder of Amicable, a tech startup transforming how people separate. After her own challenging and costly divorce, Kate wanted to create a kinder, more affordable way for couples to part — one that reduces conflict and supports both people to move forward.

What she's built is incredible. Amicable combines human support with technology to help couples navigate everything from parenting arrangements to dividing finances, without those

aggravated and expensive battles that often cause so much damage. Today, Amicable is a B Corp certified company helping thousands of people every year separate in a much healthier way.

What we really love about Kate is that she doesn't just talk about the legal or practical side of divorce. She's deeply interested in the emotional side — the shame, the loss, how self-worth gets tangled up in being a partner, and how we begin to rebuild when that role falls away.

This is such a vital conversation because almost everyone has experienced having their self-worth tied up in a relationship. When that relationship ends, rebuilding can be really tough. In this episode, we're going to ask Kate about the common self-worth struggles she sees in people going through divorce, and what it looks like to reclaim your sense of value and identity on the other side of separation.

We can't wait for you to hear her wisdom.

So, hi Kate, and welcome to *Keep Me Sane*.

Hi Julie, hi Aileen. It's lovely to be here. Thank you for having me.

We're so excited for this chat, and we want to focus a bit on self-worth, which is something we've talked about a lot recently. We were saying earlier that we often measure our worth by whether we're chosen or loved. From your perspective, how do relationships shape the way people see their value?

Often we take roles in relationships, and over time as those roles change, if a relationship ends it can be really difficult not to feel that the thing you were valued for has finished — and therefore that you have no value. A lot of divorces now happen later in life, often at the same time that roles are changing anyway because children are growing up and leaving home. If a relationship ends at the same time, it can leave a huge dent in your self-worth and how you feel about yourself.

It can also make you look back and question whether you've had a fulfilling life, especially if the family unit you created together no longer exists. When relationship breakdown coincides with changing family dynamics, it can be a really vulnerable time and very easy to spiral into a dark place.

That makes sense, because people often value themselves based on the family or the role they've played, without even thinking about who they are anymore.

Exactly. We often define ourselves by our roles — job titles, being a parent, a carer. Our self-worth becomes linked to what we do rather than who we are. Real self-worth is that intrinsic sense of being good enough, without needing to prove yourself through a big job or a perfectly curated family. Unfortunately, many of us take our worth from doing rather than being, and we rarely have time to think about who we actually are.

That's exactly how we ended up starting this podcast. Julie and I talked for years and realised so much of it came down to self-worth — tying it to careers, money, achievement. But it's an inside job.

Do you think women in particular struggle with this — tying their worth to being a good wife, a good mum, or holding everything together?

Traditionally, yes. Women's work has often been undervalued and invisible. If you're the homemaker, your validation doesn't come with a paycheck or external praise. You don't get tangible markers of success, even though the mental load is enormous. That invisible labour has gone unnoticed for centuries, yet women are criticised for not having confidence, money, or pensions — when in reality, they've been carrying everything else.

There's the invisible load and the invisible labour, and very little recognition for it. Do you also see identity issues come up — where people don't even know who they are anymore?

Absolutely. When we ask people what they want their future to look like, they really struggle. They're often much better at saying what they don't want. Sometimes that's actually a good place to start. You don't need a perfect plan. Life doesn't work like that. But knowing who you are — or at least beginning that exploration — helps you move forward even when the future feels uncertain.

Many people have spent years making decisions based on others' needs — partners, children, families. When that structure changes, it can send shockwaves through someone's sense of self.

I've noticed that too. I knew who I was before my marriage ended, but I have friends who went straight from university into marriage and struggled much more afterward.

That's very common. If you go into a relationship with a strong sense of self, you have more resilience. True self-worth doesn't disappear — even if you have to dig deep to reconnect with it. But if you've never lived alone or spent time discovering who you are, separation can feel completely destabilising.

I married young and had never lived on my own. When that relationship ended, that's when I truly grew up. I learned to be alone, to enjoy my own company, to say no, to stop people-pleasing. Those years were incredibly freeing and formative, even though they followed a divorce.

So many of us tie our worth to what we do, what we earn, or how others see us. But real self-worth is knowing you're enough without the labels. Therapy can help untangle those patterns and build a kinder relationship with yourself.

Sometimes these changes are hard not just for you, but for the people around you. When you start setting boundaries or changing, it can feel disruptive to others. Not everyone will like it or support it. But that doesn't mean it's wrong. Big personal changes often come with resistance — and that's something people should be prepared for when they start choosing themselves.

There might be some communication needed, and there may be work you have to do to really embed those changes and help people see you in a different way.

Yeah. And sometimes shame or guilt can come up when you feel like you've failed or that you aren't enough. How do you see that showing up with some of the women you speak to?

Shame and guilt show up in both men and women. There is still a stigma around getting divorced or separating. I was reading something the other day about Nicole Kidman and Keith Urban having been together for 19 years. If a band had been together for 19 years, we'd be saying that's incredible. If you'd had the same job for 19 years, that would be unheard of. So the notion that a 19-year relationship is a failure really struck me. Quite frankly, I'd be patting myself on the back at that point.

The way we conceptualise divorce and separation is still incredibly negative, something to be ashamed of. Yet we know it happens to nearly half of marriages. The idea that it should be shameful, stigmatised, or punishing is really problematic, because ultimately you aren't failing. You're changing the way your family functions so that everyone can be happier within it.

If a family isn't functioning well and one or more people are suffering, then you do need to be bold and make a change. It should be seen as protecting everyone's mental health. If we reframed it as saying, I'm not breaking my family, I'm changing how it operates so everyone can thrive, that would be a completely different way of looking at divorce and separation. That's where we need to get to as a society.

Shaming people and making them feel guilty damages mental health. It makes co-parenting harder after separation. It increases the risk of male suicide because men often become isolated from friends and family. And ultimately, it costs this country £52 billion a year picking up the pieces after divorce and separation.

This is a huge problem. It's not just an individual issue. It starts with the individual, but it rolls up into communities, regions, and entire countries. The price of getting this wrong is absolutely massive.

That number is staggering — £52 billion. I had no idea.

It's nearly as much as we spend on defence.

That's unreal, isn't it?

And the rise in male suicide is particularly concerning. I have a friend who's recently gone through a divorce, and he talked about how isolating it can be for men.

Yes, because who usually gets the friends? Often it's women, as they tend to build the social networks, particularly through caregiving and children. Men can very quickly become isolated after separation. Culturally, they're not encouraged to talk about how they feel or voice concerns about their mental health. Suddenly they're spending night after night alone, perhaps seeing their children less, without the same caregiving responsibilities, and it can become a very dark place very quickly.

It's something we really need to be aware of, because men don't get the same natural support within the community.

Going back to shame and stigma, do you think part of why it sticks around is because when someone makes a bold decision to change their life, it forces others to reflect on their own relationships — and that discomfort gets projected outward?

Yes, definitely. People often say divorce is contagious, because it forces reflection. You'll be sitting with friends and someone will say, well, my partner does this or that, and you can almost see the ripple effect around the table as others think, oh, my partner does that too.

When someone chooses to separate and says this is the right decision for me and my family, it does make others look at their own relationships. And sometimes those relationships fall short. But there's nothing wrong with reflecting. Just because a relationship isn't perfect doesn't mean it's over. There are many steps between questioning whether something is working and deciding to separate.

As a society, we need to invest far more in maintaining relationships. Right now, we have this idea that you get married with a big celebration and then ignore the relationship for the rest of your life. If you're lucky, it carries on. If you're unlucky, someone raises a concern and there's no framework to deal with it.

We'd be far better off teaching relationship skills in schools and creating a cultural expectation that relationships require ongoing care and attention. They don't just run in the background.

Relationships have to evolve, just as individuals do.

Exactly. It's strange when you think about it practically. You meet in your twenties or thirties and you're expected to stay together until death, yet we're all encouraged to grow as individuals. What happens when you grow in different directions? Are we saying that's bad? That personal growth is only acceptable if it happens in exactly the same way?

It doesn't make rational sense. Some people will grow together, and that's wonderful. Others won't, and for those people, it can be the bravest decision to acknowledge that growth has happened and choose a new way forward.

We've grown, we've raised a family, or we're starting to raise a family. We need to find a different way to make this work. And if finding a different way to make it work means we don't live together but we parent together, or we don't live together and don't have anything to do with each other, then so be it. That choice belongs to the people in the relationship.

But if we have the option to support people while they're making that choice, rather than sending them to two separate lawyers to fight about assets, childcare, and everything else, then wouldn't that be a great thing?

Part of what we're trying to do at Amicable is help people transition from being partners to being co-parents — to be better equipped for the next part of the journey, which is parenting apart. That's a skill, and it requires support. You don't just wake up one day, stop living in the same house, and assume parenting will continue as normal. It's fundamentally changed, and people need help adjusting to that.

I think what you're doing is amazing, Kate. I actually see your billboards on the buses and always think of you when they go past. It's fantastic what you're doing.

Something I was wondering about is people-pleasing. Do you see women staying too long or giving too much of themselves because their worth feels tied to keeping the relationship alive?

Yes, and it's a broader cultural issue. Women are brought up to people-please and are rewarded for it from a very early age. There's a real gender difference there — people saying, I don't want to say anything because I don't want to rock the boat. We hear that a lot.

I think we've also lost the art of disagreeing agreeably. Just because we don't agree doesn't mean it has to turn into a fight or conflict. When you're navigating a relationship breakdown — whether you're trying to repair it or separate — you can still have different opinions without it becoming a crisis.

From a female perspective in particular, we're often taught not to rock the boat, not to say controversial things, not to risk anger. And very often that's because the other person controls the finances or resources, so the consequences of disagreeing feel very high. But they don't have to be.

In a supported environment, with someone facilitating the conversation, you can raise concerns. You don't have to people-please or simply nod along with the person who appears to have the power. There are many ways to approach separation differently, but we often default to adversarial language very quickly.

You catch more flies with honey than vinegar. Amicable doesn't mean not disagreeing. You can disagree amicably. You can work through all the issues, challenge things, and still reach a resolution that works. Taking an amicable approach doesn't mean you can't raise objections — it's the opposite.

It really is a radical reimagining, isn't it? People are so used to being pitted against each other, thinking that change requires conflict or resistance. And yet, it does come back to self-worth. Fear plays such a big role — fear about finances, about being okay on your own. Helping people rebuild their self-worth is a crucial part of that transition.

The first step is recognising when fear is the lever. When fear is driving the reaction, it's often the amygdala — the emotional part of the brain — taking over. That fear can be rooted in childhood experiences, abandonment issues, or past financial insecurity, and relationship breakdowns can trigger those deeply ingrained patterns.

The goal during separation or negotiation is to move from reacting emotionally to responding rationally — shifting thinking into the frontal cortex. That sounds simple, but it takes practice. Slowing things down helps. Deep breathing, grounding yourself physically, noticing your body — even small actions can create enough space to stop an automatic reaction.

Naming the emotion is powerful. Saying internally, I'm reacting because I'm frightened, buys you time and helps you process what's actually happening. Fear is valid. Divorce and separation are frightening, especially when finances and the future are uncertain. But fear shouldn't drive the entire strategy.

Once the emotional response is acknowledged, you need to think strategically. That means considering not only your own needs, but also the other person's fears and motivations. In a separation, you're only half the story. Understanding the full picture leads to better outcomes.

Working through this process almost requires an openness to personal growth. And that's one of the most rewarding parts of the work. You might start with deeply entrenched positions and strong beliefs about what's fair. Often people confuse fair with equal, but they're not the same — particularly when one partner has given up work or career progression.

By the end of the process, when those assumptions have been examined and challenged, growth is inevitable — even if it's uncomfortable. I see it all the time.

There was one woman I worked with who had a rigid, tightly structured plan because her job demanded it. Everything was on a knife edge. But as we talked, it became clear she hated her job and wanted to start something completely different. The existing agreement only worked if she stayed stuck.

It would have been easier to leave it as it was, but it felt wrong. So we went back to the beginning and renegotiated everything. It took a long time, and it was scary, but it was the right thing. She's happier now, and because of that, the co-parenting relationship is more flexible and healthier. The child is thriving, and the outcome is better for everyone.

That kind of result wouldn't have been possible in a traditional adversarial process.

That must have felt incredible to witness. And without that support, she might not have had the insight or the bravery to make that choice.

Bravery often feels like madness at the time. I relate to that deeply. After my second divorce, I had nothing. I was on benefits, had two small children, and relied heavily on my parents for childcare. I constantly questioned whether I was doing the right thing or whether I should just take a stable job.

Those doubts are real, especially when you have children. But you get one life. Sometimes that perspective matters.

You were brave too, Kate.

Brave or stupid — you never know at the time. It just worked out.

Looking back, though, you can see it as bravery.

When it comes to rebuilding self-worth during separation, support is everything. I think of it as a triangle: one good friend, one professional, and one personal practice.

Your practice might be walking, journaling, cooking, or reading — something you do regularly just for you. A professional could be a therapist, coach, or another form of support, depending on what you need at the time. And then one really good friend.

Friends and professionals play very different roles. Friends offer warmth, safety, and space to be messy. Professionals help you move forward and do the deeper work. Knowing the difference is important.

That triangulation — one friend, one practice, one professional — can change everything.

The power of one friend really is incredible. Talking things through can make such a difference. There's something especially powerful about walking and talking — it allows the brain to work differently.

Thank you so much, Kate. This has been an incredible conversation and such valuable insight into breakups, self-worth, and growth. We're so grateful for your time.

Kate really is phenomenal. What stood out most was how deeply we tie our identity and self-worth to relationships and roles — and how losing those can shake us to the core.

But divorce doesn't have to be just an ending. It can also be a beginning. Growth often comes after the hardest moments.

If this episode resonated with you, we'd love to hear from you. Maybe you've been through a separation, or maybe you've felt your worth tied to a relationship. Share your story with us — we're here to listen.

If you found this episode helpful, please subscribe, share it with a friend, and leave us a review.

Until next time, remember: your worth is yours. No relationship can give it to you or take it away.

Thanks for listening. Bye bye.

Thanks so much for joining us. We hope you're feeling more understood, a little less alone, or that something we discussed resonated with you.

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If you need professional help, please seek advice from a licensed therapist. If you don't know how to find one, we'll do our best to help.

You Keep Me Sane acknowledges the Boon Wurrung people of the Kulin Nation, the traditional custodians of the land on which part of this podcast episode was filmed. We pay our respects to their Elders, past and present.