

Dr. Elizabeth Cohen:

I'm so happy today to welcome Natasha Dewirst to the Divorce Doctor Podcast. After surviving a traumatic childhood, Natasha lived with post traumatic stress disorder and after repeating relationship patterns during her marriage, she developed chronic fatigue and found herself in a wheelchair. Driven by her love of her young children, Natasha divorced her husband, healed herself from chronic fatigue and is now on a mission to support women who live in a constant state of survival and burnout due to faulty childhood beliefs and dysfunctional relationships. Natasha, I am so happy to have you. You are exactly in the right place. You're the exact right person we need to talk to. I'm so happy you're here. So we're going to talk a little bit about your work and about burnout mostly through your story. But I always like to ask people the same question when we start, what's a word or two that you would use to describe your experience of your divorce?

Natasha Dewirst:

Oh, well. Thank you, firstly, for letting me be here. And I think this is such an important topic to discuss because it's so easy to hear the negative side, but my two words are really positive. It would be empowering and liberating. It was a really positive experience for me.

Dr. Elizabeth Cohen:

Oh, I'm so glad for you to say that. And you'd be surprised most of the people who are on the podcast have positive words because right. They've done the work as you're taught. We'll talk about seeing it as something that moved you forward. So can you talk a little bit about kind of when you started feeling, I mean, it sounds like, I mean, you, we know when you ended up in the wheelchair, something that was a big moment, but before that moment where they're quiet little signs, that something wasn't right. This kind of birdies in your ear, when did you start hearing them and what was, what was that experience like?

Natasha Dewirst:

Yeah, of course. So truthfully, those warning signs were there from day one. We did not have a good couple fair at all. We didn't share the same morals and values we met when I was 19. And you know, we were together for a really long time and he's a good guy. I was a good woman. We had children together. We, you know, we thought that we needed to keep trying to make it work. And there were just so many little things, but I guess the biggest things for me were not the impact or maybe it was the impact on my children. And the final straw came for me when my husband had gone out with my son and he'd ended up, my son had gone home and said, oh, daddy had a drink. And I wasn't allowed any of it because he put his special drink in it. And I realized at that moment that my husband was in such a dark place, that he was actually drinking that day. And so, you know, that was, that was probably the loudest tweet I got. But up until then, honestly, all the way through that was just such a mismatch.

Dr. Elizabeth Cohen:

Isn't it amazing Natasha, how I wrote about this in the book that I wrote that like this happens to a lot of people. It happened to me when it impacts someone we love, it's like no holds barred, right? We're like, forget it, I'm done. But when it impacts us, we don't have that same response. Right. We don't have that same, this isn't okay. I have the same thing where, when I left my daughter who was maybe I mean, three months old with my ex-husband and I came in a few hours or an hour later, and he passed out from alcohol and she was just kind of crawling on him. And that was the moment where I thought this is it. But I mean, of course there had been so many other times where I, you know, I was the one crawling,

you know, it wasn't, but it wasn't enough until it happened for them. So what do you, what do you make of that?

Natasha Dewirst:

It's all about conditioning, especially as females. Okay. So we are always given that message to be a good girl. Don't make a face, don't get angry because if you're angry, you'll be perceived as mad. So we're constantly growing up in a society where we hear some of this messaging and we end up being conditioned as to who we think we need to be. And we also feel like, you know, to be loved and to be in a loving relationship, well, we have to trade off other areas of our lives. So, well, you know, if this isn't, you know, if this isn't perfect and I'm not a hundred percent happy, well, that's just the way it is just be, be grateful that you're married, be grateful that you've got your health. Life could be, life could be awful. So I think we get conditioned into this role of acceptance and we know that it's not right. And we know that we're not happy, but we, we aren't step outside of that box that we've made for ourselves, but also has been shaped by all of the life experiences that we've had.

Dr. Elizabeth Cohen:

Absolutely. So well said, I couldn't agree more. And you know, what's been coming up for me lately pushing against this feminine, you know, or no push to be nice, you know, is this idea that if I couldn't understand the person's intention, then I didn't have to care about their impact. So my whole life was like, well, he's upset. He's depressed. That's why he's nasty to me. Or, you know, he had, doesn't get along with his mother that, and I just recently full disclosure had this moment with my daughter where we were talking about something. I said, wait a minute, it doesn't matter. Like that doesn't matter. Like the impact matters. Like I don't give a shit if we understand why. And as a therapist, this happens to me all the time. I understand, but I'm not tolerating it. And I think that we're not taught that as women.

Natasha Dewirst:

Right. Well, we know. And also, you know, we take responsibility for the other class, which, you know, why don't we do that? You know, we take self responsibility, but then we also take responsibility for them. And, you know, I see that time and time again in myself and in my clients, you know, we're people pleasers, we want our life to look perfect. So we just, you know, we just hide these, these things because we don't hear other people talking candidly about them. So we just think, oh, this must be happening just for me.

Dr. Elizabeth Cohen:

And do you think Natasha, that, that was telling me what, what in, how did that hiding your feelings from, you know, really from early on about it not being a good match, how did pushing those feelings down? How did they end up impacting you and how did they finally?

Natasha Dewirst:

Yeah. Oh, massive, absolutely massive. I mean, you know, first start, I think every time we kind of deny our feelings and our needs, because either we've never been taught how to express those, or we haven't had somebody listening to us and hearing us, or we're in a relationship where those needs are just, you know, not acknowledged. We, we slowly step by step. We disconnect from our bodies. We disconnect from our essence of who we are. So we don't listen to ourselves. We don't, we break ourselves trust. We, you know, we really, you know, let ourselves down by pushing ourselves to the bottom of the pile and putting this other person first or everybody else. First, in my case, I was such a people pleaser to be

loved. And so, you know, for me that impact couldn't have been any bigger. I ended up in a wheelchair, I denied and denied and denied my own needs or repressed my feelings. I had all this inner anger. And of course I was, I was brought up a good Catholic girl. I wasn't allowed to be angry. You know, I just had to get it, I don't know about you, but I grew up with a lot of sayings, like where you made your bed, you've got to lie in it. And all these really random, you know, opinions that just aren't true. But we absorbed them. We think that they are how life is. So for me, the impact was my physical health and I literally stopped.

Dr. Elizabeth Cohen:

Wow. And how can you tell us a little bit about the moment? So you were still married when you were in the wheelchair. Okay. So can you tell us about the moment when you made the resilient and brave and a hard and, and connection that many people don't ever make between the pain and the chronic fatigue and the wheelchair and your emotions? Like, how did that happen? How did you figure that out and the relationship?

Natasha Dewirst:

Yeah. And I wish I could say it was like, just a moment that was really easy. And I went, oh, this is what it is. That would have been wonderful. Right. But no, it was a long, hard process, really looking inward. And it started with, you know, just little things about being really ill and not having the loving support of my husband. And he's a good guy. This isn't about bashing him. He did his best with his skills and his, let's say, but he didn't understand. And he thought, well, if I just push her and I push her and I just go off for the weekend and leave her with the kids, she'll have to pull through. Right. She'll have to get on with it. So there was this real, you know, toxic environment where I wasn't getting my needs met and I was so ill.

Natasha Dewirst:

And I, I just couldn't communicate with him. And my consultant tried to talk to him and there was no, just no understanding. And I remember just lying in bed, desperate to be outside playing with my children. And I couldn't, I was that ill at the beginning and thinking if I don't, if I can't connect to the one person who's supposed to have my back and love me and support me, if we can't sort this out, I'm never going to get better. I'm going to stay stuck. And the thought of that terrified me because I have two beautiful children. And so it was at that point that I made the decision that I knew the relationship was not helping. And I needed space in my home to feel, you know, to, to, to rest and to be, you know, safe. I needed time to think about all of this.

Natasha Dewirst:

And it was at that point, I made that decision, but then I also started looking into what, okay, what people with chronic fatigue or illnesses, where does that come from? What are the things that lead us? And that just led me down this, you know, decade long path of learning and discovery and training. And I call it, it's a bit of a catch phrase, but it's true. I call it a dark gift because for me, it just opened up a whole new world that I wasn't aware of. And I was able to really study that body-mind connection and really understand why I had been, you know, I guess, susceptible to ending up in this place.

Dr. Elizabeth Cohen:

Thank you for sharing that. You know what I'm so struck by. And I want our audience to, to hear this, that when I hear your story, I think about that part of you that knew this wasn't okay. Laying in that bed, that, that voice, right. That you've had all along. But it sounds to me like your ex-husband did the best he

could, but he was very similar to your family as far as the messages of pull yourself up. Why don't you just get over this? Right. And so you were swimming in this world. That was what you were familiar with, right? The devil we know is better than the devil. We don't at that moment. That, that moment of, oh my, you deserve better than this. Like, it just comes to you. And I just want people to know that, to listen to it. Cause it will come. And to know that it's your real inner truth and you listened, you really listened to it.

Natasha Dewirst:

Really listened. And honestly, it wasn't that I deserved better. It was to serve my children better. That was the first step it became. I deserve better. That was the children because I love them so deeply.

Dr. Elizabeth Cohen:

That's so great. And I love that because you go, you enter in some way, you enter into this self freedom or self-actualization however you can get in there, get in whatever door, if it's your kids who bring you in, if it's your job, you know, if it's his, the person's affair, whatever it is that brings you into that world of really starting to work on yourself, take that road. And so you mentioned that you did some reading. Were there any specific kinds of treatment, psychological treatments that you did? What, what did you do to help with? Because I know a lot of the people who are listening struggle with fibromyalgia, chronic fatigue, and lots of medical issues.

Natasha Dewirst:

Yeah. I mean, I went through a real journey. I tried everything at first because I was just in that place where I am going to be well, and I'm going to be looking after my children and life is going to be a shape that I want it to be and I enjoy. And so I really started, you know, trying different things. I tried counseling and it was really helpful for putting words to my experience, but it wasn't any more than that, but that was a good for... it was a bridge and that was beautiful. And then I tried something called the lightning process, which was all about cognitive behavioral therapy in neuro-linguistic programming. And that was really beautiful because that was a bridge again. And it helped me understand about, well, hang on what I'm thinking about most, what I'm talking about most that's, what's coming around, that's the instructions I'm giving my body.

Natasha Dewirst:

And so again, that was another step over a bit further. And then I think the thing that really helped me was I started looking at that body mind connection and I did some work around the subconscious mind and it was only really then that I think the key started to unlock and I could really say, okay, so I had this traumatic childhood, I know that I had PTSD from that. And what I didn't realize is that in my daily life, as an adult, I was often going into fight flight or freeze when I was getting triggered by stress and my stress response because of the trauma in my childhood, you know, my emotional brain would take over my cognitive brain and I would have a bigger stress response. And somebody that grew up in a, in a normal, if we, you know, if there such a thing, but a common childhood.

Natasha Dewirst:

So it was only really when I looked at those unconscious patterns of reactions in my body and then the beliefs that I had about myself and who I needed to be, to be worthy or to be, you know, for me, my story was about not being bad, but you know, we, we have these kind of agreements with ourselves. Well, if I show up in this way, I'll be loved or I'll be accepted. And what I didn't know was the cost of that,

that I was keeping myself stuck in a cycle of perfectionism of always wanting to show up. If I went anywhere, I looked immaculate. Anything I did for the children was, you know, the birthday parties were so elaborate. The house was always immaculate. And I was absolutely wearing myself then trying to be mother-father grandparents, doing everything. And when I realized how much that was costing me, that gripping onto life, that's when the freedom and the release came.

Dr. Elizabeth Cohen:

I'm so glad you're bringing this up. Perfectionism, because I think that, I just appreciate that you said that you looked perfect from the outside, because I just think that so many of us, so many of us who feel not perfect on the inside, look at someone who has it perfect. And think they have their ins, I would say, don't compare other people's outsides to your insides. Right? We think like you have an immaculate house and you do it for me. It's like, if you have a perfect birthday party, you must have everything together. And it's like, no, I'm, I'm wasting away here. And that none of that actually matters. All that stuff that is seen, like all that really matters is how is your heart, body and mind doing? Because if you take care of your heart, body and mind, everything I imagine gets better, I mean, you got out of the wheelchair.

Natasha Dewirst:

Absolutely. Yeah. Yeah. And it's, you know, and that spot on it is exactly that. But of course, when you haven't had a model, I mean, I did have a model. I had very successful grandparents and they were truly amazing, but my grandmother was a perfectionist and a high achiever. So when you've had models that also, you know, have those same kind of perfectionism tendencies, or you've grown up in a situation where perhaps you've been unfortunate to have a parent that's done the best they could, but they, you know, life was challenging for them. You can become an adult and you really don't know who you are and you don't, you've never taken the time to stop and think about your values and think about how important this facade is and keeping this facade well. So you all are just in that survival, you're on that hamster wheel, trying to fit in, have all the same things that everybody else does give your children the same experiences. And sadly, it's only when something quite big happens that you then stop and reassess and go, ah, maybe I didn't have it. Right.

Dr. Elizabeth Cohen:

Yeah. And I interviewed my friend, Valerie Ryan who wrote about patriarchy stress disorder. I don't know if you've read that book. It's a beautiful book. And she talks about that being a trauma for all women, patriarchy that even if right. Even the perfectionism you talked about earlier. And so it's really important for people listening to know that, you know, if you're reflecting, as many of my clients do and think, well, my childhood was okay, I don't have PTSD. Just know because of how patriarchy works for men and for women, it impacts us in a traumatic way. And if you're listening and thinking, I also have something traumatic that happened in my childhood, you know, as Natasha is sharing, it's essential to work on that. You know, it's just because you're out of a situation. And so many of our dear friend Jenny Worth who was on the podcast, you know, talk about these things that have happened and the importance of processing it. So you can move forward. Like unless you move through it and process it, it keeps coming out sideways. Right? Absolutely.

Natasha Dewirst:

And there's the saying, that is so true. And trauma is visible in breakdowns, you know, that's when it becomes visible, that's when you realize, hang on a minute, I'm not coping as well with this as other

people are, or, you know, how, how comes out. It's just completely sidelined me. And it's had such a big impact on me and it's because anything that's unhealed within us. And as you know, you know, trauma doesn't need to be a huge event, but obviously sometimes trauma can also be regularly being shamed by a sibling or shouted out by a parent or a teacher. And so we create these beliefs about ourselves that we're, you know, we're not good enough or a bad person. And then when we go through life, they're getting reinforced and imprinted into our mind. But when we go through a breakdown, when we have a loss of a job, you know, a divorce that's when all of that comes out and is really present for us. So cleaning up those areas, taking responsibility and saying, right, okay. I know that there was this thing and I haven't really looked at it and I keep stuffing it down. And when I get triggered, I'm really snipey with everybody around me. So I know there's something that caning those things up really helps our resilience for future challenges.

Dr. Elizabeth Cohen:

You're absolutely right. And Natasha, I'm just wondering if you could share, like, what was the hardest part for you with the divorce? You know, the part that kind of had you on your hands and knees.

Natasha Dewirst:

Yeah. I think at the end of the day, you know, I'd known my husband since I was 19 and I loved him dearly and he loved me dearly to the best of his abilities. And, you know, really being the one that had to say, no enough is enough. This isn't working for him, it's not working for me. And we need to, you know, we need to draw a line under it with two young children that was heartbreaking, absolutely heartbreaking. You've got two children that love their parents and to go from, you know, living with both of them, to living with one and then having to go between houses, you know, at first that was really challenging and heartbreaking. Interestingly, the children got a lot from that and it's been, you know, they're, they're very successful, happy people. And I think it was a much healthier environment, but being the one that made that call being the grownup, that was hard, really heartbreaking.

Dr. Elizabeth Cohen:

I think that you're, you're so not alone in that, right. I'm glad you're bringing that up. They're okay. You know, I think it is really hard to shift things. You know, you can shift things for yourself, but the fact that you're also, your moves are going to impact your children is really painful. And also it's important to remember that if you didn't shift things, they would have had a mother in a wheelchair.

Natasha Dewirst:

They would have had a mother in a wheelchair. They would have had an unhappy father. They would have had an unhappy mother. We know that the angry snake sleeps out in all these different ways, you know, darts here and there when you don't address it. And you know, who knows how their childhoods would have been. So, you know, it was definitely the right decision for, for everybody.

Dr. Elizabeth Cohen:

Definitely to ask people. If you could imagine yourself now, your adult self, going back to you, maybe laying there in that bed, or when you were in the wheelchair, what message would your self now give to yourself back then?

Natasha Dewirst:

I think it would have been just that soft mothering. I was missing at the time and telling myself something like, you know, my darling, you are exactly where you need to be and you're doing the right thing. And you know, you will, your life will change. So amazingly and just, I think the energy it took to make that decision, it would have been lovely to reassure my younger self, you know, just make the decision, just be brave. Leap. You'll grow your wings on the way down. It will work out. That, yeah, that's what I'd go back and tell her,

Dr. Elizabeth Cohen:

Oh, I love that. I have chills because I'm thinking about something that I've been struggling with and I'm thinking, oh right. What if I was compassionate? Like, I just wonder if everyone took a moment and just thought about whatever you're struggling with now, wherever you are in the process, what would the compassionate response be to yourself? Right.

Natasha Dewirst:

Yeah. And that's a bit that's often missing for a CNO. We're very harsh and critical. We expect so much of ourselves and we never treat our friends or our children or our sisters like that, yeah. Self-Compassion is massive. It's a big piece of becoming, you know, becoming, coming home to yourself, rebuilding that broken self-trust. Yeah.

Dr. Elizabeth Cohen:

And I think for those of us who've had, haven't had, because of their mother's own stuff, like their own love, you haven't had that mirrored.

Natasha Dewirst:

Yeah. It gets hard.

Dr. Elizabeth Cohen:

Right. To remember, but we need to contend, I love this idea of what you would say to your kid, right. What would you say to your kid if they, if they said what you were saying, such a beautiful, important message. And so can you share a little bit about like, do you think that you had hit burnout when you were in your wheelchair? Like how do you understand burnout in your world? I just want to share that with people before we finish up.

Natasha Dewirst:

Oh, of course. Yeah. So for me I definitely had a huge kind of breakdown and it, I think I'd even gone past the, now I had a really high profile career. I was working really hard. It was raising these beautiful children. I was running a home. I was trying to support my husband and I was doing all the things that I thought I needed to do. And so I had lots of little whispers. I ended up getting a really horrible viral infection and I had a big event. I was running and of course I couldn't trust anybody else to do it because I was a perfectionist. I needed to do it. So I just kept pushing, pushing, pushing. And so that's, you know, that's where I went past burnout. But the most interesting experience I've had with burnout was actually after my divorce.

Natasha Dewirst:

So I moved house and I, you know, I went back to work and I remember sitting in the car park and I would have had two children that didn't sleep very well. And I was doing all the things, you know, clubs after school and I'd turn up at work and I'd work so hard. And I remember just sitting in the car every morning, I went and went, I don't think I can do this today. You know, I've had like three hours of sleep. I've had no time on my own for like a fortnight. And, you know, had not long kind of recovered. It took me two and a half years to kind of heal myself. And I just knowing that I was teetering and I'd sit in the car and I wouldn't want to go to the office. And then I'd notice I was picking up everything.

Natasha Dewirst:

So if anybody came into the office with anything at all, I got it. And it was a bit of a joke and then I would get it and I couldn't get rid of it. I just couldn't shift like viruses in the same timeframe that everybody else could. And then I was just feeling really down about my job, really quite negative towards it. Like what, what was the point? Why was I doing it? And I was working with social enterprises on amazing projects. So that, wasn't what I was doing. It was me. And so I was getting out, I was feeling really about what I was doing. And then I just started noticing I was getting headaches and I was getting like this burning face. And I was like, ah, I've been here before. But it, it really was, then I'm not doing this anymore. And I took a big, big risk. I left my job, but it was about self love. And this time it was for me, I was like, ah, I'm not going to that place again. I can't do that. And so I changed the way that I worked so that I could be more present with my children and have time for myself.

Dr. Elizabeth Cohen:

That's so brave. And obviously you had the privilege of being able to do that and show up for yourself in that way. And so I know now you help people move through burnout. Is there anything as we finish up today and, and thank you for being so honest and sharing your deep vulnerability that you feel like you want to share with the audience that we haven't yet talked about related to your divorce or the experience of going through a divorce?

Natasha Dewirst:

Yeah, I think, I think the most important thing for me was, you know, if I'd only realized that there were tools I could use to help myself when I was going through that, I really learned from the ground up. And hopefully, you know, by talking about it, you know, people that are listening, they can pick up bits and pieces that work for that. But I think one of the most helpful things that I could share really is just a quick technique for processing emotion and you know, quick catch shift and rewire because it's really that simple. But, you know, it's really important when our body is holding on to negative emotions and, you know, and we're not choosing to fill them. Sometimes they're unconscious and they just pop up so that we get that out of our body as fast as possible. Because when we go into, when we trigger the stress response and we've got the cortisol and the adrenaline and the noradrenaline running round, that's when we can move on to that next step of getting those illnesses and really running down our bodies.

Natasha Dewirst:

So my heartfelt, you know, kind of offer would be just consider a really short practice like this one, you know, catch yourself when you notice that you're feeling fear or anxiety or any emotion and just kind of name it. That's all you need to do. Oh, look right now I'm feeling. And if you don't know what you're feeling, just it, oh, my stomach's feeling a bit flattery. My throat's really sore and I'm feeling really hot. And just by kind of bringing presence to the moment and slowing down, you can then make a choice and you can start to process. So what I like to do is when I notice that I've caught the emotion is just kind of

feeling gratitude that I've managed to kind of stop that cycle. And brilliant. I've caught it well, and I can be grateful for anything. And then the rewire part of it is just about visualizing the opposite of what you're feeling in that moment.

Natasha Dewirst:

So if I'm feeling fearful, then I just like to bring to my, how I feel when I feel safe. And the mind just doesn't know the difference, right. Between reality and imagination. So before I know it, all of a sudden my body's relaxing, you know, I'm noticing my breathing is slowing my heartbeat slowing, and I'm feeling really safe and calm. And that is just such a small thing, but it's, it's, it takes a bit of practice to get going. But when you do that can really kind of reset our nervous system. And I think that's the most important step for any woman, you know, and not just going through divorce in our daily lives.

Dr. Elizabeth Cohen:

Absolutely. I love that technique. Thank you for sharing that. And I want to emphasize again that what you said, so brilliant Natasha, about how, when we're triggered or when something happens for us, we go into fight flight or freeze and the number one way to tell our nervous system that we are no longer in that trauma is exactly what you said, which is to remind yourself that you're safe. Like, I can't tell you how many times during the day I put my hand on my heart and I say, you're safe just to remind myself that whatever is getting stirred up is not happening right now. And I'm so grateful for this suggestion and thing. And I'm so grateful that there are people like you doing this work, spreading it, and also that have been through something difficult and are now teaching about it. Thank you for that. Thank you for changing to, for turning your pain into lessons for other people.

Natasha Dewirst:

Thank you. Thank you for having me and allowing me to share that with people.

Dr. Elizabeth Cohen:

Oh, it's my pleasure. Thank you so much. And I'll have all the information in the show notes, but can you just let people know where to find you where your website is? Yeah,

Natasha Dewirst:

Of course. Yeah. So I'm all over Instagram. It's @natasha_c_dewirst, and I also have a website which is natashacarltondewirst.com. So it's quite a mouthful, but you'll find it.

Dr. Elizabeth Cohen:

I'll put the link there and now we love you're watching your Instagram. And so definitely check that out and thank you so very much for your vulnerability and your honesty and for being here. You're welcome. Thank you.