

Announcer (Jesse) ([00:01](#)):

None of the voices in the series are ongoing patients of Esther Perel, each episode of where should we begin is a onetime counseling session for the purposes of maintaining confidentiality names and some identifiable characteristics have been removed, but their voices and their stories are real. This next session briefly describes an instance of domestic violence and may not be appropriate for all listeners. Please take care while listening.

Esther Perel ([00:35](#)):

The initial request of this couple surrounded his recent infidelity.

Her ([00:42](#)):

I had found out he was cheating on me with someone online.

Him ([00:48](#)):

I was looking for excitement, things that really distracted me from what I was experiencing at home.

Esther Perel ([00:56](#)):

But the thing that immediately became clear is that for almost a decade, as among couple, they fought to be a couple.

Her ([01:06](#)):

I knew that I had met the love of my life. And then I was like I can't be with him because it's a huge taboo.

Him ([01:19](#)):

In our community it's forbidden for clans to marry within the same clan. So in me and my wife's case we're from the same clan, but we're not from the same family.

Her ([01:24](#)):

It got to the point where it's like, "Well, we're not related anyways. Fuck it. Let's just be together?" So it was an uproar among all my family.

Esther Perel ([01:35](#)):

For so long they stood united against the opposition. And then when they were finally together, the opposition became between them, chronic, constant bickering.

Him ([01:48](#)):

She only saw things from her side and I only saw things from my side and that's when I just lost it. And I was like, "Man, you know what, I'm just going to go out and talk to these girls. And see if I can get my mind off things and figure out whether or not I made the right choice to get married to this girl."

Her ([02:04](#)):

Okay. So every time you get mad at me, you're going to cheat on me or you're going to go download Messenger app and find some random person to talk to, to make you happy.

Esther Perel ([02:21](#)):

Is everybody here? Because they want to be here.

Him ([02:24](#)):

Yeah.

Her ([02:25](#)):

Yes.

Him ([02:26](#)):

Yeah, of course. Normally when we talk to each other we don't really say the things we want to. So I think this will bring us closer together.

Esther Perel ([02:37](#)):

That's a very nice wish. I would imagine.

Her ([02:40](#)):

I wouldn't imagine saying that, but yes.

Esther Perel ([02:44](#)):

I saw your face, that's why... When did your parents or your grandparents come?

Him ([02:53](#)):

They came in the seventies. They came here during the Vietnam war. They escaped the war and that was it. I don't really know the details. My dad, he never had a job. He went to school. Very poor.

Esther Perel ([03:11](#)):

How old was he when he came here?

Him ([03:13](#)):

I think he was 15, maybe 16? Yep.

Esther Perel ([03:17](#)):

What influence do you think your father's experience had on you?

Him ([03:26](#)):

He he's very kind. He is very funny. He doesn't really shout. He doesn't speak up. And I think I picked that side up from him.

Esther Perel ([03:38](#)):

So he arrives at 15.

Him ([03:42](#)):

He meets my mom. They married here and I was born here.

Esther Perel (03:48):

Yeah. They stay together?

Him (03:51):

No.

Esther Perel (03:53):

Okay. And you stayed with?

Him (03:55):

So me and my brother stayed with my dad and my youngest brother and my sister stayed with my mom. So she wanted the girl and the baby and then my dad was like, "Okay, well, if you want those two, I'll just take the other two, the oldest and the third." How did that work out? It was hard. I felt like I was kind of betrayed a little bit by my mom because I was the first and the oldest. It was heartbreaking-

Esther Perel (04:30):

How old were you?

Him (04:33):

I was maybe seven or eight. It was kind of funny because-

Esther Perel (04:40):

No, it wasn't funny.

Him (04:41):

Because she doesn't always-

Esther Perel (04:44):

It wasn't funny.

Him (04:45):

Well, now that I think back about it. Yeah. It wasn't funny, but she'd always joke about, "You're my oldest. I love you forever. My son." Blah, blah, blah, this and that. But when she chose my sister and my younger brother it broke me.

Esther Perel (05:05):

Is that the first time your heart was broken?

Him (05:12):

Yeah. The first time.

Esther Perel ([05:18](#)):

We don't forget that time.

Him ([05:20](#)):

No, I still remember that day.

Esther Perel ([05:25](#)):

That she left.

Him ([05:28](#)):

Mm-hmm (affirmative). My mom and dad had two different cars, my sister and brother in one car and then me and my brother in one car and then we just drove away.

Esther Perel ([05:40](#)):

You're seeing it when you say it, right?

Him ([05:43](#)):

Yeah.

Esther Perel ([05:44](#)):

Yeah. So you lost your mother very young.

Him ([05:51](#)):

Mm-hmm (affirmative). Yeah.

Esther Perel ([05:55](#)):

She know that.

Him ([05:55](#)):

I don't think so. I told my wife that me and my mom we don't really talk. And we never on good terms anyway. She's never a part of my life, but-

Esther Perel ([06:09](#)):

But she's such a huge part of your life, your internal life.

Him ([06:12](#)):

Mm-hmm (affirmative). She is. And I think about her a lot, but I'm at a point where I have my own family to worry about now.

Esther Perel ([06:23](#)):

Yeah. But the way you will worry about your own family carries the story that's inside of you too. And you have a lot to talk to each other, but you're not. But look how she's listening to you. She's crying with you.

Him ([06:44](#)):

Yeah. We don't really share stories because I don't want to talk about this.

Esther Perel ([06:52](#)):

Why not? Because it hurts.

Him ([06:55](#)):

Yeah. It hurts and I usually don't like to bring up the past, it's just a way of me trying to be strong.

Esther Perel ([07:08](#)):

Does it work?

Him ([07:09](#)):

No.

Esther Perel ([07:10](#)):

Thank you.

Him ([07:13](#)):

Sometimes it does.

Esther Perel ([07:14](#)):

Sometimes it does. But mostly it doesn't because it does live inside of you. And because you do think about it a lot and because if you actually did share some of it, it would have a place rather than underground powers. You're a whole different person when you talk about all of this and she has no way of experiencing it or appreciating it for that matter, what you think is strong, which is to avoid all your feelings and circumvent them. There's not much strength to that.

Him ([07:51](#)):

Never thought about it that way.

Esther Perel ([07:57](#)):

Tell me if I hear that, well. You carry inside of you your kind, gentle, warm and funny father. And then you carry inside of you... How do you carry mom inside of you?

Him ([08:13](#)):

I don't know. I don't think I'm anything my mom to be honest, I'm too kind and too caring.

Esther Perel ([08:23](#)):

You're not too. You can take the two out of it. There is no too kind. This is a crazy talk.

Him ([08:31](#)):

Yeah, that's true.

Esther Perel ([08:32](#)):

You're kind and you're caring. And you can say it without reservation. Okay. And who is your family?

Her ([08:45](#)):

There are eight of us in total, there's five girls, three boys.

Esther Perel ([08:51](#)):

And you are number?

Her ([08:52](#)):

I am number four. I'm the middle child or one of the middle children. My parents divorced and they'd fight... All I've known them to just bickering, fighting, physically fighting. And so when I was 18, my mom caught my dad cheating. And then he was just , "Why are you going through my shit, blah, blah, blah." And he got violent and there was just yelling.

Esther Perel ([09:24](#)):

The violence, the physical violence was mainly between the parents or it was everybody.

Her ([09:30](#)):

Well, it was everybody. But when I did bad stuff growing up you learn how to dodge. But my parents were physically abusive to each other. Mostly my dad and then really abusive to us. Growing up I witnessed my grandparents beat my aunt for going out too late. My uncles put holes in the walls.

Esther Perel ([09:55](#)):

Oh my God.

Her ([09:59](#)):

So that night when I decided that enough was enough. I went downstairs to stop the fighting. I went to protect my mom and my younger brother pushed my dad out of the way I called 911. And everyone's like, "Who called the cops? Who called the cops?" I don't care. I'm protecting my mom. I believe it was that summer or it was soon where I decided I'm leaving, I'm moving out. It wasn't until later I get a call from my mom and mom was like, "Where are you?" I'm like, "I moved out." "You're a devil child. You're the worst child I have." She's like, "Don't you ever call me for anything. Don't you ever call me?"

Esther Perel ([10:45](#)):

What is immediately apparent here is that this is not just a story of parents who abandoned their children, but also a larger story of intergenerational trauma of a few generations connected to the war in Vietnam, connected to the refugee experience coming to the United States. And that this transmission is both emotional and psychological, but also exists on a cellular level. You have a short marriage. You're a young family, you have a two year old, but you have a long history. And the history starts not just when you're born. Your history starts when your grandparents arrive. History starts with how all these people intersect with each other, the history starts when your mom abandons you. And when your mom abandons you, just after you try to actually save her.

Esther Perel ([11:57](#)):

And a very outspoken person with a very kind person have a lot to learn from each other. The kind person he calls himself kind, but what he's trying to say is that he doesn't always stand up for himself. But he meets and marries a woman who does stand up for herself and pays a very heavy price for it, but will do it. And then from the violent destructive family that you come to have him be so gentle is a relief to your nervous system. And now the challenge is how you going to make those goodies, give you the life and the marriage that you want to have.

Esther Perel ([12:48](#)):

So where does your infidelity play into that story? Does it have anything to do with all what we've talked about or it's yet another story?

Him ([13:00](#)):

My infidelity comes in after a long time of bearing a lot of weight. Over the years, things have started to almost plateau. We don't talk much. Whenever we do talk about certain things we tend to disagree and with disagreement comes frustration, misunderstanding. Makes me question whether or not I'm in the right place in this marriage. So in my mind I'm thinking, maybe I need to start branching out. So I started talking to this girl and she just like say, "Hi, how you doing? What's your plan for tonight?" It got to the point where we were calling each other names like babe and honey and all that stuff. She was very flirty. I was very flirty too.

Him ([14:05](#)):

And I thought it was fun to get those messages because it made me feel appreciated or wanted. Here's somebody who is not yelling at me whenever I come up with an idea or somebody that would just say, "Hey, good morning, honey. How are you? Hope you have a good day." Little messages like that made me feel good. But I knew I messed up because... You told me you saw all those messages. And she's like, "Why are you guys calling each other, babe?" And then I just told her, "I'm talking to this lady online and then that's what happened.

Esther Perel ([14:49](#)):

And now do you ask her in morning, "Hi honey, how are you? Good morning."

Him ([14:54](#)):

Yep. Every now and then I'll say, "Good morning."

Esther Perel ([14:58](#)):

Why is it every now and then?

Him ([15:03](#)):

I'm not a morning person.

Esther Perel ([15:04](#)):

It doesn't matter. What I'm saying is if you understood that being nice, and warm, and friendly is very endearing. Why don't you do it with your wife? You're upset that she's not doing it with you, but you're giving her the same...

Him ([15:20](#)):

Yeah. It's like me trying to say those things from genuinely wanting to say those things. And so I can't just say, "Hey how are you doing?" Because in bed I'm like, "I don't want to wake up. I'm not ready for this day." And not having to worry about, "Oh, hey honey, how are you doing? Good morning."

Esther Perel ([15:45](#)):

I'm missing something. If you want things to be better at home. The charming person that chats online has to also come home on occasion. This woman is nice to you because she gets a different kind of guy than this woman. If you want her to also be softer and kinder to you have to be more available to her in that way as well. Obviously, you're tired for your family, but you're not tired for your games or for your chats. So you have the energy. Why? Because we get energized when it's fun and playful and we get attention. It's energizing.

Him ([16:40](#)):

Mm-hmm (affirmative). Yeah. That's a good point.

Esther Perel ([16:43](#)):

But if you brought 10% of that energy, and playfulness, and charm home. You'd get something back too.

Him ([16:55](#)):

Yeah.

Esther Perel ([17:00](#)):

This is something that comes up very often. This idea that there are two different people the partner and the lover, and they are essentially different. One is a nag, always in a bad mood, negative, critical. And the other is charming, and fun and playful. But what's missing is the fact that he himself is acting very differently. A charming person will elicit a more charming response on the other side. His wife doesn't react to him the way that the other woman does because he brings something else to the wife than he brings to the other woman. It's an interactive dance. It's not just an essentialist difference between two people.

Esther Perel ([17:45](#)):

Your survival strategy at home was to make yourself invisible and go quiet. And your survival strategy at home was to charge and to take charge. And then that's what you're doing now. When things get tough, you shut down and you charge. And the more she charges and the more you think you need to go and shut down. And this very trait that you like so much of her stepping in now becomes the opposite, becomes a thing you need to avoid at all cost. And the very ability to contain himself that you so appreciate from him now becomes the thing you can't stand because he's like a robot in the house.

Him ([18:36](#)):

That's how our relationship is now. I just shut down and whatever she says I need to do. I just do it. But it's a never ending cycle. One day leads to another day and another day leads to forever.

Esther Perel ([18:53](#)):

But you do see that you're withdrawing creates her charging.

Him ([19:04](#)):

Yeah.

Esther Perel ([19:04](#)):

And your charging leads to his withdrawal. It's like each of us activates the survival strategy of the other because when you charge it makes him more vulnerable. And then he goes into his defense mode, his survival mode. And when he goes inward, you start to feel I'm all alone again, all the battles of my life are on my shoulder. There's never anybody there for me. And then that makes you feel like you have to arm yourself. This is all changeable just so we are very clear. But it is learning to be in a relationship you have to also understand that. You come with tremendous trauma and you're trying to do something that will be better and that will be different. And now you're in phase two. Phase one was we're going to make this happen no matter what, for whatever reason you decided she was worth fighting for all these years. But now that you are with her, you're not fighting for her or for your relationship. You're just fighting for your survival. That's too bad. Nine years you fought for her, and now all you're trying to do is avoid her. That's off.

Her ([20:40](#)):

When you start playing your video games and I'm just looking there I'm like, "We have things to do." We have the house to clean? We have dinner to make. Are you not hungry? Do you never use a bathroom? And here I am trying to manage a household manage a career. And I'm like I have to manage you too. Do you want me to wipe your ass for you? And then that's why I'm always like do you need help? How can I help you? Because I know that you might think everything I'm throwing at you is difficult, but you don't say anything so I'm always like, "Do you need help? How can I help you?"

Him ([21:18](#)):

I see things as or what we need to do as a married couple is how do we find time for each other? Because we're always busy doing things in life. There's never enough time we have eight hours a day at work and then maybe another five, six hours at home before we have to go to bed. Most of those times lately have involved things that don't incorporate each other. So we're always away from each other. We never get to see each other. And then when we do see each other it's like, "Oh, we have to do this and that." So we split up again. And that's what frustrates me because how do we find time for each other?

Esther Perel ([22:11](#)):

What I hear him asking is more closeness and intimacy. What I see her hearing is that he wants to slack off and that she needs an adult. But I do think that his request is part of an adult relationship, but he needs to find a better way of doing it. Can I give you a suggestion?

Him ([22:55](#)):

Yes.

Esther Perel ([22:56](#)):

At this point, when you want to play, she thinks I need an adult there's so much to do. And you need to convince her that adults have the permission to play as well. So if you sit down at some point and you say let's just chill for a bit. And she comes in with the list, you can say, "You know what? We've just worked for the last three hours. We're going to take a break together and we'll get to the list later. I'll engage with you on the list." I'm going to help you to give yourself permission to stop for a minute.

Him ([23:39](#)):

Mm-hmm (affirmative). Yeah. That's good.

Esther Perel ([23:45](#)):

That's an equal partner. That's an adult response rather than, "She's a party pooper. I want to have fun. She doesn't know how to have fun. All she wants to do is lists. So I'm just going to tune her out and continue to play in my head." Help her. She too wants to chill, but she doesn't necessarily know when it's okay to stop. If she can stop even if everything isn't done.

Him ([24:11](#)):

Finding a balance it sounds like.

Esther Perel ([24:13](#)):

Can you imagine?

Him ([24:15](#)):

Mm-hmm (affirmative).

Esther Perel ([24:15](#)):

So you come down, you sit for a minute. And she comes up with the list. And instead of trying to tune her out, you engage with her and you simply say, "Look, I think we can take a moment right now." But say it with conviction.

Him ([24:31](#)):

Otherwise she thinks I'm attacking her.

Esther Perel ([24:33](#)):

Yeah. Yes.

Him ([24:34](#)):

Or disagreeing with her.

Esther Perel ([24:35](#)):

You want to reassure her rather than disagree with her. She ain't going to be easy to convince.

Him ([24:41](#)):

No, it's not.

Esther Perel ([24:43](#)):

Okay. And that's where you are going to practice becoming more outspoken. That's what you wanted. That's why you picked her.

Him ([24:51](#)):

Mm-hmm (affirmative).

Esther Perel ([24:52](#)):

Why is it not going to be easy? Not because she's being abstinent to you, but because she was number four among eight, and she had four that she took care of the whole time. Do you think she learned to play anywhere?

Him ([25:05](#)):

No.

Esther Perel ([25:06](#)):

Because she left her family without a penny and just a mattress and had to build everything on her own.

Him ([25:11](#)):

Mm-hmm (affirmative).

Esther Perel ([25:13](#)):

It's not because she's just being nasty to you. It's because she doesn't know how to. This is such a classic. It presents as one person nags the other for more things to do. And the other saying, "Can you never just stop and give me a break?" And the truth is no they can't but not because they're a nag, but because they've never been able to give themselves a break either. Because that was not an option in their life. And that's why he can offer the repair to her. But he needs to be firm consistent. He needs to know that the challenge that he's taking on is the challenge of repair.

Her ([26:00](#)):

I just feel like I say too much for him. I say things for him. I make his lists for him. I make his calendars for him. And I'm just like, "Oh, my God I'm just over it. I'm done."

Esther Perel ([26:11](#)):

But you don't, you continue to do it. And the more you do it and the more you become an intrusive mom, and then he goes and he becomes a child. And when he becomes a child with you, he goes to be a man with other women. So that's the structure that has to change. The more you do what you do, the more you infantilize him. Now, he doesn't say it's, "Okay. I can handle my own lists. Don't don't do this." He lets you do it. And he resents you for it. And then he'll go and find somebody who wants him. And who's nice to him and who flirts with him because she doesn't flirt with you and you will blame her for

not flirting. It's both of you. It's true. She's no fun if all she talks about is lists, but you're not saying to her stop.

Him ([27:07](#)):

Yeah. I don't say no often.

Esther Perel ([27:11](#)):

You say no in your own passive, aggressive way. By avoiding her by not doing it, by letting her repeat it, by going and playing with others. You do say no, but not in a simply engaged equal to equal person. So let's pick an example and practice this for a minute. Just so you have a sense, a little bit of how this feels and how it lives in your bodies. What's a classic. Give me one of your top tens.

Him ([27:47](#)):

Pick one. We'll do dishes.

Esther Perel ([27:53](#)):

We've reached a moment where we have connected many dots, but this piece about how he can say no while remaining connected demands practice. And so any example is good. They choose the dishes, but the dishes are never the dishes. The dishes represent her sense of responsibility, the dishes represent his lack of connection. We have to think metaphorically for all the people who'd fight about toothbrushes, dishes, garbage cans, snow tires, and lawn mowing. It's important that we remember these are stand-ins for deeper needs. What's your line?

Her ([28:44](#)):

My line is, "Go do your dishes."

Him ([28:48](#)):

Go do my dishes.

Her ([28:48](#)):

"Go do the dishes."

Esther Perel ([28:49](#)):

So you tell him.

Her ([28:50](#)):

Yeah. I'm just like, "Hey, can you do the dishes?" And he just goes-

Esther Perel ([28:54](#)):

No, no. What he says, he's going to tell me.

Her ([28:57](#)):

Okay.

Him ([29:00](#)):

My immediate response on a normal day. I would say, "Why?"

Esther Perel ([29:04](#)):

Why?

Him ([29:06](#)):

"Why?" Like, "Why now?"

Esther Perel ([29:09](#)):

Uh-huh (affirmative). And then you say?

Her ([29:11](#)):

Because it's full. The sink is full.

Esther Perel ([29:14](#)):

All right. So you fall for the trap-

Her ([29:17](#)):

Oh I fall for the trap.

Esther Perel ([29:19](#)):

And then you say?

Him ([29:21](#)):

I say, "If it's full then why don't you go do the dishes?"

Her ([29:24](#)):

Well, the reason why the dishes are there is because I put them all in there from cooking. So it's like, "I'm still cooking. Can you go do the dishes so that I can reuse them?"

Him ([29:37](#)):

I'll say, "Okay."

Esther Perel ([29:40](#)):

And then you go do it?

Him ([29:41](#)):

Mm-hmm (affirmative).

Esther Perel ([29:42](#)):

But basically you go do it at the price to the relationship is a few more inches of distance.

Him ([29:53](#)):

Pretty much because I know she's not going to do it. So I'd do it.

Esther Perel ([29:57](#)):

Right. That's okay. You do it. But the emotional distancing that accompanies it, goes in the bucket of the diminished intimacy, collaboration, and connection and communication between the two of you. Every time you oblige the relationship suffers. For every dish, you do. The love goes down. As crazy as that sounds.

Him ([30:30](#)):

I think it's true. Because I've been having those kind of thoughts because I'm doing these things. Not just dishes, but anything in general. It's like, "Man, did I marry the right girl." Things like that come to my mind. Like, "Man, what did I get myself into."

Esther Perel ([30:52](#)):

But it's so interesting how people always ask themselves, "How is it that this is not the person that I thought she was?" They never ask themselves, "How different am I from the person she thought I was?" It's both end.

Him ([31:09](#)):

It is.

Esther Perel ([31:13](#)):

So imagine that you come and you say, "Can you do the dishes?" How do you answer her from the position of an adult now?

Him ([31:23](#)):

I don't know. Because every time I... Personally, every time I try to there's always conflict. There's always conflict.

Esther Perel ([31:41](#)):

Tell me more. What are we talking about?

Him ([31:44](#)):

So I would say, "Let's do the dishes tomorrow morning." It never gets done in the morning. And I usually try to rush home after work to do the dishes, so I can just do it and get it out of the way before I get yelled at or before she finds out.

Esther Perel ([32:07](#)):

But you understood that I get yelled at and she finds out that is the way a child speaks about a parent.

Him ([32:14](#)):

Right. That is not an equal adult.

Esther Perel ([32:16](#)):

That's what I'm saying. I don't know how to find that equal-

Her ([32:21](#)):

It's kind of funny because he acts like a child that's why I yell at him.

Esther Perel ([32:23](#)):

I get it.

Him ([32:26](#)):

Well to de-escalate the situation of course, I'm trying to-

Esther Perel ([32:29](#)):

But you're not de-escalating it.

Him ([32:31](#)):

I don't want to make it bigger than it really is. It's just a pile of dishes. It's not that big of a deal, let's do it tomorrow.

Esther Perel ([32:38](#)):

Look, the more you're going to do it like that then the more she will become exactly the character you don't like her to be. So we're going to have to change the choreography here.

Him ([32:54](#)):

Yeah. I'm trying. Just don't know how but I'm-

Esther Perel ([33:00](#)):

The first thing is. You put aside all the ways that you've already dealt with it that you know don't work. If you were fixing one of your IT things, you would not try to do one more time something that you've already done five time and it doesn't work.

Him ([33:21](#)):

That's right.

Esther Perel ([33:22](#)):

That's right. How can we think about creating a little bit more of goodwill, warrant communication, playfulness so that we not just become this rigid management inc. But every time the management takes over the love disappears because your little girl she's looking at you. Do you have a picture of her?

Him ([33:52](#)):

Yeah.

Her ([33:53](#)):

Yeah.

Esther Perel ([33:54](#)):

I think we need to put a picture of her on the table because she's watching you. And since you love her more than anything on this planet, you're going to do this emotional growing up, she's watching you and she will watch you avoid her mother every time. And she will watch her mother yell at you to try to get you engaged and then you will react. And then she will not know at first who she needs to identify with.

Esther Perel ([34:29](#)):

And she will be upset at mom because mom yells. And then she will be upset at dad because he makes mom yell. And then she will be upset at mom because she's not nice to dad. And then she will be upset at dad because he's cheating. And this is your choice. You can say we're going to give her a different story than the ones that you had.

Him ([34:57](#)):

Yeah. We always think about her every day.

Esther Perel ([35:04](#)):

But in this way.

Him ([35:07](#)):

Not often.

Esther Perel ([35:08](#)):

Instead of saying, did I marry the right person? You can ask yourself. What's my little girl learning from me now. What am I teaching her at this very moment? It'll bring the best out of you. You understand? "If I placate her mom, if I just get up... If I sit there playing my video games, while mom is running around doing this, that and the other like a chicken without a head, what am I teaching her?"

Him ([35:36](#)):

That it's okay, it's normal, but it's not. Obviously it's not fair.

Her ([35:45](#)):

I create those lists, to do lists and schedules because I want to create a tradition. When I cook, let's all sit down and eat together. But he withdraws and I'm just like it's not a bad thing what I'm trying to do.

Esther Perel ([36:01](#)):

No.

Her ([36:03](#)):

But then now I feel guilty about it because it's like he doesn't want participate.

Esther Perel ([36:07](#)):

But what is missing is grace.

Him ([36:12](#)):

Yeah. Essentially.

Esther Perel ([36:12](#)):

So that if he says we need to tweak it. Just simply say to him, "What do you suggest?" So that he doesn't just complain but contributes. And it's not your list, it's our list. "How is it working for you? How is it working for you? 'What would make it better for me is this. I would like to try that'" That's collaborative problem solving. So if you want your girl to have the family that you didn't have, you have to invest in the couple. You're investing everything in her and not enough in you.

Announcer (Jesse) ([37:23](#)):

Esther Perel is the author of *Mating in Captivity* and *The State of Affairs*. And also the host of the podcast *How's Work?* To apply with your partner for a session for the podcast or for show notes on each episode, go to whereshouldwebegin.estherperel.com. *Where should we begin* with Esther Perel is produced by Magnificent Noise for Gimlet and Esther Perel Productions. Our Production staff includes Eric Newsom, Eva Wolchover, Destry Sibley and Olivia Natt. Recorded by Noriko Okabe. Kristen Mueller is our engineer, original music and additional production by Paul Schneider and the executive producers of *Where Should We Begin?* are Esther Perel and Jesse Baker. We would also like to thank Nazanin Rafsanjani, Courtney Hamilton, Lisa Schnall, Nic Oxenhorn, Dr. Guy Winch and Jack Saul.