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Jen Riday

Vibrant Happy Women with Jen Riday

You're listening to the Vibrant Happy Women podcast. I'm Dr. Jen Riday, and on this episode we'll be talking about relationships, specifically feeling more consistent, and secure, and emotionally safe in your relationships. And how these feelings relate back to our attachment styles that we learned in our childhoods. Stay tuned.

Hi, I'm Jen Riday. This podcast is for women who want to feel more vibrant, happy, aligned, and alive. You'll gain the emotional, physical, and spiritual tools you need to get your sparkle back and ensure that depression, anxiety, and struggle don't rule your life. Welcome to the Vibrant Happy Women Podcast.

Hey my friends, welcome back. I'm Dr. Jen Riday. This is the Vibrant Happy Women podcast and today we'll be talking about attachment and relationships. We all have relationship patterns that we employ in our friendships, in our partnerships or marriages, with our kids. And it's interesting to step back and analyze why we do what we do. One of those patterns I had for really almost a decade, maybe more was the withdrawal and pursuit pattern. How does this look?

Well, being someone who was anxiously attached from childhood I would pursue my spouse hoping he would meet my emotional needs. He being more avoidantly attached, taking care of number one, taking care of his own emotional needs would withdraw and not want that emotional connection and so the pattern went. Very destructive, and unhealthy, I'm so glad we put an end to that. Now I have learned how to meet my own emotional needs largely using the tools that we talk so much about on this podcast.

And now that I'm less needy my husband doesn't need to withdraw, and we have more of a secure interactive relationship. It's not perfect but there is

improvement and we're moving in the right direction. So, my guest today is Tracy Crossley. She's a behavioral relationship expert, author, and podcast host, and she specializes in treating individuals with unhealthy life and relationship patterns. We all have some. So, you're going to hear a lot of topics in this episode all relating back to attachment.

So, listen in, notice if you hear patterns that apply to you in your relationships and see if you can't just tweak them a little bit and keep moving forward. I know our end result, the end goal is that we can feel emotionally safe in our relationships, to feel emotionally safe in our homes, so that our kids can feel emotionally safe. And the pattern that we pass on becomes healthier, and healthier, and healthier throughout the generations. So, I will be excited to hear what you think about this. Let's go ahead and dive in.

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Jen: Hey everyone, I'm here with Tracy Crossley who is the author of Overcoming Insecure Attachment. And we're going to talk about relationships today. Oh, my goodness, I am so excited because my spouse and I have an interesting relationship. We all come to relationships with interesting baggage, I think we all have some. And Tracy is an expert who is going to share some wisdom with us today. Welcome to the show, Tracy.

Tracy: Thank you for having me. I look forward to this conversation.

Jen: Yay, I'm excited. So, for those who want a refresher? What is attachment, what are the attachment styles? And then we'll go from there?

Tracy: Sure. So, attachment is something that babies do. Meaning it's an emotional attachment. And if they didn't attach they would not thrive, they

would die. So, most of us did not have perfect parents. And so, what attachment becomes from being secure, where a baby knows consistency, a baby knows how a parent is going to be there emotionally available. There is all sorts of things that parents that are let's say healthy, do, compared to parents who are not so healthy who have stuff of their own. And so, what ends up happening is an insecure attachment.

And kids can get the range of obviously, we talk about abusive parents but it's not that you have to abusive, you can be inconsistent, disordered, where one day something – you tell your small child, "Okay, don't do that." And then the next day you let them do that. That's inconsistent. And so, a child doesn't really learn the boundaries. And part of it is that when you're a child you're being conditioned. So, you're learning all of this and you're taking it in. And you're thinking this is the way the world operates.

So, if the world operates in a certain way, of course to thrive and live as a child, you're just trying to fit into that paradigm. And so, we develop different attachment styles based on our personalities. You have — and I always go with as far as attachment goes, I go with three styles because everything basically comes back to them, which is anxious, anxious avoidant, and avoidant because even if you're disordered, fearful, or ambivalent you still fit into having anxiety on some scale and having an avoidancy on some scale.

And so, it comes into our adult relationships and unfortunately, because the things we do learn as children, as much as people want to say, "I don't want to go back to my childhood," or, "It wasn't my childhood." But that's where the roots of it are because that's where you're like a little sponge just picking up everything, again, to get your world view and your place in it.

Jen: Okay. So avoidant, similar, avoidant, attachment?

Tracy: Yeah.

Jen: Okay. Just to make sure we're using the same terminology. Okay, so what kinds of situations lead to each attachment style? Can you give us a quick example?

Tracy: Sure. So, let's say that you had a parent who was not emotionally available at all and did not give you attention or very little attention. And when things, like let's say you got upset about something, and your mom or your dad was like, "I'm going to give you something to be upset about if you don't stop crying," or whatever. Those kind of things where they just basically kept shutting your emotions down. And again, it has to do with your personality as well.

Those of us that I think are a little bit more independent tend to fall into more avoidant behaviors. We don't want confrontation. We don't want to have to feel anything so we're doing whatever we can to not feel. And as children that's the thing. If you're always in an environment where you're feeling the pain of feelings and going, "I'm a little kid, I don't want to feel those feelings." So, you tend to avoid them. And then you go into your adult relationships with some degree of avoidancy.

I think as you have relationships you just kind of fill that backpack up and you just become more and more avoidant over time unless you have some idea that you have this going on.

Jen: Okay. So, I can imagine a lot of – I've noticed, women all think that their husbands have avoidant attachment style because they're on average, men stereotypically are less likely to want to talk about emotions. So, speak to that stereotype, how do we pull that apart, I guess?

Tracy: Yeah. I mean it's funny because that's always where people go. It's like, oh, men, they're always like that. But in my work I have come across women that are like that as well. And it's the feelings but it's more about the level of emotional intimacy at all. You don't really feel close to them. You can coexist with them in the same environment but it's almost like two people leading separate lives. And so, it can make – depending on a woman, a woman could be kind of avoidant herself. She could be an anxious avoidant.

And some of that might work really well for her and she's totally comfortable with that. And yet deep down inside nobody's really comfortable with that. But we tend to numb out. We tend to not really feel. And so, when you do that, what you're doing is perpetuating the same cycle that you know. It's a cycle you knew with your parents. And so, you tend to do that. But when it comes to men, I mean my husband is far more emotional than I will ever be. And I don't mean that I'm unemotional.

It's like he is just always expressing emotion, which is great, it's awesome. But is he emotionally intimate? Yes. We have emotional intimacy because I am able to do it and I used to not be able to do it.

Jen: Interesting. Well, tell us more about your personal attachment story and how you learned that skill. It sounds like you didn't always have it.

Tracy: No, I did not always have it. I came to the skill, gosh, through all my dysfunctional relationships. I got divorced many years ago. And in between I had relationships and I also spent many years where I was single. And in that, these relationships were all dysfunctional. It wasn't like I had a functional relationship. And I couldn't figure out why I always felt anxious whether I was single or in a relationship. I always felt like I would be attracted to somebody where it would always be hard work.

And I couldn't figure out why. And I'm talking about hard work even getting into the relationship. And so that was really difficult for me. And I kept going, "What is my deal?" And then I became a coach, and my love life still was this dysfunctional disaster and here I am coaching people. But you can always help people before you help yourself in that way. But I didn't want to feel like I did. And so, I came across attachment theory. And I started going, "Oh my God, that's me. I'm like the poster child for an anxious avoidant because I'm both."

And so, when I read that book, I forgot what it was called, Attached, I think. And in there it was like if you're an anxious avoidant you were screwed, there was nothing you can do. And so, I kept thinking, okay, I am not going to live the rest of my life feeling like I've got to go find somebody who's securely attached because that's not necessarily true either. People that are securely attached aren't looking for insecurely attached people. They're looking for other securely attached people.

So yeah, so it was that, but I worked through it over a number of years because I didn't know what I was doing. I just knew that there were certain things that were wrong, I'll tell you guys. One of them is this inability to feel my feelings. I mean I could feel anger, which is a reaction. I could cry not knowing why. And I could be anxious. But to actually feel what was motivated inside of me, no clue. And I realized that I was always trying to control.

I had this one dysfunctional relationship that was on and off for years. And I would always try to control what was happening intellectually by saying the right thing, or avoiding him, or whatever, playing games. And I didn't even realize what I was doing. I was just trying to survive it. So that was something I did not just with him but with other people. And I tended to keep going, "Okay, this isn't right, Tracy." And one day I woke up and went,

"Wait a minute, it's not him. Oh, and it wasn't him either. It wasn't him, it was me."

And that I was the common denominator and I realized that I had to do something different. And that was, I could not – what was it I said? I wasn't going to leave the situation, even though it was dysfunctional until I had clarity and resolution. I had to find out what was going on with me inside of it because I kept leaving it because it was dysfunctional. And of course, that's what people do, it's dysfunctional, I'd better get out of here. And then you pine away, or you think you're over it. And then that person comes back, and you have the same feelings.

It's like, why do I have the same feelings even though intellectually I know this is bad thing? And that was really the key to, okay, you've got this whole emotional area, this from the neck down that you're not dealing with. And so that was really a big wake up call.

Jen: Wow, I love that. So, you stayed in the relationship so you could learn and stop the pattern. I think that's brilliant. Well done.

Tracy: Yeah. Thank you.

Jen: Well, so for everyone listening, they can try to assume they know their attachment style and we all have moments of, even a securely attached person isn't always secure in every situation. So just to simplify, we all have moments of anxious desiring of emotional connection or worry that we're going to be abandoned. We all have moments when we need to detach, and separate and be a little more independent. How do we take this knowledge of attachment styles and apply it just in all of our relationships in the most healthy way, would you say?

Tracy: I would say that one of the first things I tell people is to be communicating honestly. Most of us think we are but often if you have an issue, you're usually looking at how you can blame the other person and make them responsible for it.

Jen: Yes. Guilty sometimes, yes.

Tracy: And so that doesn't help anything, that doesn't bring you closer together. All it does is it creates more issues because you're not really getting to the issue which is why do I have this issue in the first place? Why am I putting it on this person? And then why am I making choices either to stick around or to continually help the issue to keep being alive? Because that's really the only control you have. You can't control your partner, you can't, I mean you can try. But then you're always trying to control. You control a little bit, I got him to do what I want.

And then you try to do more and more. And then pretty soon, it's like you're trying to control everything. You don't realize you're doing this. This is just another subconscious pattern that we have. And it's really about being very honest and taking and owning your crap. Hey, I realize I do this. And I realize I'm trying to blame you. And a lot of people are afraid to do that because then they think they're giving power to the other person and it's a win or lose. And if you're in an intimate relationship why is there a win or lose in the first place?

Jen: Absolutely. Well, you also like to talk about narcistic damage, those cycles of narcistic damage. I personally believe the term, narcissist is way overused. Anyone who seems a little selfish or makes us uncomfortable is suddenly a narcissist. But tell us more about that, that cycle of narcistic damage and how do we know if we're really with a narcissist?

Tracy: Well, like you, I have a problem with the label as well. And unless someone's diagnosed by a psychologist you do not know if they're a narcist. But there are people that get stuck in these cycles. And what they do is they continue to victimize themselves because they don't realize, a narcissist is an uber victim. They're a huge victim. And that's pretty much how you know they're a narcissist. People that get entangled with them usually are narcissist too, not all the time.

And when they're not, because we all are. I mean all of us are otherwise we'd be dead. Because if you don't have any narcissistic tendencies you have no survival tendencies. It's part of your human physiology. So, to the degree that you stay stuck in these cycles, what you're doing is you're looking for something that again, this goes back to childhood attachment issues. It's, what are you looking for? You're looking for someone that was mom or like dad. And you don't realize it because you probably have an empty feeling inside.

You're operating on fear, you're operating on all these things. So just because you're with a narcissist, most people, and this is where I help people, it's to stop looking at the narcissist as the problem because you have to realize you chose to be there. When you realize that you chose to be there it's not to beat yourself up. It's so that you realize you have the power to choose. So, if I had the power to choose that, then that means I can be empowered to do something about it.

And I can stop pointing my finger backwards if it's somebody I just broke up with or whatever. And I can start pointing the finger at myself to go, what can I do? How can I grow my own self-value so that I don't end up in a dysfunctional situation like that again?

Jen: Yeah. If you got yourself into the relationship you can also get yourself out. We forget that really easy, well, not easy, but it's simple, just get out, yeah. Oh, my goodness. With narcissism it's so interesting. We think of the male version, stereotypically male version of narcissism, but I think people don't realize there is a female 'version of narcissism' where you try to manipulate emotionally with a lot of crying. In the end, narcissists are all trying to get other people to behave in a way that they want.

They're manipulating, well, those tears can be a form of narcissism too when we're trying to change the other person's behavior. So, I think it's cool you say, breaking the cycle, we're not trying to change them, we have to look at ourselves and what are we going to do in response to it, so yeah, that's cool.

Tracy: Yeah. Thank you.

Jen: So, tell us a little bit more about imposter syndrome, how this relates to attachment.

Tracy: It's so funny how everything relates to attachment. Yeah, so imposter syndrome is basically, you know, going back to attachment a little bit here. One of the things, let's say you had a parent that was avoidant or dismissive. And so, the only way you got attention was to get straight A's. And let's say you got straight A's, not because you loved school, or you wanted to be a scholar, or you wanted to go get five PhDs. And I've had clients by the way who have had multiple degrees like that.

So anyways, it's not that. It's not that I'm that person but because I got attention that way from my parent that was positive, that's something I need to keep doing. I need to be the smartest one in the room. I need to be, so you have a list of things that you decided at a young age that you needed

to be. And that was so you would get attention, or love, or whatever, if it was on your job, or it was in a relationship, whichever one it applies to.

Jen: Wow.

Tracy: Yeah. And so, then you're just this caricature in a sense and you probably don't know who you are. And you feel a sense of insecurity and anxiety if anybody gets too close or anybody starts to, you know, well, basically get to know you. It's uncomfortable because then, oh, shoot, what if they get to know the real me, or what if they do and then they're going to abandon me? Because the real me isn't good enough. And they don't realize, when I was a kid that that was the dynamic and that's where this came from in the first place.

Jen: Wow, yeah, so many patterns. My daughter was, at her school they did a prairie fire yesterday and they let the kids watch. And she was telling me, "Such and such was such a baby. She started to cry. And we said, "It's far away, why are you crying?" She always cries." And I immediately thought about attachment with your theory in mind, she has learned to be the afraid one. Some people need to be the pretty one, like you said, the smart one.

I was parentified a bit. I was responsible for my younger siblings, I mean at a very young age. So, I needed to be the responsible one, the achiever. And I still battle letting go of that identity today. So, it's super interesting. We lock these things in and yeah, imposter syndrome is tough when we don't know that we're exactly good at it in the first place.

Tracy: I know. Well, and nobody is. I mean here is the thing, none of us got an instruction booklet when we were born. Hey, this is the exact way you need to be, and this is why. A lot of us don't even know why, because we're

adults and we can't even relate it backwards. Well, why am I doing this? Well, and that's because of this or that. Like you, I was also a parent at a young age. My mother told me I was her little soldier.

Jen: Nice.

Tracy: Yeah. I was already 50 years old when I was 10, so yes.

Jen: So, my husband grew up with an interesting situation where I would definitely say, I can imagine he has a secure attachment. At nine months old he was sent to live with his grandmother because his mom was having a miscarriage with another child. And there was some food insecurity. So, I feel, okay, I can diagnose him as insecurely attached. I think I have more of an anxious attachment style from birth, even though I've done a lot of work and feel mostly secure now.

So, we've had the classic pattern of, no longer, but in the past we had the classic pattern of pursuit and withdrawal, talk about that. A lot of people have that pattern where one partner will pursue and want to talk about something, the other one will withdraw. One will want the emotional closeness in a needy way, the other will withdraw and want to be alone. How do you stop that pattern? Because it can be so destructive.

Tracy: Well, it's interesting because I have also experienced that. That was all of my relationships. And one of the best ways to do that is as somebody who's more avoidant. And they have to want to do this by the way, is to plant both feet. I always say, plant both feet, do not run, do not hide, allow whatever is happening to happen without shutting down, which is really hard to do, for them to just stay in the moment. When I'm asking people say, "It sounds so simple." It's not when you have avoidant tendencies. The first thing you want to do is go into flight.

And whether you shut down inside or you physically leave, that is the hardest thing. So, I'm always like, "Yeah, plant both feet, allow whatever is happening to happen." Obviously if you're being abused you're not going to do that. And then the person who's anxious, it's to sit with your anxiety, which is one of the hardest things to do. But the other person is not responsible for your anxiety.

And a lot of times we put the anxiety on the other person and it's not up to them. It's okay to share, "Hey, I'm anxious, I'm not looking at you to solve the problem. But I'm anxious because I'm afraid you're going to leave. And I don't need you to reassure me because that doesn't work anyway." So that's like putting a little band-aid on. And it's just really to be that real and not hide it or feel ashamed. And if you feel the shame, let your shame come up. And again, these are not quick fixes. These are things that take a while because you've got to get to what shame am I even afraid to feel?

Where did the shame come from? Why do I carry the shame? So, it's all of that on a deeper level because to me I'm always about, let's break a pattern. Let's break these patterns of behavior. I always go back to, it's the willingness. And even if their partner's not willing, you can still become a really great partner to yourself and to the other person. And then at some point if they're still not doing it, you may decide, you know what? This isn't really fulfilling to me. I'm going to go.

Jen: Yeah, exactly. Easy peasy. Oh, my goodness. Okay, you also talk a lot about the lizard brain. Those who grew up with trauma, or insecure situations, or lack of consistency, tell us what happens in the brain?

Tracy: So, the lizard brain is the oldest part of our brain. And that's why they gave it that name. And it's really interesting because what it does is it track – okay, let me back up. It's when you are in your cave, we're back in

the caveman days, and dad goes out and doesn't come back. He went out at noon, he's going to go get you lunch, and dad never came back. And mom's like, "Saber toothed tiger must have got him." Well, that's scary.

And so, when you have the feeling of fear your limbic system, which is your lizard brain is basically taking that information in and putting it in your subconscious. So, you may never leave the cave at noon because dad got eaten at noon. So, you're going to associate that with survival. And so, since we don't have saber toothed tigers or anything like that sitting outside our door we have now transferred – I mean it's basically used in all parts of your life without you being consciously aware of it is the point.

Jen: So, it affects our relationship patterns. It affects our habits. How can we break that cycle of what that limbic brain is doing to kind of flood us or give us an emotional response we don't necessarily feel works for us anymore?

Tracy: Well, it really is to first of all become aware. And people think they're aware, but most people aren't really self-aware. Because to be self-aware, you have to constantly be checking in with yourself. So, let's say that you feel anxious. And so, like I was saying before about sitting with the anxiety. Well, one of the things that you can do is you realize you're having a reaction.

Let's say that your boyfriend texted you that he would be seeing you tonight at six and it's 15 minutes after six and you're on the ceiling basically. You're just anxious, oh my God, he's not showing up, where is he? I don't want to seem needy and text him, whatever. So, you're your own worst nightmare at this point. And what you're feeling, it's to instead of reacting to the feeling because when we have anxiety, why I say to sit with it is a lot of times we're reacting to the anxiety which makes it a 1,000 times worse.

As to stop reacting to it if you can by getting in your body. Your body is where, if you notice, you feel the anxiety. You don't feel anxiety in your head, you feel it in your body. And so, it's to really — I used to close my eyes and I would look for it in my body, where do I feel it? And I could feel it, I'd hold it in my jaw by clenching my jaw. I could feel it in my gut. I might feel constricted when I'm breathing. And I would just sit with those feelings. Because what starts to happen is you're giving attention to yourself, you're connecting to yourself.

And a lot of times it's this fear of abandonment and what we usually do is we don't connect, and we do self-abandonment. So, this is one way of not abandoning yourself, is to get back in your body. And it's hard to do at first but you get into it, and you start to realize it and you start to get more relaxed. And then there's other work you can do too about breaking the pattern. But that is just a starting point, and I don't want to complicate it with adding onto that.

Jen: Yeah. So being present for yourself. Can you form a secure attachment to yourself kind of through reparenting?

Tracy: Yeah.

Jen: Yeah. That's kind of how I feel I've healed. I'm very secure in myself, I really like myself. I can meet all my own needs. Does that mean I don't want to connect? No, I love social connection. I love physical intimacy. I love all these ways I can connect. But I've got me, and I don't know, I feel like, do securely attached individuals feel that way about themselves? Or are they feeling that toward their parents, do you feel like?

Tracy: So, it's really funny because my husband is a securely attached person. I got married again. And he's never had any of this at all. It's really

weird. But it's not to say that he doesn't have anxiety about things, but never about anything relationship oriented. He'd get anxious about how some people act sometimes but not – he never had the fear of abandonment and that was interesting to me. So, he was securely attached. And I was like, "This is really weird because I've never had that before."

Jen: He's super stable, and predictable.

Tracy: Yeah, he's very predictable.

Jen: That sounds great.

Tracy: Yes. He was consistent when I started dating him and I was still working on some of this, but I don't know how much he could tell. But it was like when he would text me, and my original idea was, I'll wait a couple hours to text him back or till tomorrow. And I realized the moment I was going to do it, I'm like, you're playing that game, you're doing the thing, don't do that. Because you said, I had committed to myself to have a healthy relationship. So, a healthy relationship meant consistency.

Consistency and progression are two signs of a healthy relationship. And that's basically what he was willing to do and did. It was kind of foreign to him, any of this. It was pretty funny, it was very funny actually.

Jen: That's really cool. So, you've become a more secure person. You're in a relationship with a securely attached person. Do your old patterns still kind of nudge you on the shoulder sometimes, you have to watch out for them?

Tracy: Sometimes I get the urge to avoid. And I'll realize, what is that? And I don't do it because I've realized the damage it does. I've realized how you're just creating another problem. Instead, it's like, I will say something and it's not necessarily something he's doing. It's more about why am I even feeling the way I'm feeling? And then I'll share it with him. And I share things and sometimes I go, "Do you really want to hear all this because I'm sharing with you?" Not, I'm beating him up or anything. It's just whatever I'm sharing. And he's always like, "I always want to hear what you have to say."

Jen: Wow, that's so great. I love that. Well, I assume some of our listeners are thinking, yes, I need Tracy's help. I want to move from insecure attachment to something more secure so I can have more stable relationships. Where should they go if they want to connect with you?

Tracy: They can go to my website tracycrossley.com. Everything's there, my book, which is behind me, programs and basically they can hook up and talk to somebody on my team. And they can find out about what I do and how I can help them.

Jen: Awesome. Thank you so much for sharing your wisdom today. My mind is going to churn on this, and I love when that happens so thank you.

Tracy	: Thank	vou for	having	me. It's	really	been	great.
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Lots of food for thought there. I want you to notice your relationship patterns. Are you trying to get your partner, your kids to behave in a certain way so that you can feel a certain way? In that pattern meet your own emotional needs, become securely attached to yourself and then you can

interact more from a place of wholeness with these other people. I loved everything Tracy shared about attachment and relationship patterns.

The takeaway for all of us is to look at our patterns and work on meeting our own emotional needs so we don't have to have pursuit, withdrawal, avoidant, anxious, abandonment, worry, fear patterns that make relationships tricky and challenging. As I said in the beginning, our end goal is to stop the patterns that are unhealthy and create patterns that are more stable, and consistent, and emotionally safe.

So, my friends, I will be back again next week. Until then make it a vibrant, and happy, emotionally safe, healthy patterned week. Take care.

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