

EPISODE 195**[INTRODUCTION]**

[0:00:02.6] PF: Welcome to episode 195 of Live Happy Now. This is your host Paula Felps, thanking you for joining us today. This week, we're joined by our favorite psychotherapist, Stacy Kaiser. You know her from the Live Happy column Ask Stacy, but you've probably also seen her on one of her many television appearances.

This week, we were lucky enough to get her into our studio to talk about this tricky little holiday called Valentine's Day. We're going to learn how to keep our expectations in check and our relationships intact.

[INTERVIEW]

[0:00:31.5] PF: Stacy, welcome to the show and thank you so much for coming on and being a guest.

[0:00:35.5] SK: Oh, I'm so happy to do this today.

[0:00:37.5] PF: Well, this was an absolute perfect topic to talk to you about, because it's almost Valentine's Day. As we know, it's just one day out of the year, but oh, my God, it gets a lot of hype. I wanted to know from your perspective first of all, why do we put so much pressure on just this one day?

[0:00:53.7] SK: Well, I actually think that some of the pressure isn't our fault. Some of it happens when the minute New Year's past, they have the 50% off of the blowers for New Year's and they're putting the Valentine step already. Hello, make sure you buy your Valentine a Valentine, and restaurants are sending out their special Valentine menu and all of that.

I do think that there's a social pressure that starts it all off. Then I think the second part of that pressure ends up coming from the expectations, either within ourselves or a partner. A lot of times if you have a couple who both of them don't have any expectation, they don't celebrate

Valentine's Day, they don't have any pressure. If both of you have expectations, or one of you has expectations, that's when the pressure starts to build.

[0:01:43.2] PF: Now what do you do if you're in a situation where like I say, you have a lot of emphasis and a lot of expectation about Valentine's Day and your partner does not?

[0:01:53.5] SK: Yeah, that can be really challenging. Well, my recommendation is that people talk about it with their partner before February 14th, because –

[0:02:02.0] PF: Not on the 14th, 15th, 16th and 17th?

[0:02:04.9] SK: No. When the 14th arrives and you haven't gotten what it is you thought you should get and then you create a whole bunch of drama around it, that creates more problems. I would recommend that you really sit down and have a conversation and explain, "Look, this is an important holiday to me."

One of the things I found is in couples where one person finds Valentine's Day important, the other partner might find some other holiday important. It's really good to negotiate a trade, like I really about Valentine's Day and you care about the 4th of July. I will make sure that I do whatever it is you want on the 4th of July can be your day and Valentine's is my day.

[0:02:46.7] PF: Oh, that's an excellent way to approach it, because even if they think it's hokey, then they're going to do it because they want to score big on their holiday.

[0:02:53.6] SK: Exactly. I've had people say to me and this is a – I'm sorry. I'm a female, you're a female, so I think I can say this; it tends to be the ladies that say this and I have a lot of my friends that do it. They'll say, "Well, I don't want someone to do something for me if I have to ask for it." If you want a good relationship, you need to ask for what you want. If your partner is on board for a good relationship, they're going to want to deliver the best that they possibly can.

That doesn't mean that you can ask for a big 5-carat diamond ring or something every Valentine's Day, but that you want their game to be on on February 14th, that's something that a person who loves and cares about you should be willing to do.

[0:03:31.7] PF: The fact is that they may not know. If that's not their thing, if it's not their holiday, they need that guidance. Just like if you're going to a football game and you don't know how to play football, you're not going to understand what's going on. I think guys are sometimes like that for Valentine's Day. It's like, "I know I'm supposed to get something, but I'm not really sure what I need to do here."

[0:03:52.0] SK: I think that's a good point. Also, it depends on other relationships they've had in the past. If your parents weren't big Valentine's Day people, maybe you're not going to be, or the last relationship you were in that person didn't care about it, so you started to not care about it either. I actually think this conversation is just a general theme for couples and relationship, it's really important that you put your partner's comfort and well-being and happiness as a priority, even if you don't agree.

[0:04:21.6] PF: When you've got a situation where like in offices, I see women who work in offices and I used to joke about, this is the real tournament of roses, because they're all waiting for their flowers to come in. I honest-to-God, worked in an office once where a woman got on the phone, it was 4:30 in the afternoon and she is chewing out her husband, because the flowers hadn't arrived and everybody else had gotten flowers. He was like, "I've cooked you dinner. I've got flowers at home." She goes, "But nobody will see them." How much of it becomes this show? It's not about how you receive the gift, it's being done for show.

[0:04:59.5] SK: There are definitely those people that need the rest of the world to know that they're loved on Valentine's Day. I always ask people to stop and take a look at that. I mean, there's definitely that whole thing, like everyone in the office but me got flowers, which could affect anyone.

If you're finding that you're one of those people that's saying, "Well, people are going to think I'm not loved and cared about and special if something doesn't come my way on this day." The next something you want to take a look at, and side note, I see that with social media posts too. I had a client calling me sobbing because it was 9 p.m. on Valentine's Day and her husband hadn't posted his Valentine message declaring his love and she's worried that people would think they were having relationship problems. Honestly, I don't even think people are paying attention to whether or not her husband posted.

[0:05:49.0] PF: No, they're probably too busy checking their own feed and making sure that they got the appropriate responses.

[0:05:54.6] SK: Exactly.

[0:05:56.8] PF: When we're in that situation where we're saying like, "I really want a lot from this day," and regardless of whether or not you have a partner who's going to react accordingly, what are some things we can do within ourselves to manage our expectations and put it in a better perspective? Because when it comes down to it, it really is just one day.

[0:06:14.5] SK: Yeah. I mean, the first thing I think you need to do is really get clear about your own expectations and where they came from, and whether or not they're reasonable for your lifestyle, your finances, your partner's schedule in life, your relationship and the situation between the two of you. Because the more clear about where you're coming from, the more clear you are about where you're coming from, the easier it's going to be for you to manage whatever those expectations are.

Then another thing is why does Valentine's Day have to be something that is just because showing your partner that they love you? Why can't it be – I always get my kids chocolate. We're not dating. Why can't I go buy myself some flowers at the market, especially for the single people, why can't it be a day where you shower yourself with love and you do something nice for yourself, especially if you feel you're going to get let down by the people in your world. You don't want to just sit there and be let down and wait for it. You want to go and meet your own needs and make yourself happy.

[0:07:13.7] PF: I'm really glad that you brought that up, because I was going to ask you about that. For single people, it can be isolating. They start feeling like, "I'm the only one who doesn't have a relationship." It's especially pronounced if they've recently lost a spouse or have gone through a divorce and breakup. How important is it for them to be able to reframe that and what are some great tips that they can use to make this Valentine's Day not be about being alone?

[0:07:39.5] SK: For people that really care about Valentine's Day, you're right, it can be a very hard day. It is in your face. I mean, as I said earlier, you can't even go into the grocery store without the balloons and the cards and everything. I think the first step is to make sure that

you're doing something for yourself. I also think if you're somebody who doesn't like to be alone, so watching Netflix or something isn't going to make you feel better, then you want to schedule activities with other people that are not currently in relationships, or someone who's mate is out of town, and find something to do for the day or the evening, so that you are busy and have an activity and have something to do.

[0:08:20.3] PF: Yeah. That can be something that is done with others and makes you feel like you're all in this together.

[0:08:28.1] SK: Sometimes it can even be a Valentine co-worker lunch. It's funny, I know a lady that her best friend lives in another state and she's single too. She already told me that they're having FaceTime cocktails on February 14th, her and her friend. They're going to –

[0:08:42.5] PF: I love that.

[0:08:43.0] SK: - get on their phones and yeah, they're going to video chat while they have a glass of wine together. I thought that was a brilliant idea.

[0:08:48.7] PF: Oh, they're going to have more fun than a lot of people that are doing face-to-face stuff.

[0:08:52.7] SK: Yeah. I mean listen, a lot of those people who are in relationships are dreading the Valentine moment and can't find a card that fits, because they're currently angry, upset, or disconnected.

[0:09:02.6] PF: Well yeah, because that's another thing. Sometimes that day falls on what happens to be a bad day in your relationship and then you're trying to turn that day into something that it's not. What are you supposed to do?

[0:09:13.7] SK: Yeah. I mean, I had had friends joke that, "Okay, I'm not feeling the love feelings and my husband doesn't golf, so I don't know what to buy him."

[0:09:21.1] PF: Boxers with arts on it. Yeah.

[0:09:24.9] SK: If you are in a relationship and not feeling it, you still should extend yourself. Sometimes that reach out of love and by the way, this doesn't just apply to Valentine's Day. It's about putting your pride aside, putting the fight aside and saying, "Look, we're in a relationship. I care about this person, so I am going to do what I can to turn it around. I'm going to make their favorite dinner. I'm going to pick up something that they really love. I'm going to buy them flowers or whatever it is and I'm going to see if I can make this day turn things around in our relationship."

[0:09:55.1] PF: Yeah. I do remember that, I think it was a couple years ago, you had done a really great column for Live Happy that talked about ways to make it Valentine's Day all year long. That's really, you're not going to have a good – or a great Valentine's Day if you're not doing some of these things throughout the year. It's not like it just shows up on this one day.

[0:10:13.6] SK: A 100%. I think that that's still online that column; it can be found, right?

[0:10:17.4] PF: Yeah, I think it is.

[0:10:18.9] SK: Yes. I believe every day should be Valentine's Day. I'm definitely a believer that you have to put effort into your relationship. You have to make your partner feel loved, so that they want to want to work harder, want to be in a relationship with you, want to make you feel loved. It's really a give-and-take.

[0:10:35.1] PF: What are some of the things that we get wrong about that? Because I know in your line of work, you've seen every mistake that we can possibly make. What are some of the recurring things that we're doing that really sabotage our relationships and keep us from having that best interaction that we can have?

[0:10:50.8] SK: One of the biggest things I see is wanting to win the battle, instead of the war. People are so – they dig in on whatever it is that their fight of the day is, instead of looking at the war, which is actually a positive thing, like the whole relationship. They get really focused on the small, little nitpicky thing, instead of saying, "I actually want to be together for the next 20, 30, 40, 50 years and I want us to be happy." We lose sight of that.

I also think that I implied this earlier, we let our egos get in the way. Wasn't my fault. Well, he or she did this. Well, that's very nice if it wasn't your fault and they did that. This relationship is a partnership and somebody needs to break the ice. Why not it have it be you, because we all know if you guys are staying together in a day, a week, a month, you're going to get over this and move on. Why can't you do it sooner than later?

[0:11:41.6] PF: That's terrific advice. What are some of the indicators in your opinion that show a relationship really can endure and can last? What are some of the qualities that you see?

[0:11:53.0] SK: Mutual respect, trust, honesty, laughter, shared interests. I think all of us who are in relationships can relate to those moments where you have that connection with your partner. It might be that you're at some a school activity or event or something and something happens with other people and you look at each other and go like, "Oh, my gosh. Here they go." Could you see that your favorite TV show comes on and you just look at each other with that smile together like, "Let's watch this." Or your favorite team is in the Super Bowl and you both are going to put on your outfit, or your jerseys and whatnot. Those connecting moments mean that there's still something there. If you feel you can never find a connection, then that's something that you need to worry about.

[0:12:39.7] PF: We do overlook the value of those little things, those little micro-moments of – there's times with my partner where I might – we have some inside jokes and I'll say something and it's like, "Man, there is nobody else in the world A, that would get that or B, after I explained it would think it was funny."

[0:12:56.5] SK: Exactly. Those moments really matter and I think sometimes we lose sight of those. It's funny that you brought up inside jokes, because one of the greatest ways to connect with a person is to have inside jokes. If you and I started to create some, the more we had the closer we'd be. That's something that I always encourage people to do in their relationship is to not only have those inside jokes, but to pull them out periodically, because it'll make a laugh between the two of you and a little bond, even if it's only a second, it really helps the quality of the relationship.

[0:13:28.7] PF: That's really interesting, because I've not heard that advice before. Are there ways that they can nurture that? Because for some people, it's just not their nature to discover that. What are some ways that they can cultivate that in the relationship?

[0:13:41.9] SK: Right. Inside jokes might be words that you use to describe things that other people would not use. For example, I have a dog and I always say at the end of the day, the dog needs to be taken out for the final-final. Meaning, the final time I am letting him out. Every night I say, "Okay, going for the final-final. It's final-final time," and it's our thing. Any time we have to have an important conversation, whether it's about finances, or something pertaining to kids or whatever, I have this thing where I call our family room my office. I mean, it's a joke. It's not really my office.

I say, "Come into my office. We have to have a conversation," because there's couches there and it's comfortable. It's become an inside joke that our family room is my office. It really is about utilizing words or phrases that other people wouldn't use into your relationship. This is just a side note tip for the single people. As I said, it's a way to create connection. If you're dating someone, making those inside jokes is fantastic, because they then start to think of you in those moments.

[0:14:48.9] PF: Oh, that's nice. It's like planting a little seed there.

[0:14:51.2] SK: Yeah, it's very tricky. Yup.

[0:14:55.6] PF: Part of it too though is appreciating – I think we talked a little bit about this, but really appreciating the relationship. It's so easy when you're in this day in and day out to not as you say, look at the big picture. You're looking at, "I got to win this battle," instead of looking at all the attributes and all the things that you love about this person and what brought you together to begin with.

[0:15:15.8] SK: I think that's so important. I mean, you fell for this person for a reason. A lot of times, you need to remind yourself about those reasons because we get caught up in the nitty-gritty, day-to-day annoyances. Then by the way, here the other thing we forget, if you get into another relationship, that person's going to have nitty-gritty, everyday annoyances. That's just part of being in a relationship. Why not look at the big picture, at the good qualities that your

partner has and spend time appreciating those things and finding gratitude for them, instead of focusing on the negative.

[0:15:48.8] PF: Right, because it might be that you can appreciate their nitty-gritties a lot more than you would the next person's nitty-gritty.

[0:15:57.6] SK: Right. You don't even know. You never know.

[0:16:00.0] PF: Its' that double you know thing.

[0:16:01.4] SK: Exactly.

[0:16:03.6] PF: As we start wrapping this up and people are trudging toward Valentine's Day, couple of days away when this goes on the air, nurturing your relationship, can you give us just three great tips for them to focus on in the next few days of nurturing the relationship, versus celebrating a holiday?

[0:16:22.9] SK: Yeah. Number one would be taking time to have conversations where there's a real give-and-take of listening and speaking; making sure that you're really listening and understanding your partner's perspective and having quality conversations about things. They don't have to be serious topics. It could be about a sporting event, or what you're going to do in your garden when the weather is better.

The second thing that I would say is finding little ways to let your partner know that you love them. A little text message leaving a note on their toothbrush in the morning when you leave that says like, "I love you," or in a book – on their bookmarks for when they open it at bed at night when they're going to bed or on their iPad and since most people are now not reading books anymore.

[0:17:04.3] PF: What's a book, Stacy?

[0:17:07.0] SK: You can stick it in the middle of their iPad case when they open it, but just little love notes. Put them on the dashboard, put them in the refrigerator, things that say like, "I love you. I'm thinking about you. Have a great day." I think that my third tip would be to really find

ways to laugh together. There's just so much research that says that if you and your partner can have a chuckle and a laugh together, that it's a real true bonding experience.

If you guys aren't particularly funny, it might be that you need to go watch a comedy show, or have a snowball fight, but a gentle, polite fun one. Something that makes both of you laugh together.

[0:17:47.2] PF: That's terrific. One thing that I've tried incorporating lately, I've been in this relationship for 16 years now, and so I might tend to pick up my phone when we should be talking.

[0:17:58.8] SK: That's a great –

[0:17:59.9] PF: Oh, my gosh. I'm getting bad about it. I'm really trying to incorporate this thing where it's like, "Let me listen like I did when we were first dating," and really trying to –

[0:18:08.3] SK: Then we can [inaudible 0:18:08.4].

[0:18:10.5] PF: Exactly. There wasn't the problem back then. Really trying to approach it as if I were dating, would I do the same behavior?

[0:18:18.9] SK: I think that's really good. Devices really are a problem. I always recommend that look, there are times when we need to be on our devices, when we might be getting some contact from work or an ill family member or we're not with our children. It's really important to take time where you literally say it is no electronics time. The phones are off. They're put away. It's a quality hour or two. It doesn't have to be a whole day, or people can check every hour or two and look at their phone, but time to really connect without those electronic devices.

[0:18:50.0] PF: How would that change a date? Like whether it's a married date, a dating day, how is that going to change the concept and the texture of that whole date?

[0:18:57.2] SK: Well, it builds a greater connection. It allows you to be more engaged, because let's be honest, when our phones are near us, we're not engaged. I always have this joke that it ends up being that you're in two conversations; the one you're sitting with and the person who's

on the phone, you now, who was texting you. It's a lot harder to have two conversations than it is to have one.

I think the other piece of it and you just brought it up is it makes your partner feel special. It makes them feel like you really want to make them a priority in that moment. Who doesn't want to feel that way?

[0:19:27.3] PF: Absolutely. Well, that's wonderful. This is great advice. You've given us a lot to think about for Valentine's Day and way beyond it. I appreciate you coming on. How about we do this again sometime?

[0:19:38.8] SK: We will.

[0:19:39.4] PF: Absolutely. All right, thank you so much, Stacy.

[0:19:41.1] SK: Thank you.

[END OF INTERVIEW]

[0:19:46.2] PF: That was Stacy Kaiser, giving us some great insight into how to make the most of our relationships for Valentine's Day and afterwards. You can find out more by visiting us today at livehappynow.com. We hope you're already a subscriber to Live Happy Now, but if you're not, you can find us on the Pandora Podcast Network, Spotify, iHeart Radio and on iTunes and Google Play. Just find us on your favorite platform and hit subscribe so you'll never miss an episode.

That is all we have time for this week. We'll meet you back again here next week for an all-new episode. Until then, this is Paula Felps reminding you to make every day a happy one.

[END]