

That's a Hard No

Transcript: S2: Mini1 "How do I know if myself, or a loved one need therapy?"

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Heather: Welcome to That's a hard no the podcast about saying no and setting boundaries.

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Sarah: So you can become the authentic and empowered you that this world needs.

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Heather: Before we start, a quick reminder.

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Sarah: While I am a licensed professional clinical counselor, this podcast is in no way a replacement for one on one therapy with a mental health professional. If you notice the content of this podcast triggers some big feelings, visit our website hardnopodcast.com for mental health resources and other helpful links.

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Heather: In season two of That's a Hard No, we're making it a priority to dig deeper into the process of finding and utilizing the help you may need. We want to take the time to discuss with our in-house expert, Sarah Saunders, what to expect from therapy and all of its intricacies.

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Heather: So, Sarah, let's start from the beginning. How do I know when it's time to seek therapy, and how do I support and approach the subject if I believe someone I love needs therapy?

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Sarah: These are two really great questions and I am going to break them up individually and I'm going to start with "How do I know when it's time to seek therapy?" And I want to start out by just sharing as I start to go over this information, there is not one size fits all and you are the expert of you. You know you best. I think it's important to note that collectively we are all coming out of this pandemic. We all face struggles and challenges and go through so many different seasons of our life. And seeking therapy is just a really great way to feel supported while navigating all of these stressors and changes, because none of it comes with a manual. And so when I share some of these things, these are signs to consider. I want to remind you that, as I'm disclosing this information and I'll say this over and over throughout these episodes. But it's not to ever shame, blame, judge or criticize, but simply to bring your awareness to some of these signs and allow yourself to bring your awareness to that so you can do the deeper work. So some of the signs to consider the first one is: you're having trouble processing something in your life, you're anticipating or you're currently going through a major life transition or an event, so a lot of people that come into my therapeutic space, they may be becoming a parent for the first time. I do a lot of couple's work, and so maybe you're getting married or there's been a shift in the relationship dynamic. Maybe you're an empty nester. There's a job change that you're experiencing or even a big life move. So those are some things to just really think about what in your life is changing and that can definitely impact your mental health and and just having someone to support you through that. You'd like help working through difficult family or relationship dynamics.

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Especially as new parents, you really take time to reevaluate everything from your upbringing. I don't know about you, Heather...

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Heather: Oh yeah.

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Sarah: But it was like when I became a parent. I started to question my upbringing, what there is no manual, and so you may start to become aware of patterns that once seemed normal, and now you're recognizing they may have been dysfunctional. This again is not to blame, shame, judge or criticize, but just to acknowledge. How can I go about processing this? Where do I even start to change these patterns, and so seeking therapy would be a really great safe space for you to do that. It's also important to, you know, really identify if you are still finding joy in things that you used to. This is very different than just your interests have changed. It's really important specifically to be mindful. So women who are postpartum or again going back to having a major change in your life, you could be developing some depressive symptoms and not being able to really find joy in the things that you used to. So that's just a sign to bring your awareness to, to just be curious Emotions intensifying, this is something that I really like to highlight, that it's important to note, that is your reaction. Does it match whatever just occurred? And so, for example, I talk a lot about mom rage. Again, I'm coming from a perspective of postpartum, but there's a lot of moms who they just feel like. Oh my goodness, I'm feeling extremely overstimulated things that didn't use to bother me, now I'm having this really big reaction to, and so, being mindful, does your reaction match the event that happened?

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Heather: Yeah, I know, and in couples, in relationship-type situations, often people are blowing up at each other about, you know, the dishwasher or laundry or whatever, and it's never about the dishwasher or laundry. Right, there's something else going on. So why are we blowing up at each other over these small things? Maybe there's something we need to go talk about.

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Sarah: Right, and that's where I talk about that: Your check engine light is going, and so there's something deeper under the hood and in these emotions intensifying, are you noticing that maybe you're crying more or you're yelling more? So those are some signs to really bring your awareness to. Another thing to think about is: Are habits becoming problematic? And so oftentimes people associate unhealthy habits being problematic related to, like drugs and alcohol, which is, yes, very important to pay attention to, but also look at things like excessive spending or shopping, excessive exercise, extreme changes in eating patterns or risky behaviors, kind of finding what are ways that I'm coping that actually are hurtful rather than helpful. I oftentimes talk about how self-care should never hurt, it should never hurt your bank account, it should never hurt your relationships. And so if you're noticing that the way in which you're coping is actually something that you're keeping from someone, or loved ones are noticing that it's just a sign to bring your curiosity to that. Relationship distress, so are your relationships being nurtured? So are you noticing

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continued arguments with your partner again, maybe snapping at your kids? Some of that mom rage I had talked about and even ignoring family and friends' phone calls or text. Sometimes when I meet with people they're telling me you know I don't want people to stop inviting me places, but yet every time that I'm invited somewhere I freeze. I don't respond. I kind of ghost people, kind of that people use, or you know, I'll say yes and I'll cancel the plan. So really, how are your relationships being nurtured and are you noticing distress within the relationships? Trauma, so have you experienced a traumatic life event? And when I talk about Trauma, you have your capital T trauma and you have your lower-case t trauma. Trauma is not always what happens to you, but it's what happens inside of you. And so, yes, there are those capital T traumas like a horrific car accident or an unexpected death, or you know Heather you've talked about, you know the fire that your family experienced, right?

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Heather: It can also be prolonged things.

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Sarah: Absolutely.

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Heather: Years of abuse, verbal abuse, emotional whatever. Yeah, dealing with someone with a like a severe mental illness and having to deal with all the horrible things that come with that sometimes, yeah.

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Sarah: Absolutely, and that's where that lower case t trauma. It's this invisible load that nobody else sees but you carry and it's causing then impairment in your daily life, the lack of boundary setting, you know, not feeling like you're able to truly be yourself. So really identifying. Are there things in my current situation or things from my past that are unprocessed?

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Heather: I'm always going to pound on this every time we have an opportunity: caretakers, people who are caretaking people, older parents, parents with dementia, spouses with dementia. It is like the most stressful, traumatic thing on so many levels and a lot of times those people are very isolated and don't think to get help. So that's a really important thing to remember that you can't take care of someone else if you're not taking care of yourself first.

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Sarah: Absolutely, which also leads me into the importance of a support system.

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Heather: Right.

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Sarah: I, oftentimes use the language of a village. We weren't meant to do these things alone.

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Heather: Right.

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Sarah: And so is your support system or is your village nonexistent, or has it, has it diminished in some way? If you have recently moved, maybe away from family, and oftentimes big moves are associated with a job change. So that's kind of like a dynamic duo. So to really be aware of, do I have the support in place that I need to truly be able to do the things that that make me feel my best? And if we don't have that, reaching out and finding that support through therapy is really important.

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Heather: Mmhm.

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Sarah: Intrusive thoughts. So if you're experiencing intrusive thoughts and I want to take a couple of minutes to just kind of unpack this, because disturbing thoughts that pop into your mind, unprompted or unexpectedly, absolutely can make you feel uneasy. However, they are common. So while intrusive thoughts may be disturbing, it's important to remember that thoughts are not facts and they aren't harmful unless it's something that is impairing your daily life. And so one example that I want to give is so, again, I work with a lot of new moms, specifically motherhood across the lifespan, and so, and this is something I actually experienced that I didn't know enough about. If your, if your baby is crying and you're sleep-deprived and you are just exhausted and the thought pops into your head of what if I took this pillow and put it over my baby's face? Right like it would stop the crying immediately? It's important to recognize when that thought, that intrusive thought, pops into your head. Do you feel relief in thinking that would make things so much easier? Or do you have the thought of, oh my gosh, I can't believe I thought that I would never do something like that, right? Oftentimes, the latter is what happens if we would find relief based on an intrusive thought. That's when we're getting into psychosis, and that is when you would need immediate medical attention, but with just those intrusive thoughts that pop into our head. That is not your fault, but if you're noticing that it's reoccurring and it's something that then is creating so much fear and anxiety, that would be a time to definitely reach out and talk to someone. The other thing is that we are bombarded with self-help books.

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Heather: We sure are!

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Sarah: And different, you know podcasts, people are, you know, essential oils go for a walk or you know fill in the blank.

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Heather: This supplement! Yeah.

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Sarah: Exactly, if you've tried exercise, meditation, focusing on your eating and sleeping, you've tried some of those recommended self-help books that are floating around and

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nothing has seemed to help. That is a really important sign to just recognize, I do have some deeper work that I need to do and, being mindful of that. The main thing to highlight here is that is, your daily functioning and quality of living impaired? If you are not able to perform as effectively and efficiently in your daily roles, it's really important to just seek support to navigate those things.

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Heather: And so that's all really helpful stuff to think about. I think we all get kind of mired in our depression or whatever situation we're in, kind of like the frogs in the boiling water right. They don't feel it at first until it's too late. So that's really great stuff. What about if someone you love or a friend or someone is really seems to be struggling and you think they need help?

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Sarah: This is such a tough one.

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Heather: Yeah!

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Sarah: This is such a tough one.

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Heather: It can be really awkward and people can get really defensive and...

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Sarah: Absolutely like I had said before, you know you are the expert and you are human. It's never easy to see someone you care about deeply suffering and as humans, naturally, our go-to oftentimes is, we want to fix, rescue, save.

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Heather: Ding, ding,ding, that's me.

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Sarah: Yeah, and so it's important to honor your own experience of how this is making you feel, while also approaching the conversation with compassion and careful language. It's really important to be mindful and sensitive to the timing and place. You know you don't want to bring this up in the midst of our emotional temperature being hot. You don't want to use it as a way to like, cut the conversation off like oh, just go and talk to someone, I don't have time for this, right? Like you want to be very intentional with the way that you're delivering it and using "I" statements and being specific. And so, for example, I feel concerned about you because I've noticed you've been cancelling our plans frequently and so offering that "I" statement. You know I'm feeling concerned because if you start a conversation with you, research shows that you're going to be met with defensiveness, and so at the core of your discussion there should be empathy and concern for that person's wellbeing right, not frustration with how their mood is impacting you.

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Heather: Right, I mean, if you love them, you want to hold space, to have a really honest conversation and and just tell them you're concerned.

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Sarah: Exactly, exactly, and and I think it can be very difficult because of how deeply we feel about that person and so our emotions. We want to validate that while also not making it about us, and so letter-writing can be a really great exercise to organize your thoughts regarding how to go about this conversation. I actually created a template that can help guide you through this process. There'll be a link in our show notes, but you can also visit our website, hardnopodcast.com, and access the template under the resource tab, and this just kind of gives you, you know, a few ways to reflect on how to process having this conversation and to organize your thoughts. The other thing that is important is to normalize therapy. You know, part of this podcast, in these minisodes that we're providing, is to really take the stigma away from mental health and so reminding whoever you're talking to that therapy is a wonderful judgment-free zone, even people without a mental health condition, they just can go and talk through those life challenges, like I mentioned in the beginning of the podcast. How do you know if you need therapy? It doesn't have to be anything earth shattering. It's just a place for support and guidance and it's it's part of, you know the human experience and so really normalizing it through talking about the importance of this being a normal part of life. As you had mentioned, Heather it is important to to be mindful that there will be, there's the possibility of resistance.

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Heather: Right.

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Sarah: Your loved one might not be ready to hear what you're sharing, and that is OK. It's okay to give them permission to not be ready yet. It's important that you take time to hear them and understand them too, without being defensive yourself, pushy, or giving up on them, staying neutral and open. It's okay to park the conversation and revisit it. I'm here to talk when you're ready. And so, with both of those concepts that I had shared in regards to, how do I know if I need therapy and how do I talk to a loved one about seeking therapy. The two general guidelines that I want you to just keep in mind is that is the problem distressing? and is it interfering with some aspect of life? And if you answer yes to any of those, you would be a candidate for seeking your own therapy or having a loved one talk to someone.

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Heather: That's great, Sarah. Thanks for giving us insight into the first step towards therapy, especially for listeners who may have been on the fence about it.

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Sarah: That's what I'm here for.

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Heather: And again, we have resources on our resource page, including a link to psychology today where you can search for therapists. We have lots of downloadables and books and

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podcasts and all kinds of things. So visit us there. There'll be a link in our show notes to that page and you can always message us if you have questions. In our next minisode we'll detail how to find the right therapist and what to expect from the process.

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Sarah: Bye guys, thanks for listening.