

The Flying Free Podcast with Natalie Hoffman, Episode 347 - Nine Tricky Ways Emotional Abusers Pull Us Back Into the Cycle (and six clever ways to respond!)

Heads up, friend: What you're about to read is a raw, unedited transcript straight from the robots. That means you'll find some weird words, funky punctuation, and moments that make you go, "Huh?" If you want the real experience (and to actually know what's going on), I recommend reading the polished article, listening to the full episode, or watching it on 1.5x speed with captions on. Your brain will thank you.

Natalie: Welcome to episode 347 of the Flying Free Podcast. Today we're gonna dive into something that I know hits really close to home for so many of us.

Me included. This is a topic that I have wrestled with personally, and it is one that comes up again and again in our Flying Free community. Basically, how do emotional abusers pull us back into those toxic cycles? And more importantly. What can we actually do about it? So what we're talking about more specifically is the push pull cycle that is extremely common in relationships where there is abuse happening.

Here's the typical, the typical pattern. First of all, the abuser feels offended by something that you say or do. It could be that you didn't make the roast the way they liked it, or you didn't wear the dress they wanted you to wear, or that you cut your hair, or you liked a different style of carpeting.

It could be that you said something with a tone that they didn't like, or you set a limit or a boundary, or you walked away from a conversation that was going south. It could be because you had a different opinion than they did, or you didn't give them their way. It could be for any reason at all, but they have certain beliefs about the world.

They create their emotions and they get offended if you don't share those same exact beliefs and buy into their universe. So what happens next? They attack you. They will blame you. They'll shame you. They'll guilt trip you. They'll

accuse you. We're gonna get into some of those specific examples in just a minute.

And then three, you set a boundary. You're kind but firm. Then four, they escalate, they get meaner, they throw in cruel or passive aggressive jabs. And then five, they eventually soften and they apologize and they say, I love you, and they give you these convincing pleas to reconnect. And so then six, you open your heart again because you love that person and you want the relationship.

Right? And then seven, the you just rinse and repeat. This is not about you failing. This is about whatever mental illness or personality disorder or brain programming that they have and how they interpret closeness and boundaries. People with issues like this will often swing between desperate need for connection and it also intense fear of abandonment, which can come out as aggression and then guilt, and then trying to pull you back in.

Now where I have recognized that I unintentionally reinforce this cycle is by. Number one, I reengage too soon after the means phase, and this teaches the other person that if they apologize or they soften enough that I'm gonna reset everything and let them back in even if their harmful behavior hasn't changed.

Another way that I have unintentionally reinforced this cycle is by explaining and justifying my boundaries at length. And this just invites debate manipulation and circular arguments instead of actually closing the door on the behavior. Another thing I've done a lot with people like this in my life is taking responsibility for their feelings, which, which is impossible by the way, and also exhausting because it is impossible.

It's like, you know, banging your head against a brick wall. Ouch. The truth is, we cannot fix rescue or stabilize another person. We can only decide what we will and won't allow in our own life. Boundaries are not meant to control another person's behavior. They are simply meant to protect me from that behavior.

So what does help break the cycle? Well, we're gonna get into this, but just overall at the beginning here, let me just say that short firm boundaries will help. You know, like that comment was disrespectful. I'm gonna step away now. No lengthy explanations. Oh my word, you guys, if I could say this over and over again, I would from the housetops, do not explain yourself.

Why? Because your explanations will become the weapons they use against you. You are basically handing them weapons that they're gonna use to hurt you. And then another, the final thing that helps break the cycle, uh, again, we're, I'm just giving you overall, I'm gonna really get into it in this episode, but just be consistent.

Show that cruelty equals loss of access to you, whereas kindness equals access. Now I'm speaking about, not just about relationships with our spouses, okay? 'cause I am no longer married to anyone. Yet, there are still some familial relationships that I have that are like this, okay. And that I have chosen to stay in relationship with.

This person or these people, and so I'm still, I'm still in the thick of it trying to figure out, you know, who do I wanna be in this situation? We may love the person hurting us over and over again, but love that does not have boundaries is not safe, and it's not safe for me and it's not safe for the other person.

Love with. Firm. Consistent boundaries is respectful for both of us because it gives both people the freedom to decide for themselves who they wanna be in the relationship, and whether or not they want that relationship to continue. That's respectful to both people. So I'm gonna share nine specific tactics that emotional abusers use to hook us back in.

Now, these are not just random behaviors that happen, you know. Once in a blue moon. These are patterns. They're repeatable. They show, and they show up in emotionally abusive relationships everywhere, which is why it's so important that we learn to recognize them. And then I'm gonna give you six practical strategies that you can start using today.

To step out of that, you know, that wrestling ring or whatever, while keeping your dignity intact. Now again, this is something I'm, I'm struggling with too, even now, even after all that I've learned and all the healing I've done and the fact that I coach women on this every day. That pull toward those unhealthy dynamics can still catch me off guard sometimes.

So if you are listening and you're thinking, oh, I should know better by now, I should be all healed, please give yourself some grace. This stuff is complicated and it takes time to rewire our responses. Alright, so let's get into this here. The, these nine tactics that I'm gonna teach you, these nine tactics that emotional abusers use to pull us back in.

They're not just unique to one person or one type of relationship. So you might be recognizing these, you know, I want you to think about all of your relationships, not just your relationship with your spouse. It could be that these dynamics are showing up. With your parents or, or a parent. It could be a sibling or a friend.

It could be your pastor or your women's ministry leader. It could be your adult child. These are patterns that show up again and again in emotionally abusive dynamics. And here's what I want you to remember as we go through these nine tactics, recognizing the pattern is step one. To breaking free from it if you can't recognize it.

You're not gonna know what's happening, you're gonna just be caught up in the knee-jerk cycle of it. You know, this is just what you're used to and it feels normal and you're not gonna see how destructive it is to you. Alright, so the first tactic is guilt tripping. And this is maybe the most common one.

It's. Devastatingly effective. For example, if you set a boundary around a family event or something, they might say something like, you know, like we see this with parents. Even like a lot of parents can be very manipulative 'cause they want you to be at the, this family event and they get very offended if you, you can't come for some reason.

Um, if you really loved me, you would let me do this or you don't want me around or I can tell you don't care about me anymore. The goal here is to make you question your own love, to make you question your loyalty and your character. Maybe I'm not a good mother. Maybe I'm not a good daughter. Maybe I'm a terrible friend.

They're essentially saying a good person would do what I want. I mean, that's what it really is. A good person would do what I want. It's very petulant and immature, but. That's what's happening here. And because most of us want to be good people, we start second guessing ourselves. I had a woman in our community tell me that her husband would say things like, well, I guess you just don't care about our marriage anymore.

Whenever she tried to set any kind of a boundary for herself, can you see how this works? It puts her in the position of having to prove her love by abandoning her own needs on the altar of his power hungry lust. Tactic Number two is passive aggression and sarcasm. So instead of being direct about what they want or how they feel, they, and also just managing their own emo emotions, right?

For themselves. They throw these cutting little comments. They're so, they're so covert. It's hard to even put your finger on what, what's happening. But here's how you know what's happening. You feel. Unsettled and confused. So you may not even be able to see exactly what they said that's causing you to feel unsettled and confused, but you do feel it in your nervous system.

So things, it could be something like, you know, well thanks for the distance, or, well, maybe I should just stop trying or, well, I can see where I stand with you. These comments are designed to stir up guilt again and confusion without the other person having to take responsibility for D. Being an adult and directly asking for what they want.

It's manipulation, disguised as martyrdom or victimhood. In the Flying Free Kaleidoscope, we have a discussion space called Toxic Text Interpretations where members can actually get help interpreting the abuse strategies that are used in the written words that their abusers are offering to them. And this can be very revealing and bring a lot of clarity to their individual situations.

Uh, Flying Free Kaleidoscope is something you can be part of, it's affordable and effective, and you can go to join Flying Free dot com. To learn more about that. Alright, tactic three is blame shifting. And this one is so unfair because suddenly you become the problem. They'll say things like, well, you led me on, or You made me think I could trust you, or, this is all happening because of what you did.

Often the, the actual victim in the relationship is carrying the bulk of the emotional and physical labor in the relationship, and they are working over time to avoid being blamed or shamed, and yet the bar is always set a little higher than they can ever reach as a human being. Meanwhile, the abuser is the one who's actually making the choices that are leading to his or her bad results.

But since abusers can never take responsibility, it is the number one sign of an abuser. By the way, someone who doesn't take personal responsibility, they're gonna put that on you. It can never be about their behavior. Their personal adult choices or their responsibility. It's always going to be when you're with someone like this or you're in a relationship with someone like this, it's always gonna be about what you did wrong, and this is designed to keep you focused on defending yourself instead of addressing their problematic behavior and walking away.

Alright, tactic number four. Escalation. So when the subtle tactics don't work, they will sometimes escalate. Maybe they will yell. Maybe they'll call you

names or swear or just raise the emotional intensity until you feel overwhelmed. Maybe they'll text you a million texts or call you or FaceTime you constantly.

They might say things like, what kind of terrible person would do this to someone they claim to love? Or, what kind of God do you worship that you would treat me this way? Or you are just a hypocrite. You think you're such a godly person and the only one who does. Anything, right? Take the log out of your own eye.

These are the kinds of things that you'll hear, and the goal here is they are trying to intimidate you. They want to wear you down until it actually feels easier for you to just give in to whatever it is that they demand in the moment, rather than, you know, than to keep fighting. Tactic number five. Well, and by the way, when, when I say to keep fighting we're, I'm gonna teach you that fighting is not the answer either.

Towards the end of this episode, you're going to hear some strategies that you can use that actually will work. They won't make the other person stop, of course, 'cause we can't control other people. But they'll work to help you restore your own personal dignity and safe space. I'll say, okay, so tactic number five, all or nothing thinking.

This is that black and white language that makes everything feel dramatic and final. Well fine. I guess I'll never be able to talk to you again or I guess I'm always the bad guy, or, well, I can see you've already made up your mind about me or this one. We hear this one a lot in the kaleidoscope. Well, where husbands will say this, well, I just may as well die.

You're not giving me any reasons to live. Now this tactic is designed to make you feel like if you don't give in to what they want, the relationship may not just be over, but they might even kill themselves. This is emotional blackmail, essentially. And by the way, if anyone you love threaten suicide, you need to just call 9 1 1 because if they are serious about committing suicide, they need help.

You can't give that to them, but a hospital can. And if they aren't serious about committing suicide, but they're just using it as emotional blackmail by your calling 9 1 1, you are letting them know that this is not going to be an effective abuse strategy to use with you. They're not going to get their way.

When they do that, they're gonna get a trip to the hospital and they will probably not do that again. 'cause I'm sure they don't. If, if they're not really

serious, then they're not gonna wanna go to the hospital. Alright, tactic number six is love bombing after they're mean. So in the abuse cycle pictures that you can find online, and I've posted a lot of these pictures, you know, uh, on my website and in the kaleidoscope, but this is called the honeymoon phase.

In fact, I just recently talked about on a recent episode, this is a honeymoon phase, but you know what? This is so confusing and so painful because the honeymoon phase is 100% pure abuse. After they've been cruel or manipulative, suddenly they switch gears and say, oh, I love you so much. You're the only one I can count on.

I don't know what I would do without you. And this is where you might see some crocodile tears and hear all the words that your nervous system is longing to hear. To bring you relief and you want that relief. It feels so good in your body. It's literally a chemical dopamine hit when you get, when we get to this part of the cycle, there is going to be a very strong emotional and physical chemical and brain wiring pull to believe them.

And this is where if you want to break free from this cycle, you are going to need to hang on to your logical wisdom and understanding and radically accept that this is just part of an abuse cycle. Have you ever lifted weights before or done pull-ups or something like that? Anything really that requires something of you.

It requires you to fight your desire to just quit when it starts to get hard. You need to just keep lifting or pulling until your muscles actually fail you. It's the same thing here. You need to resist the urge to believe what you know deep down isn't true. The other person did not just make a one time mistake.

Hey my friends, you've been around this block many times before. You don't have to repeat the same walk. You can take a turn in a new direction. Even though it feels uncomfortable and not, and maybe it doesn't feel normal to you because that's not what you've been living in, however, it is the only way you're going to be able to break out of the cycle.

All right? Tactic number seven is they're gonna test your boundaries and they're gonna argue over rules. This is when they nitpick the conditions you've set. Well, that wasn't exactly what you said before. Or are you just looking for a loophole to keep me away or you are being unreasonable? No one else would have a problem with this.

Abusive individuals are masters at knowing just how far to push your boundary. They are genius in this area. They're not actually confused about your boundary. They're just testing to see if. You're confused about your boundary. They wanna know will she bend it, will she modify it or will she abandon it altogether?

I just wanna jump in here and give a little caveat too, because sometimes I'll actually, not sometimes, a lot of times we'll have women in the kaleidoscope that will say, yeah, my children are abusive. No, this is what children do. This is part of their growing up process. This is part of their brain development, it's part of their human development.

Okay. Children are not abusive when they're doing this kind of, when they're testing boundaries and arguing over rules. What hap what? What happens is when children become adults and continue to do this because they never learned what they were supposed to learn when they were kids. They never saw it modeled.

They never saw, you know, they never saw healthy boun boundaries modeled at all. And so then they end up adopting these as their strategies for controlling other people so that they can feel comfortable. They can sometimes grow up to be like the abuse, like, like if their, if their's a, if their mom and dad have an abusive relationship, and one is the abuser and one is the victim.

Some of those kids may grow up and decide that it's actually I can control my life if I become an abuser, if I employ the tactics that the abusive parent employed, 'cause it worked for them. Maybe it'll work for me. And then they will do that. They'll clum onto people who will, who are, who, well, who are maybe like other siblings that take on the role of the other one, the victim in the in the relationship.

Who is afraid to have those boundaries? Who just wants to feel relief and who is willing to. Who doesn't, who's who, who's not willing to do that work that it takes to actually break out of the abuse cycle. And I am not, I'm also not caveat after caveat. I'm not talking about someone who is staying in an, in an abusive relationship because they are terrified that they or their children are going to be injured or killed in that if they try to get out.

I, I want those people to get out. Of course, I want them to get to safety, but there are, those kinds of situations are complicated. That is not the work that I do. I don't work with people who are in those kinds of relationships. Yes, we do have people like that in the kaleidoscope, for sure. Uh, but I can't help them with that situation in their life.

The only thing that I help people with and the, the work that I do with most of the people I work with are Christian women who are in these very conservative Christian environments where they and their partners or husbands have adopted a belief in a power dynamic in which one person has power over the other.

This is not a, this is not a true a Christian. In the sense of being, you know, followers of Christ way of life. But this is what there, there are pockets of religion. That actually teach this kind of stuff and, and I work with those people. With them. It's just a matter of changing your beliefs, changing your brain's programming, and then everything can change.

But, you know, we hang on to things that we have believed our whole lives since we were children, things we've been indoctrinated with by our churches or our religious environments. We don't realize that those perspectives are actually very tiny pockets of the population in the world and in history.

That they're very, very destructive and, and wicked because we think they're Christian. 'cause we, they've been packaged in a, in a Christian kind of a packaging. But what's underneath is, like Christ said, it's very for. It's like white, you know, the tombs look all white on the outside, but inside there's dead men's bones.

It's, this is not true Christianity. This is not, this is not representative of me or my father. That's what Jesus tried to get across, but I think a lot of people did not pick up what he was laying down. But that doesn't mean you can't, though. That doesn't mean I can't, we can pick up what Christ laid down.

So anyway, that's what I'm saying. If you, you have to be willing to change that thinking, that way of thinking, if you wanna get out of the abuse cycle, because that emotional abuse cycle, how do I know this? Because I, I did it. It took me years, it took me, I wrote a book called All the Scary Little Gods that actually documents the whole process from the time I was a small child.

All of the indoctrination process. I do it in a entertaining and, you know, sometimes humorous way. Um, it's not a heavy book, but it will actually profoundly if you, if this is, if any of this resonates with you at all, that book will, you know. Profoundly resonate with you, with you, um, that story. Well, and you can, and then you can see an example of what is possible when you slowly change your thinking about different things.

The the eighth tactic. Is playing the victim. I, and I wanna focus on this a little bit longer because this is a big one. Um, I'm always the one left out, or I'm just the bad person in everyone's life, or no one understands what I'm going through.

This tactic of playing the victim is gonna hook into our compassion. It makes us wanna rescue the other person or reassure them or prove that we are not like everyone else who supposedly treats them badly. We're better than that. Recently when dealing with someone in my own personal life who continues to utilize all of these tactics to loop me in, I noticed that the firmer my boundary was the more the other person would cry out that they were my victim, that I was victimizing them.

And the more that this person did that, the more that others on the outside began to defend this person. And I thought back to my interactions with other abusive individuals in my history, and I saw that this was definitely a common theme. I'm an INFJ in the Myers-Briggs world, and one of the traits of INFJs is that we can put up with a lot and we can do it for a very long time.

We have a lot of empathy. We can get lost in the feelings and emotions of other people while setting ourselves aside if necessary. But what is also true about us is that when we are finally done, we are done like it's over baby. The line gets crossed one too many times and there's no going back. We are finished.

It's over the end, but it can take years, decades, even for us to get there. So I noticed this pattern in my life. You can see it in my book actually. If you read it, someone would hurt me again and again until I would finally set a boundary for myself. Usually it was some version of, you know, I'm gonna step away until this person can be more respectful or stop harassing me, or, that was so painful to hear.

I don't want to engage in this anymore. Or, what they did was so painful. I, I just can't. I can't do this relationship anymore, and then the other person would pull all the tactics that I just have given you. But the biggest one is this, number eight, playing the victim. They suddenly became my victim. Which would really kill me because I had bent over backwards sometimes with some of these people for decades to offer them a million concessions and chances I had compromised my own emotional and even physical health for years to cater to their needs, and yet when I couldn't do it anymore, when I finally reached the end.

I'm now the perpetrator that is very discombobulating. My youngest daughter, she noticed this was happening to me and she said to me, mom, the reason

people are defending this person is because this person is pretending to be your victim. Saying all the right words to come across that way. And you are not playing the victim role.

You come across strong because you've set a boundary and this other person is coming across weak and needy. So it looks to those on the outside who don't understand all the dynamics that you are being the mean one. But that's not true and they just can't see the truth. So I thought that was very, uh, it was actually really eye-opening for me.

Um. To hear that from a, a teenager who, who actually, uh, has only ever observed things and she's never been in an abusive relationship before, um, she has had very strong b of all of my kids. She has the strongest boundaries. She's, uh, said no to people, adults in her life who have been harmful, who she has observed be harmful to others.

She has been the one kid who will say no, even though all of her other siblings will not. And she is just, she's, she's, uh, she's a very strong person internally, even though she may not appear that way on the outside, very, very strong on the inside and also very wise. So anyway, that was, I appreciated that and it helped me to see, uh, something that maybe I wasn't able to see at first.

So the ninth tactic that I wanna share, and the last one is pushing for endless processing. This is when they insist on talking until you are completely drained. They might say things like, we need to keep talking until we understand each other, or Let's just get this resolved once and for all. Or, I'm not letting this go until we work it out.

And that sounds wonderful, doesn't it? It would be wonderful if that's actually what they wanted. But that's not what they want. What they want is to get their own way. The point is to keep you engaged, keep you exhausted, and keep you focused on the relationship drama instead of on your own wellbeing and your boundary, whatever that boundary is that you've decided on those tactics work.

Because they target our deepest desires. We desire to be loved. We desire to understand another person and to be understood. We desire to maintain connection like true inner deep connection with the people that we love the most. There is nothing wrong with wanting those things. The problem is when someone else uses those beautiful desires against us to manipulate us.

So what do we do with all of this? Because if we ignore it all together, that will often lead to accusations of abandonment. If we attack them back, that's just

gonna fuel the fire and disrespect ourselves and them. So I think there are six healthier strategies that we can start using today. The first strategy is to keep your responses short and simple, and this is maybe the hardest one for many of us because we've been trained, especially as Christian women, that we need to explain ourselves, answer questions, justify our decisions, and help everyone understand our perspective.

Are you the kind of person who thinks that just because someone asks you a question that you have to answer it. If someone asks you a question and you feel like you have to answer it, raise your hand. Okay? If, if you raise, if your hand is raised, or if it's raised in your imagination, then you are also the kind of person like me who can get caught up in this relationship dynamic.

But when you are dealing with someone who uses these manipulative tactics, those long explanations and those answering of these endless barrage of questions. That means that you are putting yourself in a place where you are susceptible to getting tripped up and the they're gonna take the words that you gave to them and use them as ammunition against you.

So instead of a paragraph long explanation of why you need space, try just saying the boundary stands. Or instead of explaining why their behavior is hurtful, which you've already done that a million times before, right? So why are we going down that road again? Remember, why are we walking around a block that we've already been around a million times?

If we don't enjoy it? I mean, if you enjoy it, then go ahead, take the walk again. But if you don't enjoy it, like why are you doing that? Why am I doing that? So instead of explaining whether behavior is hurtful. Which never works. Say that's disrespectful and I will not continue. If it continues or I won't engage with sarcasm.

If you wanna talk respectfully, I'm here. Period. End of sentence. Less is more. I understand that this feels uncomfortable at first 'cause you're not used to doing that. That's not who you've been in the past. That is. The version of you that exists right now. But that doesn't mean that that has to be the, the version that exists a year from now.

You don't have to stay the same. We change, people change all the time. And you, you can change too. You can be a different version of yourself. You can still be 100% you, but evolve a little bit. I mean, ev, every good story involves characters who evolve, who change in some way, who have epiphanies, who become.

Better in different ways, and you can too, and so can I. So, so anyway, we, we, you know, we wanna be understood. We wanna help them to see our perspective. We, but we mistakenly believe that if they can see where we're coming from, there's gonna be this meeting of the minds and we can solve the problem. But remember, if someone is genuinely interested in understanding, they won't need to manipulate you to get information.

Okay. Alright. The next strategy is don't defend yourself or justify your choices or your boundaries. If they accuse you of something like, well, you just led me on, or You're just trying to hurt me. Resist the urge to jump into proving you're innocence. Do you believe you're innocent? Sometimes we don't feel innocent 'cause we don't believe we're innocent.

Sometimes we think, oh, I shouldn't have done that. Uh, maybe I did lead them on. Maybe I am trying to hurt them. Hmm. We, we just go right there. We just believe everything Other people say, why do we do that? We stop that. That's, that's not helpful to you. Instead, try responses, like, I will not accept blame for, or responsibility for your feelings.

I'm gonna, we teach this right away in the Flying Free kaleidoscope. This is a ve through the model course. Join Flying Free dot com if you wanna come in and learn how to stop doing this and how to do something different instead. Like, I'm gonna, I'm giving you the high level here, but if you wanna really get down and dirty with me and, and learn how to do this and be calm, that next version of yourself, join us.

It's less than a dollar a day. It's like more than worth it. So, or, or a response like this. I am responsible for my words and boundaries. I am not responsible for your interpretations. That is their work to do. You could say, you can even just say something even more simple by, well, that's not true, or, huh, I see things differently.

Or even just, okay, and I know this feels wrong. This version of yourself that's listening right now, you might be like, oh, this feels so wrong. Every fiber of your being wants to clear your name, right? But here's what I've learned. Defensiveness only invites debate. When you start defending yourself, you know what you're doing.

You are essentially agreeing to put your character on trial. And guess who gets to be the judge? They do. Do you really wanna do that? You don't have to do that. Okay. Strategy number three, step away from disrespect. This one requires

your words and your actions. When they escalate calmly, say something like, this conversation has become disrespectful.

I'm going to step away until we can talk respectfully and then, and this is crucial, actually follow through. Don't just threaten to leave. In fact, if you're not gonna actually leave, don't say that. Otherwise, they just are like, she's just a bluffer. She's just a, you know, she's just bluffing me. They're not gonna take you seriously.

They're not gonna respect your words. So don't do that. And it's hard for us to respect ourselves when we say something and then we don't follow through, right? Actually leave the conversation, leave the room, end the phone call. I've talked to women who've told me that their soon to be ex or their ex, or their parent or their child, adult child, I'm not talking about kids here, I'm talking about adult kids, is berating them on the phone for over an hour and they just sit and listen.

And my thought is. Very fascinating. What has you listening to that for an hour? How is that? How is your sitting there for an hour listening to that serving you or serving the other person? Hang up the phone. You are an adult. Respect their right to freak out and be an asshole, but also please respect yourself and your own space.

Action teaches them that disrespect has consequences. It teaches them this in a way that words alone never will. Alright, strategy number four, return to the relationship only when kindness resumes. And now I'm not talking about, and by the way, I, I've been divorced twice now. So, um, this is not for those of you who are, you know, getting out of your relationship.

You're in the divorce process or you're already divorced or whatever. You don't have to return ever, but if you wanna be, so for me. Um, in a relationship that I have right now, I want to be in a relationship with this person. So my commitment is to, and this is not a romantic relationship by the way, I, that is, I'm done with all that, but you can say something like this, I love you, and I will connect with you again when our conversation can be respectful.

And this teaches them that kindness, it equals access to you, and cruelty equals distance from you. This is not about punishment. This is just about natural consequences. When we are kind and respectful to people, they like to be around us. This is just a natural law of nature, right? Like even animals know this.

I animals try to get away from other animals who are disrespecting them by trying to eat them. Okay. Just, that's just the way it is. The rabbit is not punishing the lion when the, or the fox, when the rabbit runs away. The rabbit is just trying to teach the fox that if you're going to eat me, I'm not gonna be hanging around here.

Notice that you can do this while still affirming your love for them. You're not rejecting them as a person, you're just rejecting their behavior. These are good things to keep in mind too. If you are, you know, if you're someone who wants to, to stay in your marriage relationship, even though your partner is very disrespectful to you and abusive, you know, these are things that you can do to help manage that dysfunctional relationship.

Alright? Strategy number five is to avoid rehashing the past when they, and they will try to drag up old wounds or past conflicts, things that you have already dealt with. Hold your ground. No, I am not going to rehash the past. If you need to process that, I get it. Please bring it to your therapist. This protects you from these endless circular conversations that leave you feeling crazy and exhausted.

You are not responsible for being someone else's therapist, especially when they're using processing as a way to keep you hooked into their drama. And then strategy number six, focus on self-respect, not control. And this is the most important one. It is the one that maybe took me the longest to really understand boundaries are not about changing the other person, they're about protecting you.

Your job is not ever, ever, ever, ever to manage their emotions. To fix their problems, to make them understand your perspective. Your job is to manage your choices and protect your own peace. God did not put your, another adult, you, you, in charge of or in power over another adult, nor did God put another adult in power over or in charge of you.

I know you were taught differently, but newsflash, that is a big fat lie from the pit of hell. When you really get this, I mean really deeply understand it. Everything changes. You're gonna stop trying to convince them to treat you better. 'cause oh my gosh, that, how many decades have you been doing that?

Some of you, you start and you start simply choosing how you will respond when they don't. Which they won't. Now I'm gonna give you some specific language that you can use when they try to guilt trip you. You can say, I understand you're disappointed, but my decision stands when they try to shift the blame to you.

You can say, no, I am not responsible for your feelings about my choices. When they start to escalate, you can say, I'm ending this conversation. Now we can try again. When you're ready to be respectful, when they play the victim, you can say, I am so sorry that you are struggling. Have you considered talking to a therapist about that?

When they push for processing, you can say, I've said what I need to say, and I'm not going to keep going in circles. Let me tell you what these strategies actually accomplish. First of all, they protect your energy. Instead of getting drained by hours of circular conversations, you preserve your emotional resources for things that actually matter.

Secondly, they maintain your dignity. You're not attacking them, and you're not allowing yourself to be attacked. Third, they create clarity. When you stop participating in their chaos, it becomes much easier to see the situation for what it actually is. And then fourth, and this might surprise you, but they actually, when you do these things, they actually create the possibility, the possibility, keyword here for a healthier interaction when you stop rewarding their manipulative, abusive behavior with your attention and your engagement.

Then you can create space for a more authentic connection. Now, will this actually happen? Maybe, maybe not. It does take two people actively pursuing respect and kindness, and you may be the only one capable of doing that, but at least you will have done what you could, and that honestly feels good. But here's what you need to know.

Implementing these strategies does not feel good at first. It feels mean, it feels selfish, it feels wrong, and in fact, that is an indicator to you if you are feeling mean selfish and wrong. When you are implementing adult boundaries and adult uh, strategies, that means there's something in your programming that got wired incorrectly.

And we see a lot of this in religious circles. By the way, I just wanna, those of, so those of you who have been around for a long time, you know that I'm a Christian, I love Jesus Christ. He is my passion. I teach Bible studies in Fly in the Flying Hire Program. And um, honestly, my number one passion is to.

Spread the good news of Jesus, the actual good news of Jesus Christ. And that means exposing the lies about him and about Christianity and about, um, what healthy relationships actually are. Because if we're believing lies, then we're not actually experiencing the good news, right? So I just wanna give that caveat, but, 'cause sometimes you will hear me say things that sort of, I'm like

criticizing Christianity, but I, it's not, I'm only criticizing a version of Christianity that is like ris, saym.

That it is very workspace per and performance driven that the, the same uh, type of religion that Jesus Christ was very condemning of when he was on the Earth. And, um, if I'm a follower of Christ, then I feel like, you know, that's an alignment with what he did. So if it's good enough for him, it's good enough for me.

Right. And if people don't like it, well they didn't like him either. Anyway, it's normal. If you've been conditioned to believe that love means that you have to tolerate whatever, someone dishes out, alright, that you, that's your programming. Of course it's gonna feel normal. But then just notice that. Just be like, okay, this obviously is my programming.

'cause I'm feeling mean, I'm feeling selfish, I'm feeling wrong. I'm feeling guilty. So the, instead of, instead of saying there's something wrong with being an adult, how about if we say there's something wrong with whatever it is that's inside of me? There's something wrong with those beliefs that have caused me to believe that being an adult is mean selfish and wrong.

Or that having boundaries is mean selfish and wrong. It's not true. That's not love. That is enabling, and I'm even gonna dare to say it, even though I might get my head chopped off by certain advocates that is codependent. Real love sometimes means allowing people to experience the natural consequences of their choices.

Now, here's the part that nobody really talks about, but it's probably the most important part, even when you do all of this perfectly well, can anyone actually do it perfectly? I don't think so. But even if you could, it's still gonna hurt because it hurts to step away. It hurts to not explain yourself. It hurts to feel misunderstood or to be accused of not loving enough.

It hurts to not be seen. It hurts even more when some, when it's someone that you desperately love and want to have a healthy relationship with. And let me be completely honest with you, there's a part of me that absolutely wants to jump back in sometimes. That part of, there's a part of me that wants to prove my love and to show my good intentions or help them understand my heart.

That is the vulnerable tender part of me that craves connection. And you know what? That is not wrong. That is human and that is what I am. But here's what I've learned. Sometimes the hard way, real connection cannot be built on

manipulation. It can only be built on mutual respect. When someone is using these tactics, the guilt, tripping, the blame, shifting the emotional escalation, they are not actually seeking connection with you.

They are seeking control over you, and you cannot build authentic relationships on a foundation of power over and control. And that is why these religious systems that teach this. Teach that marriages are supposed to be this way. That is why they are. So, the, the fruit of what they teach is absolutely horrific.

It's just so destructive to men, women, and children, because it's, it's, I believe it's satanic. So when you walk away from these dynamics, you might feel grief, you might feel guilt. You might even feel like you're the one being cruel. But that does not mean you're wrong. It just means you're human. So allow yourself to grieve the relationship you never had.

Instead of continually sacrificing yourself to the relationship that you actually have. Here's what you're actually grieving. You're grieving the hope that they're gonna change. You gotta let go of that. You gotta let go of that hope. It's not gonna happen. You need to grieve your fantasy. This fantasy that you might have of mutual respect and understanding between you and this particular person.

You can get that from other people, but not, not, probably not this person. If you, if you can't see that after two decades or three decades, then like, what has you not able to see that? That's what I ask myself. You're also actually grieving the dream of being truly seen and valued by this person. You'll have to actually grieve the comfort of familiar patterns.

Even when those patterns hurt, they still feel comforting because there's, we're used to them, but here's what you're gonna gain. When you step out of these cycles, you are gonna gain peace in your own mind and heart. You are gonna gain dignity and self-respect. You'll gain more energy to invest in relationships that are actually healthy.

You're gonna gain space for your own healing and growth. And you know what? You'll gain the possibility, not the guarantee, but the possibility of a healthier connection in the future. Because here's the thing, when you stop participating in unhealthy dynamics, you are not destroying the relationship. You are just refusing to accept a counterfeit version of relationship.

That means that you are now creating space for something real to develop. If the other person chooses to step into that space, most of them will not. I'm not

gonna lie to you and say, you know, say what a lot of Christian organizations will say, oh yeah, if you do all of this, then the other person's gonna, you know, you'll save your husband without a word.

That is, I know that's a Bible verse, but that's not what that bible verse is trying to say. They're twisting verses to make money. So most of the time that's not gonna happen. But do you wanna create the space for the possibility of that to happen or do you want to continue to accept a counterfeit version of that relationship?

I mean, you get to decide. It's up to you. Alright, so, so then, you know, obviously then the next question might be, you know, what if they never change, what if I lose this relationship forever? I need you to hear this beautiful butterfly, a relationship that can only exist when you are willing to abandon your own wellbeing.

That is not a relationship, my friend. That is a hostage situation. You are not responsible for maintaining connection at the expense of someone's mental, emotional, and spiritual health. Do you know who that someone is? It's you. God did not create you or me or your child, or your best friend or any other woman or man for that matter, to be someone else's emotional punching bag, even if they wrap their fists in religious language or family obligation.

And here's something else I want you to know. Choosing to protect yourself does not make you an unforgiving, unloving. On Christian type of person, it actually makes you wise. The Bible tells us to be wise as serpents and gentle as doves, and sometimes wisdom looks like recognizing manipulation and refusing to participate in it.

Sometimes gentleness looks like speaking truth with kindness and then stepping away when that truth is rejected. Let me give you permission for something. It is okay to love someone from a distance. I love a lot of people from the distant, from a distance right now, and it's okay. It's okay to want good things for someone else while protecting yourself from their choices to be destructive in their behaviors.

It is okay to pray for someone's healing while refusing to be their target or their punching bag. You can hold space in your heart for someone without giving them access to wound you. So this was a big, long episode. I just wanna. Recap it a little bit here. We looked at nine tactics that emotional abusers use to pull us back into toxic cycles.

The guilt tripping, passive aggression, blame shifting, escalation, all or nothing thinking love bombing after they're be, after they've been mean. Testing your boundaries, playing the victim, and pushing for endless processing. And then we talked about six strategies that you can use to unhook. Keeping responses short and simple.

Refusing to defend or justify stepping away from disrespect, returning only when kindness resumes, avoiding rehashing the past and focusing on self-respect rather than trying to control their behavior. And we acknowledge that letting go hurts, but it is a necessary pain. It's the kind of pain that leads to healing instead of the pain that le that keeps you stuck.

Here's what I want you to remember. You are not alone in this struggle. So many of us have been exactly where you are right now. You might be as you're driving to your children around, or you are, you know, getting ready for the day or maybe you're making dinner. Whatever you're doing right now, you're not the only one doing that.

Listening to this podcast episode, there are literally thousands of women. That are listening to this episode that are feeling just like you. The poll to stay engaged in these toxic loops is real and it's strong, and there's nothing wrong with you for feeling that, but you can learn to unhook, you can have peace, you can choose dignity, and in the end.

That is what creates space for true freedom and the possibility of healthier relationships. If you want more education, more practical tools for how to do this and more support along the way, consider working with me inside the Flying Free Kaleidoscope community. You can spend hundreds of dollars on self-help, books and classes and coaching and counseling, or you can spend less than a dollar a day for spiritually grounded trauma-informed education, community, and coaching.

The best part, this is the most effective way for Christian women to recover from emotional and spiritual abuse so they can start making confident, empowered adult choices for their lives. It's the most effective and it's the most affordable. Go to fly. Join Flying Free dot com to learn more and complete your application.

And if this episode is helpful for you, please share it with someone who might need to hear these words. One way you can do that is by leaving a rating and review, which signals your whatever podcast app you're listening on to show

this podcast to other people who are just like you, who are struggling alone and unseen, and who need to hear these messages.

Pass it along. Until next time, remember, you were creative for freedom, not for chains. You are made for peace, not for chaos, and you have permission to choose what serves your healing, even when other people don't understand that choice. Fly free. Beautiful butterfly.