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Todd: Here we go. My name's Todd. This is Cathy. Welcome back to another episode of Zen Parenting Radio. This is podcast number 709. Why listen to Zen Parenting Radio because you'll feel outstanding and always remember our motto, which is that the best predictor of a child's wellbeing is a parent's self understanding.

Todd: On today's show, we have one of my favorite people of all time, Mr. Mike Domitrz. Mike, welcome to the program.

Mike: Well, thank you Todd for having me back.

Cathy: Yay. Mike's back.

Todd: So we'll have Mike introduce himself in a second, sweetie. But for those people who have never come to our conference who are relatively newish listeners how do you, how do we know Mike?

Cathy: So I would say, like you said, Mike's gonna give his own intro, but I would say the reason we always bring Mike on is because he is, he talk, he talks about consent, he talks about sexual assault, he talks about equity, equality. He talks about how we can better raise our kids to understand these things. He just is, I consider to be the expert in this field.

Cathy: And we live in the Midwest together. Yes. That's part of it as well. So, so Mike, just give us your whole overview of your, where you work and everything, what you've created. I could say yes. How about that? That's

Mike: better. Sure. Happy to go there. So, you know, nobody grows up in the seventies and eighties thinking, oh, I'm gonna be a speaker on sexual assault.

Mike: That wasn't a possibility you even considered. And I certainly wasn't either. And I was studying college when I received a phone call and it was that my sister had been raped and my life would change in that moment. And about a year later I heard a speaker and I thought I could do something about this.

Mike: And I started speaking out. So I started in middle schools and high schools a lot in universities and couldn't make it cuz the schools wouldn't talk about this in the 1990s. It was not something we could talk about. And in 2002, some people came to me and said, "Why aren't you doing this?" And I shared and they said, "Well, the world's changed."

Mike: And so the last 20 years, 21 years, I worked with universities, schools, US military corporations, a lot of parenting groups on talking about the topics of consent. Respect really is the foundation of everything honestly. Sexual assault is the crime that happens when people do not treat each other with respect and honor boundaries, but respect is the foundation of everything we're really discussing, and so we've taken it from that place to how does porn impact that?

Mike: How does nudes impact that? How does your daily sexual decision making in marriage impact this? How are we treating each other to what's the ultimate. And the ultimate mutually amazing consensual sex. Mutually amazing consensual relationships in the workplace, in the family, and in the home. So we've started from a place that was provoked by a horrible trauma and crime to how do we get to this wonderful place in our lives?

Cathy: Wonderful. Wonderful. So your place your center is called because you're wearing the shirt and I love it. The Center for Respect. Yes. And you know, I mean, like you said, it's just a great umbrella definition of everything you talk about and whatever comes up next, cuz there's gonna be something, you know what I mean?

Cathy: Like that's right. You're gonna speak at a place where they're like, here's what we had or here's what we're dealing with now is technology and AI continues, something else is gonna come up. So, I love that idea of you're like, anything in that world I can speak to.

Mike: Because if you understand what it, how respect shows up or doesn't show up in our day-to-day relationships.

Mike: Then you can talk about it on every level. Yes. Because most people are disrespectful every day. But they see respect as or disrespect as the monster, right? "Oh, I don't do that, they do that." Well, do you ever interrupt your partner? That's a sign of disrespect. Do you ever do something else while they're trying to talk to you?

Mike: That's a sign of disrespect. So we all engage in disrespect. The question is, how can we be intentional about being respectful in those moments instead of what we're doing?

Cathy: It's like the rape culture pyramid. Yes. You know, things at the bottom that we start with that then allow, and the rape culture pyramid, for everybody

who doesn't know it basically starts with what we call locker room talk, or I don't even know if that's the bottom level anymore.

Cathy: But the things we say that we're like, it's no big deal. We don't mean it. But then how that gets into us, the words like change the way we see people see ourselves, and then it leads to rape culture. And same with respect.

Mike: Absolutely. So we'll deal with an organization or company that says, well, we don't have a sexual harassment problem here, and I'll think yet we don't have that problem here yet, because what they view it as is they view it as if this was a building, their company represented a high rise, well, the 17th floor of sexual harassment. And we don't have any cracks in the foundation there. No, but the cracks are at the bottom because of these subtle little things that are getting away with.

Mike: And suddenly you're gonna have the 17th floor crumbling with the whole building. And it's gonna be too late. So what are we doing in our homes to build that foundation every day to deepen that foundation of respect versus waiting until there's a problem and now we're reactive.

Todd: So, Cathy mentioned this pyramid.

Todd: I just Googled it.

Todd: Rape culture pyramid, 11th principle. I don't even know who came up with it. Do you happen to know who came up with it? There's, well, there's, first

Mike: of all, there's several different versions. Okay. So it all depends on who version you're looking at. There's also people call the circle the wheel of sexual violence. So there's all different. Different examples of models. To talk about where this stuff starts and everybody's bottom, you brought up Cathy. I don't know what the bottom level is. It's different for everybody. The more subtle, the better it is of a bottom. Because if it's obvious, it's not the bottom.

Mike: It's usually a subtlety.

Todd: Well, in the bottom, the one I'm looking at, and I think it's a sexual sexist attitudes, rape jokes, and locker room banter. Really, we can drill down even further below that.

Mike: I can go way deeper. I give one that everybody on here can relate to. You're with your spouse or your partner, whatever the situation is.

Mike: And you said you wanna have sex tonight. Partner says, I don't know about, I don't think tonight, maybe I'm tired. And you go, well, what if I do this? What if I do that? Or, why not? Whoa. What did we not just hear? What they, and we love this person. And we're questioning them instead of honoring their answer.

Mike: That wouldn't show up as that. Because that's above that. But that's not respecting the answer. So how do I respect the answers of my partners? That's at a much more basic. Deeper level, and if I'm doing that, we're never gonna have any issues cause I'm respecting your answer. As long as I don't feel shame or guilt.

Mike: Or I'm not doing what you want to, that's the other half of it.

Todd: Well, even as you shared that, like it just reminds me of a transactional nature. Which is probably not what sex is all about. Not about transactional nature, it's about giving of yourself loving without condition and for it to be transactional is dangerous.

Mike: So when I, whether I'm speaking in a middle school or I'm speaking in a US military to an audience of 40 to 60 year olds, I say, when you say no to a sexual offer, does your partner normally go, you know, I'm glad I asked. Thanks for letting me know you don't want that. And the whole room, no matter what age goes, of course not.

Mike: I go, what do they say? What or two words do they ask you? The whole world, whether they're a middle schooler or a 55, yells, why or why not? Right? Which nobody pulled you in a classroom to teach you that. No. But everybody knows the answer. So, you know, if you say no to sexual intimacy, your answer will be questioned.

Cathy: So I just, last week I just sent Todd this meme and it was something from Twitter and it just basically said it was this woman and she was talking to her nephew, and her nephew had been trying to like, you know, interact with a girl, get a girl's attention. And she kept and he kept texting her and she said, no.

Cathy: And so this this woman said to the nephew, so what are you gonna do? And he goes, I know. Keep trying. And she goes, no, you're gonna leave her alone. And I think what you are having to deconstruct as well as everything around sexuality and consent is masculine culture, because you're supposed to keep trying.

Cathy: There's a, and we talk about grit and you know, like, Just saying, okay, I take you at face value. That's not part of masculine culture.

Mike: And so the issue here is conquering versus mutuality. Right, and people don't look at those two words. They'll look at conquering, but they don't talk about mutuality.

Mike: And most of us are taught in this world to persevere, which is a conquering mentality. There are times we should give up on something we're doing for ourselves. It's not good for us, but we're taught "Don't give up. Giving up is losing." The greatest entrepreneurs in the world walk away from businesses. Because they recognize this isn't gonna be a good fit. I'm walking away. It's a smart move. Well, that's true in our personal relationship. So am I trying to conquer this person? Or build a mutually wonderful experience with this person. Well, the moment they say, no, this ain't mutual, I'm out. This isn't mutual.

Mike: But if I'm in conquer, well I gotta win 'em over. And by the way, people do this in bed, right? So there's people listening right now who have experienced this exact moment. They're in a sexual experience. They say, that's not working. Move on or do something and their partner says, well give it a second.

Mike: It will. And they're like, no, that's not going to work. Right, right. And so, but the mindset of the other person is, watch me. Right. Watch what I can do. And so it's a conquering versus is if it's mutual, I wanna listen to you. And I would go, oh, it's not working. Okay. What would you like or what else do we do, you know?

Todd: Well, and just to kinda rewind, maybe five minutes, the example you gave is, let's say that there's two partners and they love each other, and the one person asks the other, Hey, I think we should, I would love to have sex tonight, or whatever. How many times, like if we surveyed a hundred people out there, how often is it verbalized, like consenting adults?

Todd: How often is there. Because we, and we've talked to Mike a lot, and I'm gonna include all of our previous interviews with Mike in the show notes. So you guys can all say I'll experience that. But most of the time there is no verbal ask. It's just this, it's a physical ask, right? So, it's a touch.

Todd: It's a touch. So I just, what's your best guess? A hundred couples, consensual adults. How many of them are verbally. Asking, I would like to have sex tonight or

Mike: right now. So this is gonna depend on the age of the adult. Okay. You're seeing changes in the younger generation of this occurring of asking and saying, Hey, what do you wanna do tonight? What does that mean to you? There, there are people making that shift. Which is beautiful. But if we're saying the average 40 to 60, 70 year old married, 10, 20, 30 years, the odds they're asking are incredibly

Todd: slim. Can you help me understand why asking with touch is not an ask?

Todd: So let's say I'm in bed with Cathy. I think I wanna have sex with Cathy. I start rubbing her back. Isn't that an ask?

Mike: So, no, it's called rubbing the back. Right. It's so, it's a very easy answer, right? But, so let me give you an example that I give with adult audiences. What's amazing about not asking is you get more frustrated

Mike: than if you just asked. So what'll happen is, And we call this the backdoor bump. Two people are in bed laying next to each other in the spoon position. And one just starts doing a little grind. Actually. The kids, the other one's back in, right. And they think, well, I'm clearly want you, I'm telling you I want you and what the other person's hearing is you want some, oh I'm the object. You're getting it through. Because there's nothing intimate about this grind up against my backend. It's a are you open for business move? Right. Versus, what do you want right now? How would you, let me to touch you. Where do you wanna be kissed? Where do you wanna be licked?

Mike: Where do you wanna be? We're in a different conversation right now, right? That's a whole different experience. So what happens is the person who's grinding up thinks, oh, they love this, but they can't see the person's face. Who's going? Really? And that's very common. If they had simply asked, what do you want right now?

Mike: Would you love me? They might say nothing. I'm tired. Okay, then I'm glad I asked you, maybe, would you like a back rub to help fall asleep? How often does somebody ask that? Right? No. It's a back rub to get late. Right, right. So do you want a back rub? So we always used to joke, watch how quickly they offer compliments to you or back rubs to you.

Mike: Right. Before they want sexual activity. But they don't do it any other time. So now it's a gimmick. Versus you just want a background. I'll give you a background.

Todd: Right. It's a mechanism. You get something else.

Cathy: Well, and then that's why like, you know, you're not in the bedroom, you're like in the kitchen getting something ready, and your partner comes up and like rubs your shoulders or whatever.

Cathy: You can't accept it because you're like, if I accept this from you, you think this means that we're gonna have sex later. It's almost like I've entered into a contract now because I'm allowing you. So a lot of partners will shrug off their partner, like not now. And really that partner is trying to,

Todd: they're not shrugging off what's happening. They're shrugging off what they think this means.

Mike: The projection. The projection that's in their mind

Cathy: right now. Correct. Which is, I would say 99. There's probably, there's 1% in there that partner is really just seeing that they're tense and trying to support them. But you know, they have learned being married to this person or partnering with this person or just their history.

Cathy: It may not be this person, but that this is some negotiation. That's happening. And isn't that sad? You know, that that we think if someone says, Hey, can I rub your feet or Can I rub your back? Or just give you a hug that there's something connected to it. That we just are giving into something.

Mike: Well, and there's the flip side of that, which is you can compliment your partner too much. Because they start to then think they're just an object. Right. So you're always telling your partner how [00:13:20] beautiful they are. Maybe I'm sick of hearing that. Interesting. And so that's always an interesting side to this too, of what else am I?

Mike: Besides just gorgeous and beautiful or good looking or muscular, whatever it is. What else am I to you? Because that's what I hear all the time.

Todd: It's just my body, sweetie. I probably don't tell you're beautiful too much.

Cathy: No, Todd's not. Todd's love language is not words. I will say, Todd, how do I look today?

Cathy: And he'll say, oh hold on. Lemme

Mike: tell. I know. So I, but I'll own this. This is an area where I can make that mistake. Because I'm words. So I use words back to my partner, right. Because that's what I believe I wanna hear. Yes. But their language can be different. So hers could be acts of service or time together.

Mike: And so it's understanding that

Todd: well, and in the journey, and I no longer have the excuse like, well, I just. I can't claim ignorance. We've been at this married for 21

Cathy: years. Well, and I will say, because I'm like Mike, sometimes I, when I get a visual representation, sometimes when I'm am showering Todd, I literally see the words fall to the floor.

Cathy: He's not catching them. Like he's not the way I'm trying to offer them. And you know, he's like, it doesn't mean anything to him to say, wow, you look really good, or you're a really good looking guy. He's like, blah, blah, blah. He doesn't hear it. Right. And so I literally see them falling to the floor.

Cathy: So, you know, you and I, Mike, as words people, even though that means the most to us, I have to find different

Todd: ways to engage it. Well, it was just my birthday. Yes. Two days ago. I think happy birthday. Thank you very much. And Cathy made me a playlist. Oh a really good one. It's like, How many hours of music is on this?

Todd: Well,

Cathy: I spent six months every song that would come on that I would hear that reminds me of Todd. I put in this playlist, I was gonna give it to him for his birthday.

Todd: So that's an act of service. Right. Which is my love language. The problem is she hit me up with this literally like two minutes before we went to sleep.

Cathy: And I kind of forgot because I had made it and I had it ready like about a month ago, and then he started playing a song that was on it as we were gonna bed. I go, oh my God, I have something for you. And I gave it to him and I told him, I said, I've been working on this for six months and every

Cathy: and

Todd: I looked at it and I appreciate it, but it was like really late.

Todd: So the next morning, and this is, I'm gonna compliment you here for a second, sweetie. You my response to your gift was not, did not meet expectations. Right. You

Cathy: set, you scrolled through, you go, that's long. That's great. And then you set your

Todd: phone. Right. This is long. And then that's what she said.

Todd: Sweetie, come on. Get your mind on the better. I know, I, okay, so, but then the next morning, and this is, this has nothing to do with consent or anything else, this is just relationship stuff. The next morning you did say, I didn't feel. That the way I, you didn't feel the way I appreciated the gift was what you were hoping it was.

Todd: Right. And the reason I think that's an important piece, I think a lot of partners will develop an internal resentment and hold on to stuff. And what's great about Cathy is when something bothers her, she shares it in a very loving way, and I just wanted, that's like relationship 101 is don't let, don't stuff stuff down. Share it in the most compassionate way you can. So anyways.

Cathy: Well, and you're a good receiver because that's the thing too, Mike, it's true, is that in a partnership sometimes one person is like, they wanna ask these questions. You know, going back to what you were talking about, they wanna say they wanna talk about consent and they wanna ask permission, or they wanna share vulnerably, but the other one doesn't.

Cathy: Don't you think that's the most common

Mike: thing? You, and that becomes this is true whether you're talking to your kids about relationships or you're looking at your own partner with relationships is are you matching with somebody who has the maturity to have the relationship you wanna have?

Mike:

Todd: We both like, yes. I know a lot of men out there that are struggling right now because they're either way behind and have no interest in looking in the mirror and doing any personal growth work, or they're doing a ton of work. Even some clients I'm thinking of, and their wives or their partners have no interest whatsoever in looking at their stuff.

Todd: Yeah. It's

Mike: tough. And so there's two sides of that conversation, right? One is, okay, I chose this partner for life and I'm in a growth spurt. They're not in, that's on me. And so to expect them to change is I'm not here to fix them. So the question is, how do I be okay with my growth in a way that's different than them?

Mike: Or how do I figure this out? That they don't have to change and yet we can figure out how to communicate. Yes. Right. That would be the key to that person. Yes. How do I figure out to communicate in their world without making them change? Because I'm the one on the growth side right now. Right. And they might be one down the road and I'm not in one. True. So I don't have to give up on them necessarily. It's how do I get to communicate that? Now, that's in a mature relationship. If you're in an unhealthy toxic, obviously I'm not recommending you stay in that, figure that out in that kind of a situation because then you have to start to go, wow, we're.

Mike: How we view treating another human being is differently. Well now we got problems. Because how are we gonna stay together? This isn't gonna add up add up. So those are, you know, those are questions people have to explore in those situations.

Todd: Well, I think that's really valuable because, and it's not like, oh, I'm in a growth mindset and my partner isn't.

Todd: Rarely is it one or the other? Like Tuesday I might be in a growth mindset, right. But Wednesday I may not be. But if the problems become bigger, I like what you said is like, cuz we're not here to fix. Each other No, at all. Even though I think that there's a lot of relationships that do have that like, well, I'm not in it unless my partner is following me every step of the way.

Todd: And that's not it. But what you said was, how do we communicate? How do we connect? Can we connect? Can I love this person? Even though at this moment they're not in a growth mindset. That's tricky.

Mike: Well, but here's the thing for me, I don't know that it's tricky. It's get over yourself. We think they should be doing everything we're doing right? So that's about us. That's our ego. How dare you not wanna grow? How dare you not wanna do this? How dare you not wanna versus going, all right, if I'm truly on a path, then how do I get patient to understand them? Instead of asking them to fix to my path.

Mike: Right. And I was somebody in the past that could be a fixer, so I own that too. Sure. That, oh, well they need, I'll help 'em do this, I'll help 'em do that. But they're not looking to do that. So why am I trying to do that? Why don't I change? So how this needs to work, as long as I'm not.

Mike: Losing myself, right. When I talk about changing there, that's the danger zone is I'm losing my values, losing my voice. No, tho that's not what we're talking about. Sure. How do I adapt though?

Cathy: Well, and like you said, you, when we started this conversation, you said it's like in parenting too, and that's what we always talk about is, you know, we have three daughters.

Cathy: They're all very different, and the way you reach them and communicate with them are different. That's right. And so I'm not saying. I'm the parent, this is how I parent. Deal with me this way. I'm saying, I'm getting to know you. And the what thing you respond to best is here. You know, I have one daughter who will text back immediately, a one who won't, one who might, and that doesn't mean one's disrespectful and the other it means that's not their method of communication.

Cathy: And so it's like how do you reach them? And I think that's been a big part of our conversation, like, Todd with the girls is just if you know them, just like, you know your partner, you are willing to figure out how to reach them and then everybody feels seen.

Mike: Look, same thing. I have four sons, you know, they're in their twenties now.

Mike: But yes, if the one doesn't reply back, you might be like, okay, that's pretty normal, but if the certain one didn't reply back, now you're going, oh. Yes. Because they normally reply back right away. So that's exactly it. You have to build it based on the understanding. And it's the same through relationship.

Mike: Going back to what we just said. What's my partner's means, and how do they normally do this? I know that I used to think, well, if my partner writes something out to me in a long email, why didn't they just say that to my face? Because that's not their means. They're like, when they sit down and they write, they get to flow and understand, and you get everything you need to know in there.

Mike: So just accept where it's at.

Todd: Well, and I appreciate your viewpoint. Sometimes it's hard like, cuz it's so easy to fall into, I'll call it a victim trap, or like, oh, well my partner isn't who I want my partner to be. Then I gotta start looking elsewhere. Whereas what you said is like, how do I connect with this person where they are?

Todd: And the terminology I use, like you're taking radical responsibility for how you show up something you have control over and you don't have any control over whether or not your person. Chooses to change or not change? How do you experience it with all the caveats that you shared? I think that's really interesting.

Todd: I remember we had a guy named Jayson Gaddis who we love. He wrote a great book called *Getting to Zero*, and we were, he was, oh, he was in studio, I think. And Cathy and I were in some type of contentions. I don't know, there's some, he was just debating something that had come up. And the nature of it was if there's some, if there's a disconnect between us, Cathy's always the one that brings it up.

Todd: And Cathy, I'm sure you get fatigued by that is always the one that brings it up. And one thing that Jayson said, which I love because it's very accommodating to my viewpoint, Todd loves this story, was Todd's nervous system. Is different and Todd has a different history and a different past and all that.

Todd: And that doesn't leave me completely off the hook, but it's similar to what you just said is like how do we meet this person where they are versus where we need them, where we think we need them to be.

Mike: Yeah I'll give you an example. I just read the book *Driven*, amazing book on people who are wired, that entrepreneur, that high achiever.

Mike: And what it showed is we have to do certain things and have them in our life. And if we're not, they'll be dissatisfaction. But other people can think that is

overly spontaneous because they don't understand how we're wired. It's how we're wired. So it's a neurodiverse situation versus a well, they're choosing.

Mike: No, they literally need that in their life. They need that dopamine and they're gonna be much better to you. In how they treat you. If you give 'em the dopamine hit, like let them go do their thing. They're gonna be way better for you in present. So it's understanding that whatever you need is different than what I need and what they need.

Mike: Just like our kids, we all have different needs, right? And so it's understanding the wiring of that and honoring that. Look, let's be very clear, that's difficult. When we're agitated. Or we're not well rested or we've had a rough day cuz we're in our, we're in our mindset only not other people's.

Cathy: Exactly.

Cathy: And I'll tell you what because you know, we've had this discussion a lot. I'll tell you what partner typically women usually say back to me about that story, Todd, is that, while I totally hear that in between you and I, we manage that very well. I think a lot of women say, well, I've done a lot of work to be able to bring these things up.

Cathy: Like I've, and so. That is, that's the piece that's always like, well, I've been working on myself since I was 30 and I've been thinking about all these things and I've been reading the books. And then he'll say, but see, I'm not wired that way. It's an excuse. It can be like you

Mike: and I have.

Mike: It's not an excuse if it's true. If I'm not wired, if I'm wired differently than you, that's a fact. Okay, so we're gonna get into it. This is great. This is good. This is what I, this is great. So fact. Now the question is, am I understanding that about myself and saying, so how can I, the way I'm wired, correct ro.

Mike: And yes, work on this relationship. So then it's an excuse if I'm willing to say, well, I'm wired that way. So nothing I do can be anything that how I'm, now, it's an excuse, right? But to say it's how I'm wired. It's not an excuse, it's a reality of foundation. I need to understand. To be able to work in this relationship better, to be my best self.

Todd: Well, it brings us back like that. Well, that's true, but it brings us back to the point that we just made 15 minutes ago, which is, if I'm wired this way and

I'm just making this up, I'm wired and I can't bring up difficult moments with Cathy because of what I experienced when I was a little kid, and I'm so conflict averse, blah, blah, blah.

Todd: If I if I own that and I'm like, I don't really wanna work on that part, so you're on, that gets back to. I have no growth mindset, right? I, so how is it so, like in this example, Cathy, she can't change me, right? So I feel like it's a slippery slope where excuses can come so easily. And how do you love somebody who doesn't wanna look in the mirror and.

Todd: And grow or evolve or learn or how to better connect. So, and just

Cathy: by the way, this is the most common question, Todd, I get, which is why we're digging in with you, right? Because everyone will say one of two things, either how do, what do you do with a partner who doesn't wanna grow? Or, you're so lucky you have Todd.

Cathy: Like, I get that all the time. You're so lucky you have Todd. If I had Todd, you know, and I appreciate that because Todd is willing, but partners, and as you can see, this can be very gender gendered. Yep. You know, and it's not always, I always have to say this is not always the case because we definitely know people where it's the opposite.

Cathy: It's the opposite. Karen,

Mike: if Karen's sitting here right now, she'd tell you we're probably, you two are flips of us. Yes, exactly. Right. And you've met Karen. Yes, I have. And that doesn't, and that doesn't make Karen or Todd a different learner. They're different learners than us, but may, it doesn't make them less committed to our relationship.

Mike: Right. Because they find their commitment in other ways. And so that's something, so I'll go back to, let's say I am the one who for 30 years is always trying to grow and trying to learn and all that's not on you. I shouldn't be putting that on my partner that I did all the work for 30 years.

Mike: Let's get honest. I did all the work for 30 years cuz I thought I had to. Not because you did it for me, I did it for me. Yes, you're right. So turn it against you is unfair. To say, well I've been self-work for 30 years. I did that for me. So why am I using that against you? [00:26:40]

Mike: Which people do. They be like, oh, I'm doing all the work and you're not doing well. Why are you doing the work? Yes. For you. So stop making it about me.

Todd: Interesting. You're doing the work for you. Well, and it just reminds me, and then I want to talk, well, I wanna pivot discussions, but I used to use this framework, and I don't think I use it anymore, but like the different levels of relationship.

Todd: And most of us fluctuate between the levels on a daily or a minute to minute basis, but level one is it's all selfish. Level two, it's transactional. And level three is where. My needs are to meet Cathy's needs. And Cathy's needs are to meet my needs. And when, and even saying that sounds a little weird, like, cuz then you, you don't wanna remove, I don't wanna remove myself from the equation if all my needs are just to make sure Cathy's says.

Cathy: But that's not what you're saying. You're, that would be the, you're what I, the visual I get is I love the way Mike says it cause he says it very matter of fact, but it has so much nuance in it. And that is that. We're meeting each other's needs because we're in relationship. And we get something out of that as well.

Cathy: It's not about I'm setting myself down and I'm just meeting your needs. I understand. I love you. I care for you. I get something out of this relationship too, and I'm bringing my full self, which means I'm self-aware as I'm doing things for you and I'm, I have boundaries. So that third level is a very there's a lot of pieces to it.

Cathy: Sure.

Mike: Do you know what I mean? Massively. So I gave the example earlier how we're probably flipped my relationship versus your relationship. And Karen gives on an instinct like she can't not give. Right? And so like, she just can't help people. And it's awesome. It's amazing. I tell her all the time, you give so much to other people.

Mike: So the fact that I'm and she reads and is self to she's wonderful that way does grow just like you both do too. So, But we do it differently. And so it's just looking at going, wow, look at everything she's constantly doing. If we do that, we're good. It's when we do, but I'm doing this and they're not doing this.

Mike: Yes. That's when the fire erupts. Because now we're getting, our life should be theirs. They should be a robot of us. And that's where all the danger

happens. It's stopping and going, wow. Look at what they are. Look at what they are doing. That's amazing. If we do that, we're gonna be balanced.

Mike: Because it's actually not about meeting each other's needs. I don't believe that. At all because. Then if I'm having to meet your needs, then I'm trying to be something that's not me either.

Todd: So it's funny. So I wanna bring, pivot this conversation into the bedroom because there was a time in the relationship between Cathy and I where our sexual relationship was.

Todd: I was only happy if she was happy, and I don't know if it was a stair paral or somebody, but we also need to not forget about our own desires. Now,

Cathy: would you say that is also a gendered response? Like, did you know, like, where did you get that? Like, take it off of me for a second. I don't know.

Mike: Go there.

Mike: I'll go there. I've seen this in my work a lot. They're both genders. Go after it for different reasons. Okay. And by the way, there's multiple genders, so I wanna be clear that's all genders, non-binary. All genders. But we're saying both here. Cause there's two people in the room identifying, but that's important to understand.

Mike: So a lot of men are raised that you're supposed to be the king in the bedroom. And so it's about performance to prove you're the king in the bedroom. Yes. So I have to please you because that's my job

Todd: because I wanna feel good about myself.

Mike: And that's how I'm a man. Right, right. That mentality.

Mike: Very heterosexual. And so women are taught. It's my job to please. Cuz that's what a woman does. She makes sure their partner are happy. It's not about conquering, it's about my value is in their pleasure. Yes. Where he's doing it as to prove she's doing it to find her value. It is very different.

Mike: And by the way, we're being very generalistic, I be clear here, but our society talks, teaches those. So young women are way more likely to say yes to sex. They don't wanna have, because they just don't wanna disappoint their

partner. Young men are more likely to say yes to sex. They don't wanna have, because they think they're not a man if they say no.

Mike: Of course. So there are very different reasons, but both focused on performance at some level. But neither might be for the healthy reason of

Cathy: mutuality. Right. Isn't it so interesting if both of those things are happening simultaneously you're completely missing each other. Right. One is conquering.

Cathy: One's appeasing. And there's nothing in it. And that's probably why people walk away and say, we're having sex, but it's empty. And it's because they're missing each other in the process. They are being, you know, because to your point of all genders, I think all, you know, depending, we all have a piece of that, the desire to, you know, cuz women sometimes want to, and again, You know, it's hard to talk about this and talk about all the pieces, but want to overpower sexuality is used in a power way as well, so it's just a the lack of discussion is what causes this problem.

Cathy: Yes. Because we're not communicating we're going from almost a cellular memory of this is the expectation, but we really don't even really know. What the other person wants or where they're coming

Mike: from. Sure. And the ramifications as you age. It's horrible. Yes. Because what'll start to happen, anybody gets to certain ages, knows this, you know, at 25 to perform is no big deal as long as you're not, you know, not too much intoxication or drugs, whatever else.

Mike: Or there could be stresses to get to there, but as you age your whole value of what performance looks like and how an erection happens or how moist somebody gets or how what somebody gets changes. Cuz the body is drastically changing. And so now you have all these expectations that just are not gonna happen that way.

Mike: And you start to feel shame and guilt and humiliation because you didn't realize it was never about that. It was about the two of you's experience in that moment. Yes.

Cathy: You took it on the surface level. Of we do this, we go through these motions, and then if those things are disempowered for whatever reason, cuz lack of connection or just biological aging.

Todd: Well, and it seems like Mike's foundational messages about communication. Like verbal communication. Well, and I

Cathy: was gonna ask like, when are you speaking to people who are 40 and up? Because I know you speak to, well, military is probably a place, but like, are these conversations like in partnership happening?

Cathy: Like, where are you doing this?

Mike: Well, so we're actually creating something new for that. So I'm doing, I'm building out what are called our mutual amazing relationships retreats. So it's Mars if you put it together, but taking people to Mars. So, But a three day retreat where people are gonna come together for this goal.

Mike: How do we build mutual amazing relationships in our relationship? Because in the past where we've done that is, is with the military, is with parenting groups. Because often you do have everybody there who's in relationships or at least some level, and they're wanting this so much.

Mike: It's fascinating when you start to dive into what does it mean to have a mutual amazing relationship. People are just thirsty for this. They're like, tell me more. Where are the tools? Where are the, because none of us were given this growing up. Never.

Todd: Right? It did not exist. How much of the emphasis is on sex, on your retreats?

Todd: How much is it on intimacy and how much of it is just relationships? Communication. I know they're intertwined, but right. They're

Mike: inter Well, it's about connection. Of understanding these tools that I've put into my life. And sex will be part of where it shows up. The relationship will be part of where it shows up.

Mike: Sex is the sort of the finished product of where it shows itself. If it's the goal of it, we're gonna have problems. Cuz now it's another tool to conquer. To please. Yes. Right. And that's not the purpose here. No. This is about how do we have a life of this? Versus a I've won the prize.

Mike: Right.

Cathy: So I kind of wanna shift gears. Can I do that, Todd, or do you have more questions? I got one

Todd: more quick thing. Okay. So we have this thing called Team Zen. And one of the moms wrote in and she had her 12 year old son or something like that, watching porn. And without getting into a lot of the details, they were thinking about like giving this young man magazines or something.

Todd: Cuz we don't wanna like introduce shame into sex obviously. And there's so much. I'll call it garbage toxicity in porn. So I, I want to talk, I want you to talk generally about porn, maybe through the lens of this, starting with this one problem that this woman doesn't know how to address it with her son who has these hormones that are going as he gets into puberty.

Mike: Give him the lens. That's what I always say. Give 'em the lens to see it through. So what I mean by that is when you're in schools and you ask middle schools and high schools, Where's the number one place people turn to for information around sexual intimacy? The body, they overwhelmingly yell porn.

Mike: Not only that, they will yell specific sights. Yes. Even though there's 500 kids in the room, they'll yell the sight name they're going to, which tells you how comfortable the generation is with the idea of porn. Next question I ask is this a good source? All ages yell No. The problem is when they're watching it, they're not watching through that lens.

Mike: They're watching through. I'm in the moment lens. And because I'm in the moment, I think this is real. So I think that sounds real. I think that's how I'm supposed to be treated. Cause that's what I'm seeing. And so the difference is when we were raised. Porn was a magazine for the most part.

Mike: There was video, but a lot less people had that access caramel. And if they did, it was behind a curtain. At the mo at the rental places. There were, there was shame and guilt in that. So it was vi it was photo and you had to use your imagination to film the places. So you might have got the biology out of it, but you didn't get the pleasure out of it or any of that.

Mike: So you had to use creativity. Now you see it and hear it and think that's how it all goes together, and you're getting this horrible reception of the reality that isn't real. It's performance based, and you're going, that's how I have to perform. That's how I have to look. I have to shave down there. I get female students and male now, and all genders now and identities who will ask why do I have to be bear down there?

Mike: Well, you don't. You don't. But because of what they've seen, they believe that's a must. That is a requirement. Because that's what porn shows. So the question is, what if your kids saw porn and laughed because they had the right lens? So when they saw the porn, they're like, oh my gosh, that's so unrealistic.

Mike: Right? If they actually did that, you'd be like, I'm not too worried when they see porn, because I know they're gonna see it. So the question is, or number two, so that's one. Two, if they are seeing it because they're curious, like I wonder what the naked body, we all have curiosities. If we were 16 and we had the access, they have to explore possibilities through our mind, probably would've Googled it, probably would've done all that. The question is, did we look at it and go, oh, that's what that looks like, or, oh, okay. Or do we go, oh, I'm gonna use that for sexual pleasure. Or, that's a danger point because now you're gonna train your body that, that's how I get excited.

Mike: That's how I get pleased versus going, oh, I saw the naked body. I didn't, I had that curiosity. Okay, I saw it move on versus this is a form of pleasure for me.

Todd: How do you. So the lens, I like it. How there's a mom or a dad or a parent out there right now. It's like, how do we create that lens?

Mike: How realistic, let's say the child's name is Erin, and we're not assuming gender there. Hey Erin, when you watch that, what's your goal? That's a great question. What's the goal when you watch it? Well, what do you mean? It's I mean, for some people it's, give 'em some options. For some people it's pleasure.

Mike: For some people curiosity. It's curiosity which is it for you? And they're like, well, pleasure or, okay. How realistic do you think it is? No matter what their answer is. How realistic do you think that is? Well, I mean, it's real. You can watch it. Well, are you aware that the performers in porn don't do that at home?

Mike: Why do you think that is? Right. Have these questions. The reason is because what they do on screen is actually not for pleasure, it's for performance. What they do at home is for pleasure and there's plenty of research that shows they don't do the same thing at home that they do on film. And I want you to know that.

Mike: So when you see that, you know, that's unrealistic. So I'm not trying to shame you for seeing it. Or to feel bad about seeing the naked body. The naked body's beautiful. I hope you love your body. I hope you love your partner's bodies, but here's where I do worry that if you don't have the right lens, you're not gonna be able to love your partner's bodies, cuz you're gonna compare 'em to these bodies.

Mike: And I want you to love your partner's bodies. So I just want you to be able to look through it and go lensing of, that's that person's body on the screen. Probably not what my partner's body's gonna look like. And so I'm not gonna look for that in a partner. I'm gonna love whatever my partner's body is.

Mike: I'm gonna find the joy in their body. So help them to recognize what they're seeing is not realistic. Give them a lens, e example of that. And consistently do that without constantly bringing up any topic you constantly bring up with a young person. They're just gonna think you're beating them over the head with, so let it sit so they can learn and maybe bring it up down the road again sometime.

Cathy: But see, like that's what's so amazing, Mike, is the way you talk about it with such a sense of comfort, like, you know, what are you getting out of that? The first of all, it's fantastic and I love that sentence. And you know, we've talked a lot about how you know, talking about this is a male fantasy cuz most porn is made by men.

Cathy: And that it's a male gaze. It's close up where that's not really what women are, you know? That's not the way they visualize it. So just that in itself and, but it's your comfort. That allows for that conversation the way you said it, because so many, Todd, tell me if I'm right or wrong here, but I think a lot of parents, I mean, I'm gonna gender it, watch porn.

Cathy: Sure. And they're confused by their connection to porn. So when their child is watching porn, they don't have access to that sentence you just said, cuz they don't know why they're watching it. I mean why? Meaning they're probably masturbating. There's something they're getting out of it. But it's like, it's, the whole thing is so messy.

Mike: Well, here's the thing most people don't talk about. There are lots of people that they see a [00:40:00] celebrity on TV or they hear about, and their mind goes, what they look like naked. And they Google it. And they look at, it's interesting, they look at it uhhuh masturbate. They don't do anything.

Mike: They look at it, they just wanna see 'em. That's what they look like naked. I got my curiosity answered, and they're down. Right. But nobody has that conversation. They make it sound like any viewing of nudity or whatever is for masturbation is for sexual pleasure. Yes. So if you start to understand, not all of it's like that.

Mike: It's like if you thought, oh, there's the statue of David, all this controversy, the statue of our country right now. Right. All right. That's a beautiful piece of art. So it's a matter of a, am I turning this into self-pleasure? Or am I just answering a curiosity? And then some people are gonna see, even answering the curiosity is wrong.

Mike: Well, that's your true choice. I'm not making that argument one way or the other. But it's different than sexualizing everything. Or using it for sexual pleasure. Maybe you are looking a naked picture of that person that you found online. Cuz you want, you had a sexual, but you let it go. You saw it and went.

Mike: You didn't continue to move on it. So I always give the example. People go, well, what about when someone notices your body when you walk by them? Well, noticing it would be a natural human reaction. Sure. Googling you. And continue to stare at your body is a choice. Cat calling. That's a choice. But for me to just notice, oh, and to not turn my head and to keep following you, that's natural to notice. We have eyes, we have perception. Well, what am I doing once I notice? It goes back to the same

Todd: conversation. Well, and for me I've heard that so many times. You know, guys make up this excuse, well, we're just wired that way or whatever.

Todd: Like having these thoughts or noticing an attractive person walking by, totally normal. But we also have this prefrontal cortex. Yep. And we have this ability to discern of what's most appropriate in any given situation. And what drives me nuts is when I hear from, in my experience, other men that say, oh, well we just don't, there's no choice.

Todd: It's just the way we're wired. And I'm just like, you cannot upset me quicker when I hear

Mike: that. Because it, well, what it implies is all men are predators. That's what it implies. Because I have no ability to control myself. Oh, so you're a predator. Because if you say to any audience, if I describe someone who say they can't control themselves in a sexual situation, they're like, predator.

Mike: Exactly. So why would I ever use that as an excuse? In this sexual situation?

Cathy: And the thing that you, because obviously you've been at our conference, you've been on our show, the story you always tell is as soon as you say to somebody you know, you're that, oh by the way, I have a sexually transmitted disease.

Cathy: That person

Todd: seems to stop. All of a sudden you prefrontal cortex kicks in all of a sudden

Mike: because you saw a consequence. Of course. So it's when you choose to see consequences or you choose not to. That's the difference in all the situations we're giving. Am I choosing to see the consequence of this action or am I not just like, by the way, there are people who think, well my marriage, if I looked at a new thing online of another person, I would see that as cheating.

Mike: Well, that's your consequence. So for you, you would never do that, cuz for you that's cheating. Other couples would go, I don't care if you see it naked. Picture of somebody on who's in, I don't care. So they don't view it that way. Now, if you're, some are gonna say, well, if you're masturbating to it, I've got a serious problem.

Mike: Others are gonna go, I don't, as long as when you're with me, you're with me. Like, it's a wild, the different perceptions people can have of their standards and cheating and, but that's between the two people to decide that versus how we treat our relationships

Cathy: without partner. That's right. And it's so like a, again, I love the layers of it because before communication, Before a deep intimacy, you may say, looking at naked bodies as you're cheating on me.

Cathy: But once you start talking and recognizing your own communication and how you connect and what it meaning like sometimes we're very steadfast, like this is the way it is, but the more connected we feel to our partner, the less we worry about those things. You know, the things that we have made been like, oh, that's sacred.

Cathy: They can't. Then it's like, well actually, that's. That doesn't make me uncomfortable at all. Because I feel connected to you in other ways.

Mike: Here's a classic example. You're walking down the street with your partner and you your eyes notice something, right? Right. And your partner goes enjoying the view.

Mike: So that's, they're noticing ironic, right? So they notice the body of the person, maybe of their gender. And they're thinking, well, if I'm noticing good chance. You notice that, so that's right. You actually call it out like, okay, I notice it actually is healthy cuz you can see, all right, we will sell that.

Mike: But you can actually have fun with that. Then like, I'd love to see you in that outfit. Right. Like when they do that, like, did you say that? And I'd love to see you in that outfit because it's true. Right. I'm not saying that's a cover. I would genuinely love that view. Right. So, but that's healthy.

Mike: Right? Yes. We can both do that with each other and go, do you notice.

Cathy: And that kind of conversation again, the intimacy is created from that kind of, cuz I love the fact that Todd and I can have a conversation about people that we find attractive who are in pop culture. Or you were just saying the, you were just saying Janet Jackson was really attract on different strokes.

Cathy: Oh and I was like, oh I can totally see that. Like these are. This is, that is intimacy building in itself. You're getting to know somebody better. You're, and so the fact that we could never say something like that, you literally then can't have that kind of conversation with your partner and you'd have to switch to friends.

Cathy: Or feel ashamed.

Mike: Well, and that's where, remember the old game people would play. Who's your one celebrity you're allowed to do in your marriage, right? Sure. Which is unhealthy, right? If you really were gonna do that, like I'm give you a hall pass for most people to agree that is a unhealthy per perspective.

Todd: And but let's be clear for most, there's some people out there, that's why you said that. That's

Mike: exactly right. I'm not shaming or guilty. You're saying for most. However, the idea that we can't say what's attractive. Right. Right. Or what's not. That's a whole different ballgame than I'm gonna have sex with that person.

Mike: Right. Because it's attractive. Or I'm gonna visualize them when I'm with you. Okay. We got a problem now. Potentially. Now others will say, I don't have a problem with that either. So this is where everybody comes from such different places.

Todd: Well, and we come, we show up with that show up. We get all this baggage growing up from our kid, from our parents, from our culture, from all these messages, our experiences.

Todd: At our Men Living weekend, we sometimes do this thing called the shame ceremony. And without boring you with the details, it's an opportunity for somebody to reveal authentically of something that they feel shameful about. I would say 80%, if not more, is all about sexual shame. It's just so crazy.

Todd: And then here we are the parents that are trying our best to guide these young people and we are still ex negotiating our own shame.

Cathy: That's what I was gonna say By not. Reconciling our shame, or at least bringing some light to it. You know, we are passing it on.

Todd: Well, and what I, the one thing I know about shame is the only thing that shame doesn't like is to be spoken about.

Todd: Right? And that's why we create that space, safe space,

Mike: the dark, that's Brene Brown's, you know, heart and gold of the vulnerability talk. I'm how many parents tell me after our parent program, like I speak in a school and they bring, have me talk to the parents at night. I can't tell you the number of times there's, they come up and go, ah, I wish I'd gotten this sooner.

Mike: Yes. I just wish I'd gotten this sooner. And if they want this information. And here's what's wild. Someone will listen to an interview like this and they'll think a podcast and they will think, well these three are pretty edgy and you know, wild and. Because we're accepting of other people's possibilities.

Mike: Right? The odds that I don't know, you two's personal and you don't know mine, it's nowhere near probably what people think, right? Right. Because we're open talking about other people's boundaries and respecting them, they think, well then you must be one of those people. Right. Which is fascinating to me because I'm probably nowhere in the realm of what you think yourself as far as probably more, you know, traditional, but Sure.

Mike: But it just because you accept other people's possibilities people get uncomfortable.

Todd: I do. So before Cathy pivots, I Okay. I like frameworks and I like when somebody tells me the questions to ask our kids. So you said two, changing the lens, right? Yep. What's your goal? How realistic is it? Is there any other questions that you can come up with in case a parent wants to continue that conversation with their kid?

Mike: A, a third one that could be really powerful is when you choose to be with a partner, do you hope they see you or the person in porn? Because then who are you seeing when you're with them?

Todd: Okay. Beautiful. Like turn

Cathy: it ar turn it around on

Mike: them. Yes. Yep. If it was you, if you're with a partner, are you hoping they view you as porn?

Mike: Or is you?

Todd: Awesome. Thank you. Yep,

Cathy: sweetie. Well, so I kind of wanna go to pop culture a little bit and I'll ask you this. Mike, do you feel like you can speak to sexual trauma pretty well? Not from maybe personal experience, but because of your expertise in who you talk to, if I asked you a few questions about sexual trauma.

Cathy: So I,

Mike: the area of sexual trauma that I typically work in is helping use language to help survivors feel safe coming forward. Okay.