

Erin Breeze: It's really about each individual recognizing that no one failed. And the shame and blame, and the gloom and the doom, that's a story, but not one that we have to choose for ourselves or live in. And that we are all deserving. We're enough, we're deserving, and we can go create this beautiful life moving forward.

Sam Fuqua: That's Erin Breeze, and this is Well, That Went Sideways! A podcast that serves as a resource to help people have healthy, respectful communication. We present a diversity of ideas, tools, and techniques to help you transform conflict in relationships of all kinds. On this episode, we talk with Erin Breeze about navigating conflict in divorce and transforming the way we look at divorce. She is a life after divorce strategist who works primarily with mothers through her program, *Happy Home*.

I'm Sam Fuqua, co-host of the program with Alexis Miles. Hi Alexis.

Alexis Miles: Hi Sam.

Sam Fuqua: And we're so glad to be joined for this episode of Well, That Went Sideways! by Erin Breeze. Hello. Welcome.

Erin Breeze: Hi there. Thanks so much for having me.

Sam Fuqua: What are some of the most common conflicts, be they internal or external, that you see in your work with women who are in the process of divorcing or have recently completed the divorce process?

Erin Breeze: Sure. Well, the focus of the work that I do is with women who are also mothers. So, a lot of times coming out of divorce, as one could imagine, there's that, there's inherently conflict between the two people who have decided to, to get divorced. And so, there's, there's conflict there and then that can translate to how they're approaching parenting. So, that's a really common area and one that I work on a lot is how do we now navigate having had this, obviously this conflict that led to the divorce between the parties married, um, and how do we now navigate both that relationship, but also how do we navigate parenting? And, that's a big source of, of what I help moms do at *Happy Home*.

Sam Fuqua: What is a common specific conflict that comes up for divorced moms regarding the parenting of their children?

Erin Breeze: And I love, I love Sam that you also said like, what's some of the inner conflict 'cause that's a big piece of the work too, and I'd love for us to talk about some of the inner turmoil that happens with the heartbreak, um, and disappointment that, that surfaces with the divorce journey. Um, but specifically on the parenting side, you know often when divorce happens, there's some, a big values issue that may have surfaced or, um, other factors, right, that led to that, and so, just some of the day-to-day that, the way that we raise children from priorities around schooling to priorities around their activities to culture, family culture, um, and from how we raise kids in terms of even simple things like screen time, bedtime, you know, all of the things that you think about when you're raising kiddos. Once you have two households, there's a whole new cross-cultural challenge to navigate because oftentimes in divorce, with the two households of divorce, when kids are moving back and forth, it is, it can become very cross-cultural. The kids are learning two very different, are now operating in two very different environments with a different

lead, right? They have two parents separate now to lead those cultures. So, it can be as simple as screen time and as big as what type of education now, and how are we gonna navigate differences if we don't, if we aren't aligned as the parents.

Alexis Miles: Erin, you defined or you talked about divorce as a journey, so maybe that would be a good way to frame it, you know, as you talk some more about values, for example, that come up along that journey. Values conflict, values resolution. I'd love to hear more about that values conflict along that divorce journey and how that gets navigated.

Erin Breeze: Often, what I have seen in the, in, in my own divorce journey and also being the child of divorce and then working with so many divorced families is that, you know, some things don't get very clearly articulated at the time a couple meet and then decide to get married, that over time surface to be some, some big differences that then at times do lead to divorce. I'm of the mind that not all marriages are intended to last, and that actually part of what's happening and needs to happen, and part of why divorce has such a high rate is actually something to be celebrated. Um, one of the processes that I also teach is called *Celebrating Your Marriage as Complete*. So, I have a perspective around we, we really need to have a bigger conversation to shift this idea that longevity is the hallmark of a healthy relationship when it comes to partners, because we all know that's not true. And, we also know we have a really high rate of divorce, and I see that as a evidence of our bigger need as a society to dismantle and redefine. Like, what is partnership and how do we want that to go. And, how do we craft and create partnerships based on equity and reciprocity and aligned values.

And often, often, we're pretty young with our first marriage in a, you know, on average we're in our twenties or early thirties. And so, like there's some values, decision or awareness that hasn't necessarily kind of fully been expressed at the individual level. And these things over time can, you can start to see that, oh, there's an incompatibility here and that, that is why I feel that, that creating a room for us to not see divorce as a failure, um, and that instead that, that it's this natural progression that some relationships just simply grow into and needing to have a, a different phase, is so important. And then once you're on the journey, like there's so much, you know, I, I talk about divorce being a divine disruption, and what I mean by that, it is, is this opportunity to awaken. I mean, there's nothing like divorce to turn your whole world upside down when you're going through it because it affects every aspect of your identity and who you are, and also your future of what you thought was where you were headed. So, in that, of course, brings us such tremendous opportunity to really look and see, well, who am I? What do I want? And ask some of those values questions. What, what do I stand for? What is it that I want? Who am I now? Um, and then how do I move on from here?

Alexis Miles: So, what you are talking about, Erin, sounds to me almost as if the conversation that comes up during a divorce, you know, related to values, could have been, or perhaps should be part of a conversation that comes up before people actually get married.

Erin Breeze: Yes and no. I think sometimes we're not ready. We don't know to ha, it's like we don't know what we don't know. I love the Maya Angelou quote, "When you know better, you do better," right? It's like, but you don't. And so I think, yes, ideally, we would map things out and have a level of consciousness and awareness around all these kinds of conversations that in hindsight, we see we didn't have, but we, we don't have the, the benefit of that. Um, I mean, more and more I think where we, like to go very meta for a minute, it's like human evolution. Like, we're getting more conscious. And yes, people are having that awareness to look at some of these conversations much sooner in relationships and just, much sooner in like, in their own personal growth journey, right? But sometimes we just, it's not that we didn't have a

conversation and we sort of skipped it. It's that we weren't ready or we didn't even know, we didn't know to have it. We weren't, we weren't aware enough yet, or just, it just wasn't there to have happen. But I'd also add too, I really believe like something that's so important is that we don't look back with regret. That we really embrace that what's happening in our lives is bringing us opportunities for growth, for healing, for progression, but that it's never about sort of wishing you could delete out a human relationship as, as significant as your partner. It's just not available to us to be that specific. Humanness is, is messy and it involves all kinds of experiences that we had, you know, could go back in time maybe we would have a different conversation, but we, we can't do that.

Alexis Miles: Well, thanks for that clarification, because now all of a sudden, I'm seeing it as you are describing it, a divorce journey. And part of that journey is the growth that occurs that allows people to reach that point of understanding, "Oh, my values might be different from your values," in a way that it was, as you said, it's impossible to see early on because we transform into that, grow into that, evolve into that.

Erin Breeze: Absolutely.

Alexis Miles: 'Cause of the relationship and, and, and other things. Yeah.

Erin Breeze: Yeah, absolutely. And I think, I mean that's why I often talk about, divorce to me isn't actually something to, to be avoided. And I know that's not what a lot of people wanna think about because it feels very scary because our social narratives around divorce are very "blame and shame" and "doom and gloom" based. And that's something that I think all of us wanna have an update on because it really makes the divorce experience so much worse than it needs to be because of how we talk about it because of the narratives that's, that are available. You're sort of allowed to be angry. You're allowed to be, feel that your life is over. Like, you're allowed certain archetypes that aren't, none of which are empowering. We're not really offered this view that actually let's thoughtfully honor everything that went before and then grow into what's next and really celebrate and appreciate all that we've been through.

Sam Fuqua: I'm curious how you recommend supporting friends who are going through divorce or have recently divorced? At this point in my life, I've had many friends who have gone through it and many different reactions, uh, many different things that may or may not come up even years after the divorce. And, I guess what I try to do is just try to just navigate that conversation or steer away from it based on what I know about my friend's personality and maybe some details about their past relationship. But I would love to have some ideas to keep top of mind when that comes up and, and to be a supportive friend.

Erin Breeze: Yeah, I, I love the question. And because we all know, we're, everybody's touched by divorce. It's so commonplace that nobody is, we, I don't think you can not know someone who has been affected and then knowing what to do. I think one of the, one of the most important things is just as you're suggesting, Sam, and I know because of this podcast, you, you both have so many skills when it comes to all of the things when it comes to communication, right, but being, being good listeners and letting people just share with you where they are in a process, right? I know it sounds so simple, but actually when you ask somebody how are you holding space that you, they're being invited to actually tell you, right? And that you're not, um, that you can just sit with them in it. I think there's a big need for all of us to learn more techniques around feeling the feelings that need to be felt. And as you just indicated, Sam, sometimes people carry on the pain of divorce for years and decades even.

And so really being able to have friends in our lives who can be with us where we are and like support us to feel the feelings without needing to rush in and distract us or point, you know, have people or, too, too soon in a process sort of start to, you know, paint a, a rosy picture of it if that's not what they're actually feeling. So, some of it is like authentic listening and really creating that same space. But then I also think what, what we can do is like not participate in the process that keeps people stuck, which is some of that blame, shame, doom and gloom. And sometimes, you know, I think we can all think of a time where we've been like the recipient of the venting, right? And yes, we wanna create a safe space for, for friends to share, but we can also helpfully like be thoughtful about helping them see that sometimes that is perpetuating their stuckness or their situation if they're, they're really stuck, for example, like a victim story, what's happened to them. If they're in that disempowerment, it's really hard to heal and move forward, and I think that's part of why people stay stuck so long.

So part of it's listening, part of it's letting them say the hard things, the big feelings, being with them in the discomfort of that, whatever that vulnerability is. The third thing is then not, not participating as much as you can in the, like, victim story, if that's where they are. And so then, the fourth would be if they are in that victim story, like encouraging them toward resources because um, you know, a lot of my clients come to me as like they, their friends, we don't always know what to say or how, like, you know, we wanna encourage them toward resources that are really gonna support them to heal and to rebuild, recreate, to move on to what's next.

Alexis Miles: And I'm really curious about what it looks like. So, old paradigm blame, shame, this is horrible. I've failed. New paradigm, ah, this is an opportunity for transformation, for growth. It's not necessarily a bad thing. So let's say, uh, you are counseling somebody and helping them make that transition from the old to the new paradigm. What would that look like?

Erin Breeze: Yeah. Thank you for the question. And, and we're really, where I find it starts is with our, our thinking around the situation because we're such powerful storytellers. If all day long our story that we're narrating for ourselves is one of blame and shame, like, we'll get really stuck there. And because of how human minds work, we'll keep finding evidence to reinforce that, right? So, part of it is inviting people in and, and really asking them if they're open to different perspectives. So, part of it in the beginning is having, really giving different language, different belief system, ideas, constructs that you can start to understand like, oh, okay. And I think I, I mentioned earlier, *Celebrate Your Marriage is Complete* is the hallmark of the beginning of where I work with, with women in my program. And even that phrase alone is something that I'll hear women say like, that didn't even feel possible. Like, how can that be? But I'm intrigued, right? And so then, we can have a conversation about it.

For me, in my own journey, and also working with clients, it's about a deep process of reflecting to see what was this about for me, right? It's gonna be different for all of us. But when we can deepen our understanding about both what is the, what is this about for me and what is it bringing me, but also being radically honest about the health of the relationship we have been in, we were in, because I've yet to meet anybody going through divorce that when they're really honest would say, "Oh, our relationship was thriving." So, part of it is also being really honest that this wasn't a place, this wasn't your, your home, you know, your emotional home. There was something that you've outgrown or just wasn't healthy, right, and being really honest, um, so that we can then move into acceptance. One of the things that, part of the inception for *Happy Home* is that I have, um, worked for years in the organizational change landscape, in that space, so, teaching people how to navigate change. We're not taught how to end relationships and we're not taught how to navigate change. So, you mix those together and it's really overwhelming.

So then, it's about tools and strategies and skills that help people first have that mental understanding of, oh, I'm in this process, now I can do some of the emotional work that I need to do to get there. Uh, and then, I call myself a strategist more than a coach. It's about having a strategy to move forward, having a strategy to build family culture, having a strategy to do co-parenting, and all of my work in conflict transformation really feeds into how I teach around communicating, you know, constructively, conscious parenting, all of these pieces. And so, we start with the self and then we work on the family system and then we're ready to really create the next chapter. And that's sort of the, a quick overview of the process.

Alexis Miles: So, could you give an, uh, concrete example of what a, a strategy might look like?

Erin Breeze: Yes. I'm thinking, so in terms of, you know, the strategy for the first part that we were talking about getting, celebrating your marriage is complete, it's, there's certain steps that we take to process, to participate, to have ritual, to celebrate and release. The, there's a release ceremony ritual that I teach and guide them through. So the, the strategy there is very deeply personal, right, and is one, but it's, it's, it's a sequence of steps. And, when you go through the sequence of steps, you emerge with this sense of, of greater peace, greater freedom, greater clarity. The strategies obviously for, for parenting and creating a new family culture are gonna be different. And so, some of what we do inside the second phase of the work that I do, which I call the *Family Hive*, which is a system of really building your, your family this, this new family. And really again, honoring that there's a huge identity shift when we go from married to single parenting and stepping into a different type of family leadership when you're on your own.

So, the strategies there are both really about empowerment and, and stepping into that and getting clear what is, so we do a mission and manifesto work and other things to first get clear like, what is it, who am I as a mom, as a single mom, right? And then, then how do I build the culture? We're talking about values, like getting clear on your own values. And then, then having tools and knowing how to, how do I bring my children into that? So, there's lots of exercises and tools to bring, bring that forward, which of course are adapted depending on ages of kids and, you know, stage of life, um, are gonna look differently. But really then making the whole family that, making sure that moms feel really clear that they're and, and comfortable and excited about leading it because at the beginning it can feel really like, there's a lot of disappointment. I didn't set out to be doing this on my own, right? So, the strategies there will be different.

Um, and then just one other area that's coming to mind when it's, when it comes to communication, then of course communicating with the co-parent, if somebody is co-parenting, not everybody is, sometimes it's more parallel parenting, meaning that the, there isn't a collaborative partnership with the, among the parents, so then the strategies will be different again. And, that's everything from nonviolent communication techniques and skills to, you know, consciously, like just it, it is somewhat tailored depending on what, who, what the dynamic is between the people co-parenting. Um, but then there would be very different strategies for, for communication 'cause there's a lot, in my view, a lot of the pain of divorce that happens for the family, for the kiddos, is not related to the divorce. It's related to the dysfunction of communication and the ongoing conflict between the, the parents, and none of that is necessary. None of that is necessary once you have the tools and strategies to avoid that.

Alexis Miles: So, it sounds like a roadmap or a series of steps to a different outcome than what typically happens.

Erin Breeze: Absolutely. Yeah.

Sam Fuqua: Shifting to how you communicate, what can be abstract concepts to young children, uh, who are just developing their own, you know, intellectual and emotional lives. Uh, there was an example you wrote about on your blog where, uh, you were at your six-year-old's soccer game and your ex-husband showed up, which was a pleasant surprise for your daughter, but she asked you, "Mommy, do you still love daddy?" Can you talk about that and how you responded?

Erin Breeze: Thank you for bringing that up because it's such a great example. A, of the surprising questions we get from our kids at times that we aren't expecting, like walking off the soccer field, right, um, and the need when it comes for divorce, the divorce experience, and the divorce journey to have conversations like these over and over. This is not a one-time conversation. I still get that question, and she's almost ten, because our kids, this is a huge thing, this process, this family journey for them. So, being able to continue to have conversations like that and have them again at different age and developmental stages for our kids is so important. And so my, because I've done a lot of work around this, right, could really hold space and ask, ask more about why she was asking, and then being able to genuinely express to her a new definition of love. And love is one of our family values.

So, we talk a lot about love in all forms. Love and friendship. Love, like, that there's really, it's such a big word that means kind of nothing unless you define it. It means everything and nothing at once, right? So, really giving her language around what it, what that means, the love that I will always have toward her dad, um, and how that love now extends, I don't think I put this in the blog, but she was then asking me a question about her, 'cause she has a new stepmom, right? And so the, of course our kids are wanting to know how do you feel about them and does love extend to them and in what way? And, they're trying to understand and have a reference point. And, I really believe this is one of the advantages that divorce families have is this level of intentionality and consciousness around love and friendship and partnership, and the ways that human relationships change and grow and, and shift from one, you know, one stage to another, and, and that it really actually gives our kids such a rich and, um, maybe in certain ways, like more realistic picture because it's not, so, we're not simplifying it to say that love is supposed to exist in this way and it looks this way. We're saying, no, it looks in this, all of these, these many different ways.

Sam Fuqua: I'm struck not only in that answer, but in the entire conversation of your approach. One of the main things you're trying to do is turn what can be very awkward and painful moments, conversations, and experiences into something that is potentially quite positive in, in our development and growth.

Erin Breeze: I mean, that's certainly my calling and why I'm here and why you know this, this all is here, is to provide a, a, to what you had said, Alexis, too, like a roadmap because I didn't have one and when I was going through divorce, I realized that I had a toolkit because of my years spent in conflict transformation work and culture building work and interpersonal dialogue work and organizational change. I had all of these pieces that I didn't see my fellow divorce moms having access to, and it was just the fortunate, you know, professional trajectory I had been on that I had this advantage of all these skills. So, it's really been the, the impetus was to put all of this together and make it available to others, um, because I have that perspective of how difficult it is from the point of view of a kiddo. I was 13 when my parents divorced, and of course, I had seen these things don't happen overnight, so I had seen indications of their unhappiness, but I, I know firsthand what it's like from the perspective of the child to, to be in that experience of divorcing parents and that sadness and the pain that exists and it just, it doesn't have to be that way.

Alexis Miles: You've talked about the things that you had in your toolbox because of your profession, and I'm guessing because of your natural interest as well. What if a person doesn't have those kinds of tools in their toolbox? How would you help them or what advice would you give them?

Erin Breeze: I think we all need, when we're moving through any, any big life transition or disruption, it's so important to move toward resourcing, right, and finding that resourcing. And, in my experience, what's been, what's worked best for me and, and how I've set up my programs, it's a combination of three things. The first is having the tools, the strategy, the learning. So, if it's not in your toolkit, the awareness, it starts with the awareness that I need, I need to move toward those skills and tools. So, knowing that they are, they exist and then moving toward them. The second thing is then having, having a teacher, a guide, a mentor, having help, having support. And so, this is, and I mentioned that, especially because I see a lot in the divorce journey for men and women, the sense of isolation that can happen, and then also like a resist, we're so individualistic. I'm speaking very broadly, but it, that can show up at this time where people really try to go it alone and figure things out and be on their own and it just fuels and makes more painful this sense of isolation, right? So, really reminding people move toward resourcing, move toward the tools. If you don't have them, that's okay. Um, but let's get you them. Move toward a trusted mentor, guide, you know, find that coach or that, that group that has a leader that you relate to so you have support, it's so important.

And then the third piece is community. So, having peers around you that have been where you are, and you know, to, to have people who see you and validate and value and can witness your journey and be, that's just so, I think as humans, it's so vital. So, finding those three things and really honoring that you deserve it. Because there's a lot of times too, because divorce can lower self-confidence in that, you know, it's, it's such a, it's such a disorienting experience that we can have problems with, you know, things related to confidence and self-worth just get, get intensified. So, really making sure that you're not sort of refusing the help, right? Like, it's really brave to ask for help. And so, moving toward resourcing, um, and giving yourself permission. I think it's so important we all give ourselves permission to ask for and receive support.

Alexis Miles: And I wonder if you could describe a success story using this roadmap because I have probably 50 stories, uh, of, uh, how can I describe it, of really bad divorces that didn't result in healing and transformation and growth, but that resulted in, in trauma and lots of pain. So, describe a, a, success story using this roadmap.

Erin Breeze: Yeah. Gosh, thank you. There's so many. I mean, and again, each person, uh's, journey is gonna be unique to them. But I'm thinking of one of my clients, Heidi, who when I met her, was really stuck in anger, and the journey allowed her to move through that and get to a place of real, not just peace and acceptance, but actual empowerment. We talked about like understanding what this is here for you, why this is here for you, and then being able to create from this new place all the things in your life. And for her, in her case, it's, she's at a whole new level with her own business and relationships with her kids and all of those things, but for, for others it's gonna be something else. And I, and I think it is such a personal journey, but the hallmark of the success is that women emerge feeling clear on who they are and feeling a sense of renewal, a sense of purpose, a sense of clarity in their direction. And of course, then that ripples out in big and small ways, you know, to their, to their kids. And, as they're more and more empowered, I'm thinking of another client who, um, Carrie, who had, um, I was also helping her, you know, once you're empowered in one area, it bubbles out, right? And so, there was a work conversation she needed to have with, with a boss, a supervisor, and she had this really brave conversation that had a direct result and, in a positive way, at work, and she told her son and then, he did the same thing to stand up for a child who was being bullied at the playground, right? Just within a day he had heard his mom, she came home and shared the story of how she really stood up for what was right, and then he went and stood up for what was right.

And so, it's, it's in these like big, internal shifts of a reclamation of power and sense of here's who I am again, and I know who I am and I'm worthy of, of love moving forward. And then, it's all these rippling out ways that when, when any parent feels empowered, uh, we, we know that, you know, the impact that it has on their kids is just, is life changing because it's life giving when we're empowered, the life force that we have available, the energy that we have available. It's just completely different than when we're feeling shut down, and that fuels, you know, nourish, nourishes our kids. So, those are just a couple of the ways, but it really, as I said, it's so personal. So, it's really about each individual recognizing that no, no one, no, no one failed. And the shame and blame and the gloom and the doom, that's a story, but not one that we have to choose for ourselves or live in. And that we are all deserving. We're enough, we're deserving, and we can go create this beautiful life moving forward.

Sam Fuqua: Erin Breeze, thank you so much for your time and for your work.

Erin Breeze: Thank you so much for having me.

Sam Fuqua: Erin Breeze is a life after divorce strategist who works primarily with moms via her program, *Happy Home*. Her website is erinebreeze.com.

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