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Hello, and Happy Sunday, I hope that you're having a beautiful day. So today will be about supporting a partner through leaving an emotionally abusive dynamic. So

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I want to do a content warning upfront for psychological and emotional abuse. If that would feel too upsetting to hear about right now, then maybe bookmark it for another time, skip this resource altogether, you know, I just, I don't want to make your day harder than it needs to be.

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The connection that my partner has with this person is not romantic, they're actually a family member that he's on a recreational sports team with. And so our boundaries are maybe a bit different than they would be around a romantic or sexual connection. The nature of the relationship can push different buttons, depending on our histories of trauma, or how interdependent our lives are, I just differentiate the nature of the relationship for that reason that I think the context matters.

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So a little bit of background. So my partner's brother was acting selfish and consistently acting selfish, especially in this team dynamic, you know, always sort of centering himself, always sort of like creating unnecessary infighting in the team, you know, not really being a team player, this sort of thing. Now, I didn't always know about these instances on a regular basis, because they were not really something that my partner brought to me, he would complain to his other teammates in the moment he would confront his brother during the game, but otherwise, like, each instance, would feel a bit too small to him to outweigh the fun that he was having with his brother for a time,

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then his brother started a pattern of like minimizing my partner's pain. And this was when I was first keyed into the start of the dynamic like about a year ago, when my partner was asking, like, am I

being melodramatic, like he was being a dick, right? I'm not crazy, right. And I understood that my role in that particular conversation was to validate, for example, when his brother would be very self centered, sort of steer the team off course of what their joint goal was, during the game, he was a man that was like really fucked up, I can't believe he did that this is really frustrating to me, we agreed on what we were going to do. And his brother would be like, Ah, you're overreacting. It's not a big deal if the other guys aren't complaining this and that, right. And so that minimization started to eat away at my partner's feeling of solidarity, feeling of actually like being a teammate with his brother.

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Then it escalated with his brother pushing boundaries, specifically around Respecting time and labor. My partner is team captain, I won't go into the details, but it does require him to do a little bit more work when they're not playing games, right, a lot of prep a lot of making decisions on their behalf, like a lot of unpaid labor that he enjoys doing. But when there are moments of disrespect, he takes a little bit more of a hit in the disrespect, he takes a little bit more personally because he is giving a bit more than the other people. And so that also contributes to him having different reaction.

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From this point, there were small improvements, there were periods of reprieve, I realized, personally, I would go a month or two without ever hearing about it, you know, and that I usually took as no news is good news, because my partner would usually voiced frustration, but often would not feel the need to like vent or even talk about the gains if things went well. Now, I think I mention this as a point of concern, because if we are an emotional support person for somebody in our life, but we are getting a disproportionately weighted sort of picture of someone that we don't have a relationship with, we need to take note of that. Are we only ever hearing about this person when they are frustrating to our partner when they want emotional support about that person to just internalize that we are probably going to be operating from a place of bias that we are getting an asymmetrical imbalanced view of that person saying either can you share with me more of the times that you are having fun or more of what you actually like about this person? Because based off of everything that I'm hearing, like I don't understand why you're spending time with them.

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So yeah, you know, we get to the point where for months and months now, my partner is reiterating a boundary, you know, you got to be here on time, you can't be doing this. You can't be doing that within the context of the game. Everybody else is upholding that boundary. You're very frustrating to me because like I in my opinion, in my slanted opinion, I think his brother had a level of comfort with disrespecting him because what's he going to do not be his brother anymore, right? Like knowing that he's not going to go anywhere, no matter how much of a dick he is. So, but everybody else was easily meeting this low bar if not being rude or late period, right.

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So this is kind of a simple conflict, but it's the longevity of it. It's the perpetuation of it it is the lack of willingness for his brother to see him hear him and respect his explicit wishes that really started to

willingness for his brother to see him near him and respect his explicit wishes that really started to eat away at this relationship at this point is when I had to set firmer bounds for myself, because my partner still wasn't changing how often he saw his brother. So it was just, I started to become like a bit of a repository for venting, rather than a support person who was giving him actionable steps that he then took, right, because we sort of hit a wall, at least my partner hit a wall of effectiveness of self advocacy, because he was like, Okay, well, I guess I'm tolerating this, then I guess, like, nothing is going to change.

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I told him, Look, you can still vent to me sometimes. But please check in to see if I have energy to hear about it, because it gets a bit more exhausting to me to hear about a story I've heard 1000 times. And I have no new feedback, right? This is the same conflict over and over. And sometimes I just feel tired, at the very least, like, is there a ground rule that I can tap out? At any point, if I'm striving to get too heated, too frustrated at my partner or his brother, or both? To say, like, why isn't this changing? Because this is not my conflict, this is not my relationship. And so that is the point at which I'm no longer a helpful support person. So with that expectation established now, sometimes I do say, Okay, I'm done hearing about him tonight. Okay, I'm exhausted from work, or I'm tired with my own family stuff like this is not I'm not the support person for you tonight.

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With that said, apparently, you know, and I heard about it less often because of the boundary I've set for myself. But apparently, the frequency of instances has been ramping up in the last month especially. And it just became clear, like, this isn't an occasional mistake, this isn't something outside of his brother's control. This was a pattern of deliberate behavior. And it also got worse after my partner mentioned the boundary, again, almost as rebelling and almost as if he was like doubling down and saying what try it, like, what are you going to do about it. And I think that that taps into like older family dynamics, et cetera, et cetera, that my partner is working through in therapy.

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And so this is when really, I started to notice in my partners stories, some gaslighting, and I was like, I think this has just transcended from your brother being a dick to your brother being kind of emotionally and psychologically abusive to you, my partner expressed just last week, he said, he's getting to a breaking point about the disrespect. And his brother said, was his first time hearing about it. I was pretty shocked. Like, I have not been on this team. I have not been on the ground and involved in these conflicts. And I am exhausted with how often I'm hearing about it. And so for his brother to be like, well, you, you haven't brought this up before? Oh, what once a year ago? you know, and that was crazy making, everyone knew that to be a lie. But it did still make my partner question like, Have I been unclear? Did I actually not bring it up? When I thought I was bringing it up? You know, is it my fault that my boundary was being crossed, because I was not explicit enough in what I needed to have happen. And none of that was true, he had been only explicit, he's an excellent communicator.

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And so that was a red flag to me of just like, I know you love him. I know he's not going to be out of your life. But I just do want to encourage you to see this clearly, like, this is what it sounds like, to me that this is abuse. Does that feel accurate to you? And he sat with it. And he's like, Yeah, honestly, if this was anybody else, I probably would have acknowledged the abuse pattern a while ago. And I think, yeah, there are some areas of like, you know, willful ignorance on my part, I've just like not wanting that to be the case, or not wanting to see it like that, or, you know, judging it against this low bar of how bad it used to be when we were younger. And so it's not as bad now, but no, it can't really be described as anything other than psychologically abusive, like when somebody tries to make you feel crazy by lying, and they know they're lying. Like, that's abuse that felt like an escalation of the conflict, like, Oh, we're in new territory now, like maybe different. potential solutions are needed, because this person is obviously acting in bad faith.

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This week. Now, his brother gave a heads up at the last minute, couple of hours before the game. I'm not going to be coming tonight. Or if I do, it'll be three hours late. So that forces everybody to wait or forfeit the game, not participate at all, like, it is recreational. It is like an adult like optional game, right? There aren't huge stakes in terms of like tournaments or salaries on the line, but like, that doesn't make it less of a commitment. And that doesn't mean he's being less shitty, by skirting that commitment, so he was like, Yep, I'm gonna be late again, if I am coming, because you know, I've been on vacation. This vacation was planned for a month like I'm going to be coming back late. And my partner blew up at him. He was like, so you've known about this for a month. So we just talked last week and you knew knew that you would not be back in time from this plan that you've known about, you knew that you would be getting in late. And he was like, Yeah, I mean, but what like I told you about this vacation a month ago? And of course, he absolutely did not. Nobody on the team remembered him mentioning it. This is really when I do check my own anger, because I'm like, I really wanted to step in again, right? Like, this isn't just a one time occurrence of us checking our biases, or US checking, like what would be appropriate level of being involved, right, if I were to reach out to his brother, if I were to insert myself, if I were to try to advocate on my partner's behalf, that is, in my opinion, incredibly inappropriate, because I'm not in the business of fighting people's battles for that. Right. I don't think that helps. And in fact, I think that can impede the people we claim to love by not pushing them to advocate for themselves a skill that everybody we love should be continuing to work on.

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So he's now at a breaking point, and he wants to kick him off the team, like a little bit of a tiny intervention on his brother, he wants to go to the teammates and say, like, look, as captain, I can just kick him off, you know, I can just say, We're breaking up. And he's not going to be around anymore, right, like courtesy discussion before something happens, can still be helpful. And I think necessary, even if it's not a totally egalitarian democracy with equally distributed power, because a lot of structures don't have that. That was another thing is like, in all areas of life, except for sports. My partner works really hard to deconstruct hierarchies. But because of the nature of like this compartmentalized hierarchy, not too dissimilar from kink being compartmentalized hierarchy, if you're not in a 24/7, dynamic, it was uncomfortable for him to come in and say, I've made this decision.

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We also factored in the audience because frankly, I would never play on this team. Like it's a bunch of men with a history of making misogynistic jokes for one, like when my partner tells him to stop, says, Oh, that's really fucked up. Or like, don't make jokes like that. Then the misogyny gets turned on to him. And they call him like, oh, sorry, mom, or they call him like a nagging wife, right. And this has been kind of wild actually, personally, to see like my sis male partner, who has some experience with marginalization, because he's queer, because he's not white. but he's never been the victim of like misogyny and till this group, because the minute that he'll talk about how he feels about something, or he'll display any sort of softness, or even when he'll talk about like sucking a dude's dick, right. And like explicit ways, there will be this misogyny that comes and this homophobia that comes toward him that is really dismissive of any valid points that he has to say, just because he couched it in language of emotion of I'm upset, or I'm feeling this way I'm feeling that way that framing would make them disregard him. But it has been like kind of interesting to watch this man in real time, like, understand with empathy not just intellectually understand, but really experience what it is to be a target of misogyny.

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to the point, factor in the audience, right? Like, if I want to support my partner in strategy to in being effective to get the outcome that he is hoping for, we need to factor in like, well, who are you talking to? Right? Because he wanted to say like, I'm really upset, like, we need to talk, you know, and I was like, I love you, this would be a perfectly fine way to communicate with me or anybody else that you date. But you know, these guys that if you lead with we need to talk quote, unquote, right, like some sort of cliched girl nagging girlfriend might say this sort of thing, I guarantee you, they're going to close their ears to you, they're not even going to take in your point. And I guarantee that because of their track record of disregarding you and rolling their eyes at you every time you are vulnerable.

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So instead, we started talking about strategy of clear and direct language like hey, I'm done. not able to be on a team with him anymore if this keeps happening. right like I'm at a breaking point. I want to kick him off. And also I don't want to do that before talking to you first. So if they all decide to disband and form a new team, so be it but otherwise as team captain, it was his judgment call to finally say enough is enough, right? Like you're the only one who's not being a teammate.

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We also went through the other ramifications of having a rupture with a family member specifically because he's gonna see him in so many other contexts events holidays access to his niece and nephew like the risk of other family trying to step in and mediate all that right. Little things from day to day like he uses his brother's Disney plus password right there are very small and potentially large ramifications of holding this firmer line with a family member. We went through those hypotheticals, just to be sure that the risk was still worth it to him that he is so done to the point that he is willing to accept those consequences should they come about, because the alternative of continuing to tolerate it is no longer tenable.

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This whole video is about how do we support a person without telling them what to do without stepping in and trying to act as their surrogate? I just try and help them weigh the options. And like you could do this, you could do that. How might that feel? Have you thought about this angle? Like how might that impact you? And I just bring questions upon questions upon questions. checking in on my own biases, like would I benefit from this partner not playing a game once a week, like if the play is the team disbanded, maybe I have more time with him, you know, like, I'm continuing to not be an impartial third party. And if I don't interrogate that for myself, I could be setting up my partner to realize at some point - Wait, you gave me some self centered advice that wasn't actually in my best interest. And now this is a fight between us. so to be really proactive and transparent with ourselves, as well as urging our partners to be transparent with themselves of risk versus reward, acknowledging and accepting their ability as grown adults to make whatever decision they want. Even if we think it's the wrong one. Even if we would be frustrated at their decision.

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I felt like we saw each other and each of our own limitations, each of our own very different personalities, very different communication styles, very different goals, he wants to keep playing, he doesn't want the team to break up, right. And so I think that has also been an incentive for him to tolerate intolerable behavior for longer.

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And I've learned a lot about myself and like how to not foster codependence in a dynamic like this that has really complex and intersecting structures at play brother and teammates, you know, subordinate within the team. But then being the younger brother in the family, like there's this really interesting intersection of roles that are a bit contradictory at times that have been as a relationship nerd, like kind of fascinating to explore personally, because that's not something that I personally have ever experienced firsthand.

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But the reason that I share this story before there is any particular resolution is one, I'm not so confident after a year of this back and forth, that there will be a resolution anytime soon, but bigger and more importantly, the resolution has nothing to do with me, I'm not in a relationship with anybody but my partner.

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As a support person, I have decided that, you know, if it breaks in the way of something changing in their team dynamic, then I will continue to be at this level of support in a very like, hands on way. But if it breaks in the way of, well, actually, no, seniors are going to continue status quo. And that is decision a partner is going to opt into than I need to remove myself as being the support person because I will no longer be helpful to anybody involved, I will just start to get angry at my partner, I

will be exhausted by it. If I go to an event that my partner's brother is at, I will bring hostility to it right. And so that understanding that for myself is when and how I decided to set my own boundaries, regardless of the outcome of this conversation or next series of conversations.

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So, you know, all of that, I think, is my story that I have to tell. this is not a story about my partner resolving a conflict outside of our dynamic. This is a story about how I can show up as a support person, I have compassion for the difficulty of really setting bounds this whole time as well as the difficulty of really reaching a point of an ultimatum I need to step away. And that preserves my relationship with my partner right. that prevents the conflict from entering our dyad, that is unnecessary complication. That is messiness that is very avoidable. So I hope that that's of service today. I would love to know if you've been in similar situations. And I hope that you have a beautiful rest of your week. See you soon. Bye bye