

Laura Cox Kaplan ([00:00:01](#)):

Ready to add a big dose of positivity and empowered perspective to your day? You've come to the right place. Welcome to She Said/She Said Podcast. I'm Laura Cox Kaplan. Here we tackle everything from imposter syndrome and confidence building, to the best advice on how to lead yourself through life pivots, including the ones that knock you flat. For the past three years I've talked to hundreds of experts about their stories. Here you'll find their actionable advice and lessons, as well as my own tools that you can put to use in your own life. Stick around, I think you'll find this investment in you, well worth it.

Laura Cox Kaplan ([00:00:46](#)):

How can we learn to love others more? Today's guest says it starts with a good hard look in the mirror. Dr. Stefanie Stahl is an internationally best selling author and psychologist. Her critically acclaimed book, entitled The child in You, has sold more than a million copies and has been the number one best selling non-fiction book in her native Germany for the past three years. The book is now available in the US.

Laura Cox Kaplan ([00:01:16](#)):

I'm talking to Stefanie today about her unique approach, and how it can help us get along better and love more fully. How perfect for Valentine's month. As I think about the challenges we're having as a nation, but that to some degree are playing out around the world, Stefanie gives us practical, thoughtful, and constructive advice for thinking about our own experiences, and how they impact our lives into adulthood. But how do we get the balance right between self love, if you will, that's needed to love others, and what can become selfish love? We're going to tackle that topic and so much more in our conversation today. Dr. Stefanie Stahl, welcome to She Said/She Said podcast.

Dr. Stefanie Stahl ([00:02:09](#)):

Thank you very much, Laura, for having me.

Laura Cox Kaplan ([00:02:12](#)):

Well I'm delighted to have you. We have had more than our fair share of technical difficulties, Stefanie and I are joining each other, she is in Germany for this conversation and I of course-

Dr. Stefanie Stahl ([00:02:23](#)):

Tenerife, I'm on Tenerife. I live in Germany, but my husband and I escaped the winter and the COVID situation in Germany, so in here in Tenerife it's much nicer.

Laura Cox Kaplan ([00:02:36](#)):

Oh, sounds beautiful. It sounds really beautiful. I wish I were there with you. So let's start, I want you to tell me a little bit about yourself.

Dr. Stefanie Stahl ([00:02:45](#)):

I'm a German psychotherapist. And I'm holding seminars about self esteem and relationships. One of my core topics is fear of commitment. And yes, I'm working since 30 years as a psychotherapist. I studied psychology, and I've been writing more than 10 books now. And the one that is published now in the US is in Germany and Europe very, very successful.

Laura Cox Kaplan ([00:03:20](#)):

Very successful indeed. You've sold well over a million copies in Europe. It's been the number one best selling non-fiction book in Germany for the past three years. So to say it's a success is kind of an understatement, right?

Dr. Stefanie Stahl (00:03:36):

Thank you.

Laura Cox Kaplan (00:03:36):

What is it about this book that resonates so deeply with so many people?

Dr. Stefanie Stahl (00:03:42):

Well, I think the answer is very simple, because it helps so many people. Through my work as a psychotherapist I invented problem diagnosis strategy, or a special approach, how you can figure out what your problem really is behind all these seemingly very, very complicated patterns that you're suffering from in your everyday life. And I made a very simple strategy, step by step how to solve your problems. And obviously this approach is working very well because it's helped so many people. And, yes, that is the reason why the book is so successful, I guess.

Laura Cox Kaplan (00:04:32):

So the book is called The Child in You, and it breaks down along really two dimensions, which I think is so interesting. The shadow child, and the sun child, right? Maybe describe for us what that means, what those two dimensions are, and how that works?

Dr. Stefanie Stahl (00:04:53):

Okay. The child, the inner child, is a very well known psychological concept, as well as in the US, as well as in Germany and all over Europe, and it's so to say an old hat. But what I did, I invented a really new approach to it. And the shadow child stands in my approach for all the injuries you suffered from within your upbringing and that are deeply imprinted within your brain. Imprinted as mental patterns that you carry over into adulthood. So our reality is what our imprints are. One could say, these deep imprints, are the lens we look through to see the world. And so they govern our thinking, our perception, our behavior, and overall our feelings.

Dr. Stefanie Stahl (00:05:54):

And the shadow child is a metaphor for all these imprints that weren't that happy, that were a little bit problematic, and that we gather during our upbringing. And The sun child stands for the solution for the target state. And for our healthy inner entities, so to say. And the third psychological entity is the inner adults. And the inner adults or the adult eye stands for our clear thinking, for our reason.

Laura Cox Kaplan (00:06:33):

So let's talk about this in practice. Somebody comes to you, maybe they're having self esteem issues. Talk about how you begin to diagnose and sort of how you put this shadow child and sun child into practice. I know you start with the shadow child, which is interesting, as opposed to starting with the more positive version. But I'd love for you to talk about how you use this approach. Someone comes in and says, "I'm having real challenges with self esteem," or you've diagnosed them as having challenges with self esteem. Talk about how you apply these theories and how this works.

Dr. Stefanie Stahl (00:07:12):

First of all, every psychological problem comes down to self esteem. So all our problems, or mental problems, are linked to our self esteem. And usually people that are coming to me, my clients, are telling me a story of what is going wrong in their life. So, and then I say, "Come on," first of all what I always do in all my work, I look at the central theme. Because everybody has a central theme. And that is not very complicated and this central theme comes down to our beliefs.

Dr. Stefanie Stahl (00:07:53):

And our beliefs are so to say the programming language of our self esteem, because the self esteem itself is a little bit abstract, what is it? But you can formulate it in very simple sentence. Such sentence as, "I'm not enough." "I'm less important than you." "I'm coming up too short." So these are typical wordings of beliefs and belief systems, and we develop these beliefs within our childhood during our upbringing.

Dr. Stefanie Stahl (00:08:31):

Let's say, little Michael, I just make an example, there is Michael, as he grew up his parents were running a bakery and they had four children. So little Michael was just one of four and his parents were really busy all day long, so they couldn't give little Michael the attention care he needed. And what children then do, and think and feel is not, "Mommy and daddy are totally overburdened and they shouldn't have had four children." But what little Mikey thought and felt was, "I'm not enough. I'm a burden. I'm too much here." And that is how beliefs come about.

Dr. Stefanie Stahl (00:09:19):

And that is the inner part within ourselves that I call the shadow child. So the shadow child is about our beliefs, our feelings that are linked to the beliefs. In Michael's case he very quickly feels injured. And when he feels injured, he starts getting very angry. That is very common connection that everybody knows. If you feel injured, that you start getting angry or mad. And what the shadow child is also about is the protection strategies, self protection strategies. And this is the behavior that he has developed with the aim to compensate our bad feelings and our bad beliefs.

Dr. Stefanie Stahl (00:10:10):

So later Michael started very early on in life, to act like a very good boy. So he became over adapted. And these beliefs, these feelings that are linked to it, and the self protection strategy as a behavioral program, he carries over in adulthood. But this process is completely unknown, unconscious, he's not aware of all these connections. And as an adult, he's easily triggered whenever he gets the feeling that somebody is not taking him serious or doesn't address to his needs.

Dr. Stefanie Stahl (00:11:00):

So when, for example, his girlfriend Sarah. It can be such a [inaudible 00:11:06] thing that she forgets to buy a bag of Michael's favorite chips. And this little event can lead Michael to ... That he feels very injured because it's not you. We don't we don't respond to the events outside, but to the interpretation of the events. and Michael's interpretation through his shadow child eyes, is not, "Sarah has just forgotten to buy a bag of chips because she's not perfect, neither am I perfect." But his interpretation is, "She neglects me. She doesn't take me important. She doesn't love me." And so on.

Dr. Stefanie Stahl (00:11:56):

But he is not aware of all these interpretations. He's completely unaware of it. Neither does he know that all these interpretations are linked to his childhood. His awareness starts with his anger. So he gets very upset and then he starts fighting and bickering with Sarah. And of course, Sarah has also a shadow child, and Sarah's parents cared a lot for little Sarah but they had very exact ideas about wrong and right. So they set quite narrow boundaries for Sarah, and they far more often criticized her than they praised her.

Dr. Stefanie Stahl (00:12:49):

So, Sarah's shadow child has developed beliefs like, "I'm not enough. I never can do anything right." So when Michael's outburst hits Sarah's shadow child, she's triggered as well. But she doesn't talk back because she's over just as well. But what she does, she withdraws offended and starts sulking up to three days. So what we can see here, and what very often happens, is that there are not two adults who are having a reasonable, sensible discussion, but two children who are fighting with each other and just unconsciously reacting to their inner programs which are highly subjective. Because one can easily imagine if Sarah's or Michael's parents would have been different, and not so overburdened, or were better educated how to bring up a child, they would have developed very different beliefs.

Laura Cox Kaplan (00:14:14):

Let me ask you a question-

Dr. Stefanie Stahl (00:14:15):

So these beliefs are very, very arbitrary and actually don't belong to Sarah or Michael, but only belong to their parents.

Laura Cox Kaplan (00:14:22):

Yeah, okay. So a question about that, because I'm struck by the fact that what you're describing, at least in my mind, they're sort of micro aggressions, right? As opposed to macro. You're not talking necessarily about abuse, or real neglect, you're talking about things that a child has internalized based on the way that they're viewing the world, right?

Dr. Stefanie Stahl (00:14:45):

Exactly.

Laura Cox Kaplan (00:14:46):

Some parents are better at parenting than others, right? We all have our challenges. Anybody who's listening who's a parent knows that it is ... Every day is a great, fulfilling, and rewarding experience but it's also incredibly challenging at the same time. But what you're talking about are how these little micro aggressions can add up and really inform the way that you view the world long term. Things that you don't even realize, am I getting that?

Dr. Stefanie Stahl (00:15:16):

Laura, that is exactly the point. I always state there is not such a thing like perfect parents or perfect childhoods. So everybody has at least a little shadow child within himself. And apart from that, I state,

even if the parents were perfect that wouldn't be good. Who wants to have perfect parents? You need some space to develop.

Laura Cox Kaplan ([00:15:47](#)):

Right.

Dr. Stefanie Stahl ([00:15:47](#)):

And so either way, everybody has his little shortcomings, his little shadow child. And these imprints are so subjective because normally the parents don't want their children to develop these beliefs. It works like this. Later children have to get a picture and explanation what is happening out there in the world. And when you're, let's say, the child is four years old and daddy's acting aggressively towards him. Yes, maybe even beating the child, yes? The child will never think, "My dad is too aggressive, maybe he should go to psychotherapy to deal better with his emotions." But he thinks and feels, the child thinks and feels, "I'm not enough, I'm bad."

Dr. Stefanie Stahl ([00:16:48](#)):

So little children don't have at all an overview about the behavior of their parents or an independent moral opinion about their parents. So they always blame themselves. That is within their possibilities of their cognitive development. Everything else they are just not ready for, prepared for. And that is how these beliefs come about.

Dr. Stefanie Stahl ([00:17:17](#)):

And since the first six years of our upbringing, or the first six years in life are so very important for the development for our brain, these years have a big, big, huge impact on how our brain will be formed. Because when we are born, that is very interesting to know, our brain is only developed to 25%. And these 25% are concerning only very basic functions like the regulation of hunger and satiety, or the regulation of temperature, so very, very basic functions. And all higher brain functions like our emotional development, or our cognitive thinking, will be developed by the interaction between the child and its surrounding, its parents especially.

Laura Cox Kaplan ([00:18:25](#)):

Right.

Dr. Stefanie Stahl ([00:18:25](#)):

First caregivers.

Laura Cox Kaplan ([00:18:27](#)):

Yeah. As a parent, and I suspect this is probably true of parents listening, with your earlier example where you described, like I said before, what I would consider to be micro aggressions, and sort of a parent not realizing the impact on a child and how they were in turn ... How Michael was internalizing ... In his mind he was being neglected and overlooked. How can parents maybe get out in front, or maybe just anticipate or be or be quicker to diagnose their own children when they begin to wreck ... Is there a way to recognize these behaviors, or is this just something that we ... Everybody has a shadow child and a sun child, we're just going to have to deal with it when we grow up? Or is there a way that parents can help sort of recognize these patterns of behavior earlier? Does that make sense?

Dr. Stefanie Stahl ([00:19:20](#)):

Sure. Yes, sure. I think one of the most important things parents should address to is their own shadow child, so that they just don't pass along their own shadow child imprints onto their children. And that happens very quickly. For example, if you were neglected as a child by your mother, then usually there are two pathways you can go down. The first is you overcompensate the behavior of your own mother and maybe you become over protective, you compensate too much. Or you're going the same way like your mother so you're neglecting your child as well.

Dr. Stefanie Stahl ([00:20:11](#)):

Or what is happening more often, you make it better than your mother, but since your norms from your upbringing, are quite low, you're maybe the 2.0 version of your mother. So, you make ... Yes, you're doing a better job, but it's far not enough. But you don't realize that, because your norms are the ones you have from your childhood and not the norms that are ... How would you say in English? That are-

Laura Cox Kaplan ([00:20:50](#)):

So you're basically you're ... Sarah 2.0 has made progress, but there's still things that she has not recognized as it relates to her shadow child, even though she may be better than her mother was. But there's still things that she needs to become more self aware about.

Dr. Stefanie Stahl ([00:21:07](#)):

Exactly, yes. More self aware. So it's very important, I wrote a whole book about that subject that ... About the relationship between parents and children that the parents don't pass along their own shadow child to their children. But basically the only two things parents should really be aware of are to pass enough love and care for the children to meet the basic psychological need for attachment that every human being has. This basic psychological need for attachment, so that the child feels welcomed and loved and so on.

Dr. Stefanie Stahl ([00:21:52](#)):

And the other thing is to support the child's autonomy, so that the child is allowed to feel its feelings. That doesn't mean that you set healthy boundaries. But first of all, the child gets the message, "Your feelings are okay. You're allowed to have them. We understand your feelings. Although we can't support always your behavior." Sometimes you have to make some boundaries, but the child gets the message, "I'm okay with my feelings, okay, and I'm allowed to have an own will."

Dr. Stefanie Stahl ([00:22:33](#)):

And so, the child learns relationships are something I can shape, or help to shape with, and relationship is not only thing I'm at the mercy." And that is the foundation for creating later on life also healthy and sound relationships. Because what we need is a good balance. And that is good for everybody, what I say now. A good and healthy balance between our abilities to attach to people, and our abilities to be autonomous and independent. Because all our lives from morning until we go to bed. From the first day, to our last day, is always decision making, "Where do I adapt now?" Where I give in, where I adapt myself to other people, and where I go my own way, make my own decision. Every day.

Laura Cox Kaplan ([00:23:51](#)):

Right.

Dr. Stefanie Stahl (00:23:52):

Do I listen now to what somebody is telling, or is it for me now more important that I'm playing on my mobile phone? Or whatever, always you have to make little decisions whether you adapt to other people, or whether you do your own thing, what you actually want. And these two basic psychological need of attachment and autonomy afford very, very different skills. For attachment, you have to have the skills that you can adapt to other people. That means also that you can really listen to what other people are saying, that you have certain empathy to understand what they mean and their feelings. To cooperate, to give in if necessary, to trust.

Dr. Stefanie Stahl (00:24:46):

Without trust you never can have a close and harmless relationship if you are not able to trust fully somebody. And for independency and the need for control, independency, autonomy, you have to have a very different skill set. There are already many people struggling because they don't have a good connection to their feelings because their inner balance is huge in favor for attachment. They are over adaptive, and over adaptive people always struggle to feel their own feelings.

Dr. Stefanie Stahl (00:25:22):

Because if you have strong feelings, they wish to be fulfilled. But then you have to go on the side of autonomy and make a clear target, and then you have to stand up for your wishes and your desires. And these are the skills for autonomy. So you have to feel your feelings, you have to set yourself some targets and goals, then you have to speak out your demands. Then you have to speak out your desires and wishes and what you want. And not everybody will please, maybe by it, so you have to have the ability to to fight, stand up and ... How you say, to assert yourself.

Laura Cox Kaplan (00:26:08):

Assert yourself, yeah.

Dr. Stefanie Stahl (00:26:09):

And the ability to assert yourself, and if necessary to separate. And the art is the last one many people don't manage because they don't even manage to decouple in a healthy way from their own parents. So they're living their lives not in the way of their own wishes and autonomy, but they are living their life to please their parents and to meet their expectations.

Laura Cox Kaplan (00:26:38):

Yeah, yeah. I want to drill down on something that I think is such a challenge, certainly in the United States, but really globally as well. And that is that people are angrier and unhappier than they have been as a population. And while not everybody is angry and unhappy, maybe there's more people that would consider themselves angry, and unhappy, and scared, and fearful. Talk about how your approach, your diagnostic approach, can apply as it relates to our engagement with others when we encounter somebody who has a different point of view. Who has different ... They adhere to a different political philosophy, perhaps. And engaging on social media, interacting with each other, it really feels like we're kind of at an all time low in terms of the way that we treat each other. Maybe talk about how your approach in the book can help us get a handle on shifting this so that we think about our interactions with each other a little differently.

Dr. Stefanie Stahl (00:27:55):

Well, what I always state is that self reflection is a political necessity. Because many people think, or some people think at least, especially older men, if I may say. That all this psychological stuff, and this self reflection, and, and, and is something for women in the menopause. You know what I mean? They're downgraded. But I state self reflection is a political necessity. Why? The more and the better you are connected to your inner feelings, and the more understanding you have why you act in which way, and what motivates you, what drives you. So the more insight you have, what's going on within you mentally and psychologically, the much more aware you become of your inner motives.

Dr. Stefanie Stahl (00:28:56):

And that prevents you from acting out your inner child unconsciously, and unaware to other people. Like the example with Michael. Now, Michael and Sarah is just a couple that bickering, but if Michael had far political reach, or far reach within his business because he is on a very high position in his job, then other people will suffer a lot from his actions. Because every little thing [inaudible 00:29:36], Michael is so easily hurt, and so easily injured, and always answers it with anger and aggression. So it has so much impact, our shadow child, on the way we behave and act towards other people that it is very important to deal with it. And the more aware you are, the better you can regulate yourself.

Dr. Stefanie Stahl (00:30:06):

So the next time if Michael would make this inner child work at work. If Michael would read my book, and start working with this inner child, he could do the following exercise. And this exercise is so basic that I call it the Stefanie Stahl mantra. And the exercise goes like this. The name is Catch Yourself and Switch.

Laura Cox Kaplan (00:30:35):

Catch Yourself and Switch.

Dr. Stefanie Stahl (00:30:37):

Michael, now he made over his homework with the shadow child and the next time, he feels his anger coming up. He catches himself, because now he's aware, "Oh, be careful that could be my shadow child." And then he switches to his adult self. So please, clear thinking to the seed of reason. And by doing so he's stepping one step aside and can look onto himself and his little child shadow child from the outside. Which is the base of self reflection that you look to onto yourself form a little bit from the outside.

Dr. Stefanie Stahl (00:31:24):

And from there, he gets easily aware, "Oh, that is my shadow child. He's really ... He feels really hurt now because Sarah forgot to buy the chips. But, Sarah, "I'm not mommy and daddy-" and Sarah loves me, and I think she can sometimes forget anything as well as I do. And this key of thinking would prevent his anger, would prevent him starting an argument with Sarah, so he could regulate himself at an early state. And that's what it is all about.

Dr. Stefanie Stahl (00:32:12):

And I know many people, by the way, who tell me and write me stuff, "Just by catching myself and switching, I changed so much in my life." Because the more you do it, the more little pathways you

install within your brain and the less often your shadow child shows up, because you make new experiences. And you understand that these are deep inner program of feelings of inferiority don't say, actually, anything about your self worth, but only about the at least partial overload of your parents.

Dr. Stefanie Stahl ([00:33:01](#)):

So, it is very important for our society that people start reflecting themselves, to deal better with their own emotions, and to deal better with the emotions of others. So if somebody is behaving towards you not in a very nice way, and you have a good self reflection, you leave this behavior with him. You don't put it to your side. Because when you are triggered and you start feeling like Sarah, "Oh, I'm not enough. He's behaving so badly towards me. Now I feel again like the little one that is not enough." Then you take the behavior of the other person on your side, and then you start having feeling as well. Yes, that you're sad, angry, upset, whatever.

Dr. Stefanie Stahl ([00:34:04](#)):

But if you leave this behavior at the other person, say, "Maybe he has not been very good manners, or maybe he has a very bad day today," or just leave it with him. Then you're not triggered anymore that much. So on both sides to regulate your own inner feelings better, and also to cope better with the behavior of other people, the self reflection about your inner patterns is very, very important.

Laura Cox Kaplan ([00:34:38](#)):

Mm-hmm (affirmative). I want to have you talk about the dimension of gender as it relates to ... Especially this tendency to internalize criticism. I see this in women an awful lot. I see it in women more than men. Men do it too, right? But I see women internalize feedback, constructive criticism, or just criticism and personalize it in a way that I think men typically don't do as much. Can you talk a little bit about the different dimensions of gender and how to your last example how that may apply here?

Dr. Stefanie Stahl ([00:35:20](#)):

Well, women have been, I think, the changes now in society, have been raised differently than previous years. So they were taught to be more adapted, more to be a good girl. And boys were always allowed to be a little bit more aggressive and acting out. But what boys were also told that they should not feel their weak feelings. A boy doesn't cry. So boys learned very, very early to suppress feelings of sorrow, of weakness, of helplessness, but they were allowed to to act out feelings of more aggression than girls and, of course, of pleasure. So these are two feelings men can feel easily. Pleasure, especially in the football stadium, or anger.

Dr. Stefanie Stahl ([00:36:29](#)):

But these weaker feelings, they were more allowed for women. So first of all, they have ... Women usually have more connection to their feelings, to the whole spectrum of feelings. And plus, they were raised in a way more than boys to be a good girl. And I think that is the combination of these two things. But therefore, for that reason, many women are better in being empathetic. Because if you want to know what another person is feeling, you have to get a connection to your own feelings.

Dr. Stefanie Stahl ([00:37:15](#)):

So if your best friend tells you, "Oh I'm so sad. My husband wants to be divorced." Then you first have to make a little connection to your own feeling of sadness, how it would feel for you if somebody who you

really love wants to separate from you. And with this little inner feeling, you can act out empathy and say, "Oh, I'm so sorry for you." But if you weren't allowed, as boys often weren't, to make these connections, because they were taught to be strong, and brave, and tough, then you'll feel awkward in this kind of conversation. And that is what many men do. So if you're feeling awkward, you want to come away from the subject and then you start presenting a solution quickly. Because you don't want to linger on this touchy subject subject of feelings and emotions where you don't feel easy with. And that is the reason why our men are often very eager to present a solution.

Laura Cox Kaplan ([00:38:29](#)):

Very, very well said. Let's talk for a second about this idea of self love which I think is really underscored in the approach that you take here, it really is about respecting yourself, loving yourself. How do you differentiate between this idea of self respect and self love, and selfish love? Because I think the airwaves and magazines are filled with articles that would lead you to believe that certain activities, I would qualify as maybe being a little selfish the in the context of self love. Maybe give us your analysis for the difference between self love versus selfish love?

Dr. Stefanie Stahl ([00:39:16](#)):

I would love to. Now we coming to two very, very important parts of my approach. The first is the sun child, which is about a healthy, and sound, and appropriate self image and self ... I don't like to talk about self love. I always state it's enough when I say, "I'm happy that I'm here, I'm happy that I'm alive." Because self love is too much. If you like yourself, if you think you're okay and I vote for that I'm being here on earth, and alive. And the other thing is, these rather unhealthy selfish [crosstalk 00:40:09]. And on the other side where when you talk about these selfish love.

Laura Cox Kaplan ([00:40:17](#)):

Yes, selfish love. Yeah.

Dr. Stefanie Stahl ([00:40:20](#)):

That is what I call in my approach, a self protection strategy. We haven't been talking a lot about these until now. So Michael, for example, he's not enough. What he is doing for self protection later on in life is, he's striving for perfectionism. So he does a lot for his looks, for his outward appearance. He tries to meet everybody's expectation. He tries to be the best in his job, and to optimize himself more, and more, and more and more. And I think that was the point you were heading for this self optimization and more, and more, me and myself and I.

Laura Cox Kaplan ([00:41:04](#)):

Right.

Dr. Stefanie Stahl ([00:41:04](#)):

And in my approach, this belongs to the self protection strategies. Typical self protection strategies are striving for perfectionism, keeping the peace, striving for power, or struggle for power, to be a control freak, to help a syndrome. Then of course, escape, disguise, retreat. These are typical self protection strategies that you don't have to show the world, because you don't want to show the world how inferior you really feel, and neither you want to feel it yourself all the way.

Dr. Stefanie Stahl (00:41:45):

So early on in life, we develop self protection strategies to compensate this shadow child within us. So the self protection strategies belong to my picture of the shadow child. And I really do in psychotherapy, or within my seminars, or I lead reader through the book, that he really paints down his shadow child. Yes? That you really draw a picture. You make a silhouette of a little child, you write down mommy and daddy, with some keywords, how they behave towards you. And within the belly and chest room of your child you note down your beliefs and the bad feelings that are linked. And then outside in the leg room, you note down yourself protection strategies.

Dr. Stefanie Stahl (00:42:37):

So you have a really clear picture of your ... I want to say programming arrow. Because especially the self protection strategies, they burn our relationships and they burn ourselves. For perfectionism, you're running the risk of a burn out because these people are always over exerting, is this the right way?

Laura Cox Kaplan (00:43:03):

Mm-hmm (affirmative).

Dr. Stefanie Stahl (00:43:03):

Over exerting. Yeah? Is the right word?

Laura Cox Kaplan (00:43:05):

Yeah, overcompensating, potentially. Yeah. But it's-

Dr. Stefanie Stahl (00:43:09):

Really exhausting.

Laura Cox Kaplan (00:43:10):

Yeah, exhausting, okay.

Dr. Stefanie Stahl (00:43:11):

Exhausting to have to mask ... It's a very, very exhausting behavior for themselves, but also for others. And so ... Or if you have these inferiority complex within your shadow child that leads you to withdraw. You're invited to a party, but you think, "No I look too bad, nobody will talk to me, so I better stay at home." Then the loneliness that you are suffering from is a bigger problem than the negative belief itself.

Laura Cox Kaplan (00:43:42):

Right.

Dr. Stefanie Stahl (00:43:43):

Because this negativity belief alone doesn't have that much impact, but the self protection strategies of retreat, perfection, over adaption, keeping the peace, power hungry, control hungry. These are straining your relations. The second part of your question was how to come out of this program, therefore I invented the sun child. And the sun child is a target version. And within the sun child, you look at your

strengths, your resources, you build new beliefs, adequate beliefs. Adequate beliefs that are much more appropriate for your adult reality than the old beliefs. And most important, you also develop self reflection strategies so you're coming from self protection to self reflection.

Dr. Stefanie Stahl ([00:44:44](#)):

So for example if your self protection strategy was keeping the peace, which by the way is not a very fair one, because other people never know where you stand. And at the end, often people who are always trying to keep the peace split off, split up a relationship. But until then, never a bad word was said. So it's very unfair. The partner thinks, "What? Why didn't you say it earlier? I could have changed easily." And then the peacekeeper says, "Well, I told you." But what he did was maybe that he said, "Peep, peep." And if the world didn't stand still with this, "Peep," he withdraws again, offended, starts sulking, and thinks what he always thought, "Well I know nobody is has an interest in my person or wants to hear what I want." So it's a self fulfilling prophecy.

Dr. Stefanie Stahl ([00:45:48](#)):

But the self reflection strategy for this person could be to start opening up your mouth, say what you want and what you don't want. And this linked to new beliefs, to new feelings, to this whole sun child picture, which I lead my readers also through really painting it in beautiful colors, and have many exercises that you install these new beliefs also within your feelings, that you really feel them, and act them, and that you find also a body stance for it, and really, to get a new, new program.

Dr. Stefanie Stahl ([00:46:32](#)):

But not as something just artificial, not an artificial thing in the way of positive thinking, or something like that. That is not my idea, not my approach. But in the way that you get an appropriate self image that is much, much more realistic than the old beliefs and the old self image that you develop during your upbringing.

Laura Cox Kaplan ([00:47:03](#)):

Yeah. We've talked a lot about the impact that parents and caregivers have on children, and I want to be really clear about a point because you make it in the book. It's not about going back and blaming your parents for your current behavior necessarily, right? Talk about how you differentiate between, "Well my parents did this to me, so therefore I am this." That's not really what you're saying, you're talking about becoming much more self aware about the experiences that you've had and how they affected you. Was that right? Am I getting it right?

Dr. Stefanie Stahl ([00:47:40](#)):

Yeah, thank you for that question because it's very, very important. It's not about blaming your parents. It's just, if you want to know how your brain is functioning, and which lenses you are wearing to perceive the world outside, you have to start getting busy with your upbringing, and you have to have these questions, "What are my imprints? What did I carry over from my childhood? Did my parents meet my needs for attachment? Did they meet my needs for autonomy and to become really an independent person that feels up to live its own life and feels up to cope with the difficulties of life, and moreover to enjoy life?" Because to enjoy life is also a very, very important skill for a healthy person.

Dr. Stefanie Stahl ([00:48:44](#)):

And so you have to have a look onto your childhood and how your parents acted towards you. And there are some people, quite a few, who feel really conflicted To do so. they have this conflict of loyalty with the parents, which is actually always a clear sign that they haven't decoupled from their parents in a healthy way. They are still too attached to their parents, and don't dare to manage their life in the way they really want. Because what does it mean to detach in a healthy way from your parents? It doesn't mean that you love them less, but it means that you dare to live your life along your own personal values, and along your own personal ideas, and your own personal needs and wishes. That is detaching in a healthy manner. So, if you feel very conflicted to have a little bit more critical view on your parents that could be really a sign that you're still too closely linked to them.

Laura Cox Kaplan ([00:50:03](#)):

Mm-hmm (affirmative). We've talked a lot about the shadow child and how we recognize these dimensions and you've talked a little bit about the exercises there. Let's shift and talk a bit more about the son child, and this dimension, and how it differs.

Dr. Stefanie Stahl ([00:50:18](#)):

Well the thing is if you want to get rid of old beliefs, old behaviors, old patterns. Then it leads you often to the question, "And what do I do now?" That was my own personal I. So, well, it wasn't that perfect, but at least I knew what to do, that was my program. So I think it's much easier to change if you have something new you can target on, and that is the sun child.

Dr. Stefanie Stahl ([00:50:48](#)):

So first of all, in the sun child, we rebuild these old beliefs. For example if I have a belief, "I'm not enough," then I could make a belief, "I'm enough." If that sounds too much to me, I could shape the belief in the way, "I'm enough for my children," or, "I'm enough for my boss," or, "I'm enough for my friends." So it's very important that the new beliefs are built in a way that at least your inner adult can approve them.

Dr. Stefanie Stahl ([00:51:22](#)):

Because it's not about ... I've never heard about any woman who had a belief, "I'm ugly," that she cured herself by repeatedly saying to herself, "I'm beautiful," yes? That doesn't work. It doesn't work. The new belief have to be realistic and within your reach. So, "I'm beautiful enough." That often works much better because there's also this little sense of humor in it, no? "I'm beautiful enough." Okay, not? Or, "I'm good enough." That sounds then ... You can you can swallow it better. You have to take it because it's not only about that these beliefs linger in your mind, they have to be downloaded into a feeling.

Laura Cox Kaplan ([00:52:10](#)):

Do they have to be realistic, if I'm hearing you correctly?

Dr. Stefanie Stahl ([00:52:13](#)):

They have to be realistic. Because if you have a belief, "I'm very small. I'm a very, very small and very ... I'm not worth at all." And you make a new belief, "I'm the greatest." That would be a narcissistic overcompensation. They have to be realistic. In sense of realistic, and they have to find your own approval.

Laura Cox Kaplan ([00:52:40](#)):

Right.

Dr. Stefanie Stahl ([00:52:41](#)):

So they have to be appropriate for you. And then you think about your strengths, your resources. I mean, I lead readers through these exercises. And then I have many chapters about the self reflection strategies, and as I mentioned earlier in this interview, a good self reflection strategy would be, for example, "I open up my mouth and I stand by my wishes and demands." That is easier said than done. So in my book, I give a lot of help how you can actually manage that.

Dr. Stefanie Stahl ([00:53:21](#)):

But what I would like to do maybe for the listeners is an exercise, which anybody who wants to who is listening now just could do with me. And that is for the sun child. That you dive into a sun child situation that you already experienced. Because anybody of us has also his sound parts and healthy parts of personality and experiences moments and situations where he feels That he or she feels good, and sound, and safe, and sound.

Dr. Stefanie Stahl ([00:54:06](#)):

For example, joining a very nice dinner with close friends, or cuddling with my dog, or have a lovely day at the beach, or go hiking in the mountains. So just imagine yourself a situation where your sun child is upfront, yes? It's already there, you just have to go into the situation and then dive into the situation with all your senses. With perception, eyes, feelings, nose, smell, everything. And really dive into it and give these feelings that arise now when you're imagining this beautiful situation, give them really a big space within your body. Allow them to be there right now.

Dr. Stefanie Stahl ([00:55:01](#)):

And then imagine there would be a lovely person that you like a lot, or a good fairy mother, or Superman, any person it could be just in your imagination or a real person, where you have a very, very good relation to, standing behind you and putting tenderly his or her hands on your shoulders. And then is saying in a very, very lovely and tender voice into your ears, new beliefs like, "You're enough. You're as worthy as everybody is. You are strong. You are good. I'm very proud of you." Yeah?

Dr. Stefanie Stahl ([00:55:59](#)):

Imagine all these lovely new beliefs and really feel them within your body. Give them space, these feelings in your body. And anchor this state deeply within you. Maybe you can find a little gesture that keeps reminding you within your everyday life when you need this power stance, when you need this powerful feeling that you can carry over into your everyday life. And you can do this exercise as often as you want and whenever you need it because you can go really quickly into this source of your own power.

Laura Cox Kaplan ([00:56:45](#)):

Yeah. Beautiful. That's really beautiful. It really is. I'd love to know before we end our conversation, how did you get interested in this work in the first place? I know you've been a psychotherapist practicing in Germany for 30 plus years. What was your original interest in the work?

Dr. Stefanie Stahl (00:57:08):

Already as a child, it started very early. I remember when I was a child I was often thinking about, "Why is this person this way and the other is so different? Why do I like some people? Other people I don't like so much? why is one person so diligent, one of my other students, the other is rather lazy?" So I was often thinking about, "Why our peoples are different and what makes the difference?" So I have this genuine interest in psychology. And until today, my main, main interest, and what I'm really researching for is the structure of the psyche. And that is what all my books are about. Also this book that is now translated in English, The Child in You, it's all about the structure.

Dr. Stefanie Stahl (00:58:11):

So, the shadow child that gives people a structure at hand, and everybody can put his individual problem, his individual issues into the structure. As well as the sun child is a problem solving structure. So everybody within this structure can make his or her own new content. I don't present the content, you build your own content, you build your new beliefs, you decide which new self reflection strategies you want to install. You figure out what are your strengths and resources.

Dr. Stefanie Stahl (00:58:59):

I don't tell it to you, yes? You find your own thing. You come to your true and authentic self. And I only present the structure. And that is with all my books I'm always thinking ... Actually are at the moment, currently, I'm writing a new book. And there I want to explain how the human psyche is built up. The structure of the human psyche which is very, very closely built around the demands of evolution. And I found it always so interesting to figure out how people tick and how the human psyche is structured. Yeah, that is my passion, so to say.

Laura Cox Kaplan (00:59:46):

I love that, I love that. Stefanie, this has been fabulous. I really enjoyed the conversation. For our listeners, the book is called The Child in You, it is available in the United States as well as all around the world. I highly, highly encourage you to check it out. It's a great, thoughtful, interesting approach to really getting to the meat of what makes us tick and why we react the way that we sometimes do. And in this month it's still February, in this month of love, and showing ourselves compassion, and showing love and compassion to others. This is a great, great place to spend some time.

Dr. Stefanie Stahl (01:00:24):

I would love to add Valentine's Day is coming soon and because of corona, we can't meet so many people, so have a date with your sun child.

Laura Cox Kaplan (01:00:36):

Oh, that's lovely.

Dr. Stefanie Stahl (01:00:36):

Have a date with your self, have a date with your sun child.

Laura Cox Kaplan (01:00:39):

I love that, I love that. Thank you so much, really appreciate it.

This transcript was exported on Feb 07, 2021 - view latest version [here](#).

Dr. Stefanie Stahl ([01:00:43](#)):

Thank you for having me.

Laura Cox Kaplan ([01:00:45](#)):

To learn more about my guest today, Dr. Stefanie Stahl, check out the show notes for this episode, Episode 138. And be sure to pick up a copy of Dr. Stahl's terrific book entitled The Child in You. I've included a link in the show notes for the book as well. She offers such practical and constructive advice on getting to the bottom of behaviors that are often so counterproductive.

Laura Cox Kaplan ([01:01:13](#)):

Please be sure to let me know what you think about this episode. You can contact me via the website, or send me a direct message via Instagram. And speaking of Instagram, if you're listening to this episode on your phone, please be sure to snap a screenshot and share it to your Instagram and Facebook stories. I'm so grateful you joined us this week. I hope you found this investment in you well worth it. I'll see you again next week. Until then, take care. (silence)