

Thanks for joining us on Not Boring CEs, where we don't think you should be bored to death while getting your Continuing Ed. Keep listening here, then hop over to notboringces.com to get all your online CE credits. Alright, y'all, let's get to learning.

Krista Cargle-Niles is a couples therapist and dating coach with 19 years' experience helping individuals and partners navigate every stage of romantic relationships. Drawing on a systems-based approach, she integrates evidence-based methods, including Gottman Method couples therapy and cognitive-behavioral therapy, to support clients in improving communication, deepening connection, and using dating apps to find true partnership. In addition to her therapeutic work, Krista has created a structured curriculum that teaches clients how to date with clarity and confidence, guiding hundreds of people toward finding lasting love.

Allison Puryear (she/her): Alright, welcome! We have Krista Niles today. Krista, will you kind of...

Allison Puryear (she/her): first talk a little bit about why is... why is dating something that you specialize in, you have so much information about? Like, why is this your area of interest?

Krista Niles: Absolutely, Allison, thank you so much for having me.

Allison Puryear (she/her): This is so exciting.

Krista Niles: This is just one of my favorite topics to dive into, honestly, just because I think it is such a pain point for clients. I got into this a bunch of years back, just as I was really entering kind of the body-positive space.

Krista Niles: And what I found is that one of the major pain points, especially for plus-size women, as I was kind of starting to particularly work with plus-size women, was around dating, and feeling

Krista Niles: even able to dive into that world, or even able to put themselves out there at all. And what I found is that it actually is not even remotely unique to plus-size women.

Krista Niles: that this is a pain point that crosses communities, that, this is an area where skills and a skills focus can be really helpful. Because what I was noticing in my practice is that some of the deeper work, the self-confidence work, body image work.

Krista Niles: feeling... helping clients feel ready, that it wasn't enough, and that actually focusing in on skills was really helpful to actually get clients with a dating profile out there, meeting people, and starting to have some success with it.

Allison Puryear (she/her): Yeah, absolutely. It's interesting how, like, as therapists, we often go to just the feelings so much, and we can spend all our time with the feelings.

Allison Puryear (she/her): Instead of realizing there may be a skills gap, or there might just be, like... it's different now, dating, than it was before. And the way their parents dated, like, their parents don't have good advice for them, if this is somebody dating online. You know, like, there's just... it's a different world right now than it was...

Allison Puryear (she/her): For the way it's always been before.

Krista Niles: Absolutely, and I do think that there is an expectations

Krista Niles: ... setting that is very helpful to have. Just a lot of people are... maybe they've seen other people have the experience of...

Krista Niles: meeting somebody and having it be very romantic, or kind of a romantic rom-com, meet-cute kind of moment, and they really want that for themselves. And the truth is that the, technicalities of meeting somebody, of actually

Krista Niles: Getting connected with somebody who might end up being a good fit for you is deeply unromantic.

Allison Puryear (she/her): And, and so I, I think that....

Krista Niles: a lot of times it can feel, you know, I think maybe therapists in particular, a lot of us, I think.

Krista Niles: have really excellent social skills. I always have considered myself something of an anomaly among therapists, because I had to put in huge amounts of effort and work into dating. I did dating from 2005 until 2020, when I met my wonderful husband. On and off, I had some relationships in there.

Krista Niles: But, but I definitely, I just, I know a lot of therapists who met their partners in college, or who just, met their partners in real life, and, never really had to dive into dating as much.

Krista Niles: And so I think that, sometimes when you had that, that experience, or you had that feeling of, oh, well, if you, if you,

Krista Niles: Just know good people, if you're social, if you get out there, this will happen, that that can be your expectation of it, when the truth is that there actually are incredible tools nowadays

Krista Niles: That can help clients put the real effort and good work into actually finding a partner and creating that

Krista Niles: romantic life for themselves down the line. But the work itself is deeply unromantic.

Allison Puryear (she/her): I love the honesty there, too, because...

Allison Puryear (she/her): most of the good work in therapy is not anything anybody's excited about doing, right? Right. Right. And when you're talking about dating, like, it sounds like it could be really fun. It sounds like it could be, like, a lighter version of therapy, but my guess is it's not therapy-light.

Allison Puryear (she/her): Because dating taps into all of our not-enoughness, it taps into our self-consciousness, it taps into our skills gaps.

Allison Puryear (she/her): So, yeah, I can imagine there's a lot of good, juicy stuff there.

Krista Niles: It is incredibly vulnerable just by its very nature. If you think about it, you're putting pictures of yourself and some information about yourself online.

Krista Niles: For a bunch of strangers to, like, scroll past and judge whether you're worthy of a swipe right or a swipe... swipe left.

Krista Niles: Yeah. Like, that is an incredibly vulnerable thing to do. It is also, it's a behavior that goes against operant conditioning. So, operant conditioning being essentially

Krista Niles: the encouragement or discouragement of a behavior through consequences. Does a behavior happen and then it gets rewarded? Well, that behavior is likely to happen more. Does a behavior happen and it gets punished? Well, it's likely to happen less. And dating, by its very nature, is very punishing.

Allison Puryear (she/her): It is the kind of thing where you are going to be sending messages, and you're gonna get no response.

Krista Niles: You're going to go back and forth with somebody, and then they disappear. You're gonna go on a date with somebody, and they are awful. You're gonna get a little ways down the road with somebody, and they're gonna ghost you.

Krista Niles: Right? You're gonna show up to a date, and nobody shows up, you get stood up, right? Like, they're... oh my gosh, there are so many things about it that are deeply punishing.

Allison Puryear (she/her): And yet you have to keep coming back and doing that same behavior?

Krista Niles: really rough. It's very hard.

Allison Puryear (she/her): Yeah, I hadn't ever thought about it from, like, an operant conditioning lens. You're exactly right.

Krista Niles: Yeah.

Allison Puryear (she/her): Yeah.

Krista Niles: Well, you see it, when you start working with clients around dating, it is so incredibly clear. Because, clients will, put a profile up on a dating app, they'll be on there for maybe, like, a week and a half, and then they're gonna come back into session, they're gonna be like, oh yeah, so this isn't working. I think I'm just gonna, I'm just gonna delete the app.

Krista Niles: And part of your job as a therapist is to get them not to do that, is to help them to stick with it and continue to use the skills over and over and over again. And I'll, of course, I'll go into what some of those specific skills are.

Krista Niles: But, it just... it's your job as a therapist to help them to... to see, no, this is your brain.

Krista Niles: telling you to stop, because in any other, like, circumstance, if you're getting punished this much, you should stop doing it. It isn't worth your time. But this is the kind of thing, it's a little bit like searching for jobs, is kind of similar, right? Like, you're gonna spend 20 minutes getting your resume looking good, and another 30 writing a cover letter, and you're gonna send out a job application, and...

Krista Niles: you never hear back, right? You're gonna get a few interviews in, and they're gonna go with another candidate. It's... I do think that job interviews and... or searching for jobs and dating are just these two life areas that are deeply punishing, and yet you have to keep coming back and doing them.

Allison Puryear (she/her): Yeah, when I think about... so, online dating was really... it was new when I was in my mid-20s, and single.

Allison Puryear (she/her): And so, that was back when, eHarmony was, like, I think that and OkCupid. But eHarmony was the one, if you actually wanted a relationship, you went on back in... I can't even think of the year. Like 2005 or something. ...

Allison Puryear (she/her): And I remember it feeling like a part-time job.

Allison Puryear (she/her): Like, I was only on it for 3 months, and I was like, this is exhausting. This is, like, fatiguing. I'm, like, showing up, trying to show up as myself, so it can be, like, a clear opt-in, opt-out.

Allison Puryear (she/her): I'm going on these dates with people that... some of them, I'm like, well, you know, his profile didn't really snag me, but maybe in person it'll be different. Those kinds of things. And I just remember it being, like, a lot of work.

Allison Puryear (she/her): A lot of work.

Krista Niles: it is an incredible amount of work, and having that expectation is actually really good, that as clients are coming in... so I... I kind of have this mindset that I try to give to clients, which is... just as a little bit of this kind of, like, down-to-earth.

Krista Niles: and yet very hopeful. I call it, like, cynicism?

Krista Niles: plus certainty. And I think if therapists can really lean into, like, the cynicism of modern dating, plus a certainty that if you keep coming back, that it will work, that's very helpful, because you are absolutely right, it is a part-time job.

Krista Niles: This is the kind of thing that every day, you're gonna want your clients to be spending a certain amount of time on those apps. You're going to want them to be... to have a really clear strategy as to what they're doing, with really clear objectives that they're going to try to meet.

Krista Niles: And, and to keep coming back day after day after day and doing it, and then to take vacations as you would from a normal job, too. Like, okay, I gotta take a week off, I am burned out. What are you gonna do with that week off, and how are you going to come back in when that week off is done? But I think thinking about it like a part-time job.

Krista Niles: It's a great idea, because it, genuinely, it's a massive amount of work, and it's emotional, really emotional, really vulnerable, work.

Allison Puryear (she/her): And I think... Nowadays, it's not uncommon for people to meet their long-term partners on these apps.

Allison Puryear (she/her): Even if their parents might not get it, even if their grandmother thinks it's crazy. ...

Allison Puryear (she/her): I think the way that you... the people you're surrounded with can...

Allison Puryear (she/her): also kind of help you stick with it, or make you feel like, yeah, this is kind of weird, like, why would I think I'd meet somebody online if I haven't yet? You know, it's just like anything else. When you're around a bunch of naysayers, it's a lot easier to give up.

Krista Niles: I think that's one of the hardest things for folks. We... everybody has an opinion about online dating, especially, I would say especially people who haven't done it.

Krista Niles: Have an opinion about online dating, and there's a lot of, like...

Krista Niles: You know, there's this myth of, like, the second you stop looking, then you're gonna find the person.

Krista Niles: The, the, you know, trying too hard, that's what's getting in your way. There's this, kind of these kind of modern...

Krista Niles: Phrases about online dating, like, ugh, swipe culture is just ruining everything.

Krista Niles: And...

Krista Niles: There is some reality to this, right? I mean, there really is some reality to this, that, a lot of the apps are owned by one company, Match Group.

Krista Niles: It's really incredible how much of the market Match Group has snatched up.

Krista Niles: They buy dating apps, so in 2018, they bought Hinge, which at that time had an annual, revenue of about \$9 million. And by 2022, it had an annual revenue of about \$248 million.

Allison Puryear (she/her): Wow.

Krista Niles: Right? So they, they take a dating app, and they create all of these paywalls, they add advertising into the platform, and they essentially are, making it so that it is harder to meet somebody, people are staying on there longer, and, ...

Krista Niles: And it... so it's... there... there's a... there is a cynicism to this, that the market is owned by one big company.

Krista Niles: That, that really, their intent...

Krista Niles: is to make money, rather than to help you meet your partner. And so we have, for example, years back, OkCupid had this beautiful mechanism where you could create your own algorithm to bring in the right people for you. And I had a whole strategy developed for folks around how to use this algorithm

Krista Niles: To, just make it so that you're really only seeing people who are actually a decent fit for you.

Krista Niles: coming into your, sphere on OkCupid.

Krista Niles: And Match Group bought them, and I don't know if it was intentional or what, but they... they've broken that, system. That system was actually developed by two Stanford researchers.

Krista Niles: who, I believe they were statisticians, actually, who kind of knew how to use data to, to make dating work, and, you know, Match broke it.

Krista Niles: And, and so, being able to,

Krista Niles: You know, being able to lean in, even though a lot of these apps are working against you to some extent, and to still know that you will be able to meet somebody if you keep using the skills, it just takes a lot of support. And so, if you've got people out there who are saying.

Krista Niles: This doesn't work. Swipe culture's ruined everything. Just stop trying. You're gonna meet somebody the second you stop trying.

Krista Niles: you're gonna be really susceptible to that. I'll be honest, like, my last round of dating, which lasted 8 months, it was in 2019 into 2020, the beginning of the pandemic, and I was a dating coach, and I had all of these skills, and I'm on all the apps, and I'm using all the things that I teach.

Krista Niles: And I swear to God, I got about 2 months in, and I saw this article, I think it was in the New York Times, about how, like.

Krista Niles: like, is it possible to meet a partner through online dating? I don't know. It was, like, somebody who was writing about, like, oh, I had a lot of fun with online dating, but I did it for 2 years, and I just don't know if it's possible to meet a partner through it. And I, even with everything that I know, and all the clients that I had helped, and all the success that I had seen.

Krista Niles: I was reading this article being like, dang, maybe it doesn't work, and I had to remind myself

Krista Niles: No, keep your head in the game here. Like, stay focused, you can make this work, you can... by definition, you're gonna keep doing it until you meet somebody.

Krista Niles: And, and clients, they need a lot of help and support, not only from you, but also, just as a therapist, if you can help them build that good community so that they are hearing the supportive voices.

Krista Niles: And that they're able to screen out

Krista Niles: some of the naysayers and some of the people, the peanut gallery who doesn't actually know what they're talking about. That's really important and really helpful for clients.

Allison Puryear (she/her): Yeah, and I mean, I think about the way things have evolved.

Allison Puryear (she/her): Maybe back 20, 30 years ago, and before, meeting people out and about.

Allison Puryear (she/her): made a lot more sense, but nowadays, with people working from home, who's... is it gonna be your Uber driver? Is it gonna be, like... or your Uber Eats driver? Who's gonna be the one person you interact with that could be the one if you're not making concerted effort? Because we're... we know we're getting together a lot less as a culture, ...

Allison Puryear (she/her): It's... it's just not something that is, ...

Allison Puryear (she/her): dating is not something that is supported by our culture in the way that it has been in the past, so we have to adapt.

Krista Niles: Right, I, ...

Krista Niles: I think that that is really true. There's interesting research on this. So, the Pew Research Center actually

Krista Niles: has, some stats on how many people are actually meeting their partner through dating apps or through online dating, and the numbers are actually lower than I would expect, just based on who I know in my life, and just anecdotally, my experience. I'm a couples therapist, so the couples that I see.

Krista Niles: But what the Pew Research Center has found is that 1 in 10 partnered adults have met their partner through online dating.

Allison Puryear (she/her): So it's definitely on the floor. I would have thought higher, yeah.

Krista Niles: Absolutely, and even under 30, it's 1 in 5, which is, you know, that's 20%, that's a decent amount. At the same time, again, not a majority. And I will say this is not, just anecdotally, this is not what I have seen in my experience, in my life, among my friends who are partnered, among my partner clients. It is a higher percentage.

Krista Niles: But... you know, let's go with the Pew Research numbers. It's not a majority.

Krista Niles: But what has really shifted is that, there are real opportunities to actually, like, bias the odds in your favor at this point. That you don't have to wait until you bump into somebody at the produce

Krista Niles: side of the grocery store. You don't have to wait until, you know, the matchmaker at your temple comes up with just the perfect person for you, that you can actually create those opportunities to meet people yourself.

Allison Puryear (she/her): And a lot of clients.

Krista Niles: are very interested in IRL dating, in-real-life dating, offline dating. That's one of the first questions often that I get is, I don't know if I want to use the apps, I think I'd rather, like.

Krista Niles: just trying to meet somebody in person, and that's for a number of reasons. I mean, maybe they met a partner in person decades back, and now they're single again, and they want to try to do that again, or they've never online dated, and it feels really scary to them, or they have tried online dating, and it didn't work for them, and so they want to try a different approach, or they're hearing some of the naysayers saying it doesn't really work.

Krista Niles: And, and what I tell people is, absolutely, that will absolutely be part of the portfolio of dating activities that we're gonna put together for you.

Krista Niles: But even IRL dating, even offline dating.

Krista Niles: It takes work and effort, and there's even an online component to it of...

Krista Niles: You're going on meetup.com, and you're finding meetups in your area that are gonna throw you into the path of other interesting people who are interested in what you are interested in. There's gonna be a networking process of... you're focusing on friendship skills, making friends. You never know when you're gonna make a friend at a meetup, or a cooking class, or volunteering at the animal shelter whose brother's gonna be in town, and that person's gonna end up being the

Krista Niles: perfect fit for you, right? It's just... because... so, let's go with, even if it's the majority of people are still meeting their partner offline.

Krista Niles: It's networking that's gonna make that happen.

Allison Puryear (she/her): And so again.

Krista Niles: Again, you have a lot of things that you can do, activities that you can do, efforts that you can make.

Krista Niles: to widen who you know. And you're absolutely right that if you're working from home, if you, have a life where you are meeting only a limited number of people, you're going to have to make some sort of effort to expand that. Yeah. And so, being able to use...

Krista Niles: The dating apps, plus some offline dating strategies that also are quite intentional, is really your best bet.

Allison Puryear (she/her): Yeah. Yeah.

Allison Puryear (she/her): So, let's kind of get into a little bit. Like, when you're working with somebody who is, like, they're coming to you because this is your specialty, how do you assess their...

Allison Puryear (she/her): Kind of their mindset around dating, their confidence levels, those kinds of things.

Krista Niles: Absolutely. So I've created a worksheet that therapists can use to do this. So I'll just actually go down the areas, on the worksheet.

Krista Niles: So, the thing that I always start with is assessing a client's mindset.

Krista Niles: What is their level of cynicism here? What expectations are they bringing? One, just, example of a distorted expectation that you really want to assess for

Krista Niles: is, like, an expectation of how much work are they gonna have to put in here. Do they expect that they're gonna come in and they're going to, put a profile up, and people are gonna message them, and the world is gonna receive them, and people are gonna see them, or not?

Krista Niles: Because if they have that expectation, the answer is or not. And they're gonna put their profile up, and they're gonna get a bunch of messages from people that they would never, ever want to meet in person. Some of them creep them out. And they're gonna feel like, crap, this didn't work.

Krista Niles: Because the expectation was off. And so that's... I start with, what are some of your expectations here? What's your mindset around this? And oftentimes, there are areas in there where there's gonna need to be work even before a client, gets ready to date.

Krista Niles: Just even in the first place. So, starting with mindset.

Krista Niles: Next we move into these really much more concrete and specific areas. Photos. How do they feel about photos of themselves? Do they have a good set of current

Krista Niles: photos from, say, the last 6 months to a year that look like what they look like now. The last thing that you want to do is go on a date, and the person is surprised by what you look like because you used photos from 5 years ago. And so, how do clients feel about the photos that they have?

Krista Niles: I give clients an assignment, even if they feel pretty good about their photos, I'll oftentimes ask them.

Krista Niles: To still schedule 3 fun activities with friends.

Krista Niles: Let their friends know the purpose of these activities is to have fun, but also to get some photos of me that I can put up on dating apps. They have friends come with their phones out, ready to take those pictures.

Krista Niles: And then, at the end of those 3 fun activities, they've usually got a great set full of action shots of them doing things that they love.

Krista Niles: And ready to put them up online.

Allison Puryear (she/her): Yeah, with people they love, too, which really matters. It makes you so much more comfortable when a camera's on you, if it's somebody you care about who is caring about you.

Krista Niles: Exactly. This isn't about getting those professional photoshoots done.

Krista Niles: This isn't about having the perfect hair, perfect makeup, perfect outfit. Having some of... some new outfits can definitely help. I oftentimes recommend that clients go shopping so they feel super cute in what they're wearing, and then they've got some cute first date outfits ready, too.

Krista Niles: But it's more about, like, are you doing something that is interesting, that illustrates something about your life? The more action shots you can put up of yourself on a dating app, the more interest you're going to get

Krista Niles: From potential matches, because they're gonna see, like, oh, you know.

Krista Niles: she bakes pies, how cool is that? Or, oh, you know, he arranges a Settlers of Catan night every Friday night with all of his friends, how awesome. Right? They're gonna be able to see, like, these are some of the pieces about you.

Krista Niles: That are, are interesting, that you have this full life with all of these things that you do, and so...

Krista Niles: Assessing whether clients feel like they have a good set of photos. Do they have a good set of action shots showing them doing things that they love? One thing, I'll talk about this a little bit more, when we talk about the profile as well, but you really want to think about having hooks.

Krista Niles: You want to give, potential matches something to bite onto.

Krista Niles: What is something interesting about you that they can message you about? As clients move into messaging, they will see how hard it is to find something to message people about from their dating profiles, and you want to make your profile

Krista Niles: As easy as is humanly possible for somebody to message you about something. And the way you do that is by having pictures of yourself that show you doing things that you love.

Krista Niles: You want to assess, like, do they have a sense of what app they want to use?

Krista Niles: And, just things to look out for are you want them to be on an app that has millions of users. You want them to be on one of those apps, you know, the ones that I mentioned are... most are owned by Match Group. Bumble is not, by the way. Bumble is not owned by Match Group.

Krista Niles: So, you know, Bumble is quite commonly used, Hinge is really common, OkCupid, Match.com.

Krista Niles: And, of course, Tinder, and you want them to be able to have a sense of, like, what are some of the more common apps in the area, and you, you want them to choose two. The research on this is gonna be...

Krista Niles: marginal at best. Just use, you know, you can help them use Google, or you can use Google yourself, and just be like, yeah, it seems like people around here, I'm seeing on Reddit, a lot of people are mentioning Hinge, that might be a good one to try. And then you want to prepare them to essentially test out whether the apps are really working for them.

Krista Niles: And, so for me, as a dating coach, I was very meticulous about keeping track of, like.

Krista Niles: what... where did I meet people to go on first dates, and what apps, led to the most second dates, and things like that. And so you can help clients, you know, keep at least some informal track.

Krista Niles: of, ...

Krista Niles: which apps are working for them and which are not, because it's gonna be really hard for them to find, like, the perfect dating app for their area. Which one should they absolutely be using? They all suck.

Krista Niles: But, just get yourself on them and start to see which ones have the highest chance of actually putting you into the path of people that you want to meet.

Krista Niles: ...

Krista Niles: You want to help them, write their bio or their profile in a way that shows some interesting things about them. So again, just in terms of writing the profile, you want lots of hooks in there, specifics. Not just that they like

Krista Niles: They like to go out to brunch on a Sunday, but that they like to go to Grand Lake Kitchen and get the avocado toast.

Krista Niles: Because it's so much easier to message somebody about, like, oh my god, you've tried the avocado toast, but have you ever tried their, like, banana pancakes, right? It's so much easier to message somebody about something specific.

Krista Niles: than something vague. And so you want to, just get a sense of, like, how comfortable do they feel about writing that profile and putting those specifics in there?

Krista Niles: The big one here, how comfortable do they feel sending messages?

Krista Niles: How comfortable are they sending the first message? This breaks down along gender lines a lot.

Krista Niles: But not all the time. But a lot of times, especially when I work with straight women who are looking to date, especially cisgender men, they really want their partner to take the initiative, and oftentimes the exact line that I hear is, and it's so understandable.

Krista Niles: In my last relationship, I had to do all the emotional labor, I had to arrange all the dates, I had to make sure that we did every activity that we did, and ... this time, I really want somebody who can take the initiative. And so you want to assess for... that's a distortion.

Krista Niles: Because wanting somebody to send the first message is a truly terrible strategy to assess that.

Krista Niles: You want to be getting in touch with people, and down the line, 2 dates, 3 dates in, that's when you're going to start to see, like, are we equally passionate about this? Are we equally interested in this? Do we have equal ability to plan? Do we have equal energy for setting things up with each other?

Krista Niles: But you're not ever gonna get to that point if you're not sending the message. The stat that I tell clients

Krista Niles: is that I can count on one hand... I... remember, I dated from 2005 to 2020 in multiple stints in there. I can count on one hand the number of times that I went on a date with somebody who messaged me first.

Allison Puryear (she/her): If you wait for people to message you first, you're gonna get messages from people that you never want to see.

Krista Niles: I don't know why it works that way.

Krista Niles: The people that you want to meet, I guess, aren't seeing your profile, or there's something that they're missing on there. Whatever it is, you need to draw their attention to it, and how are you going to do that? By sending the first message. And so one of the most powerful things that therapists can do is to get a sense of whether their clients are ready to take that particular step.

Krista Niles: And then, just in terms of kind of the rest of the areas to assess, you really want to get a sense of how comfortable do they feel with how to set up a date.

Krista Niles: How comfortable do they feel about setting up a second date if the first date goes well? Do they have some skills in there? Are there some social skills deficits around those areas? Do they have a sense of how to build intimacy with somebody who they're actually getting to know? Oftentimes, that can be a little bit of a barrier for people of, like, okay, well, I got the small talk thing down, but, like.

Krista Niles: how do I turn this into an actual relationship? I feel like I keep...

Krista Niles: getting, like, friend-zoned here or something, like, how can I actually, like, take this deeper and really get to know somebody on a deeper level, or build even, like, sexual intimacy with somebody? And so therapists can really play a role in helping clients to build some of those skills. And then, of course, we have...

Krista Niles: all of the hard stuff that you want to assess for their readiness for as well. Are they ready for rejection? And what do they anticipate that that will feel like if they get a rejection? Is that going to knock them off their game? Is that going to make it so that they can't actually come back and keep doing this work?

Krista Niles: How... what is their strategy for managing burnout? Do they have a strategy for incorporating offline dating that will help them with their cynicism, their burnout? It's something to do and to keep... feel like they're still working on this in those weeks when you're actually going to take a real break from online dating?

Krista Niles: And so I have a worksheet that therapists can actually download that they can just use straight with their clients and just assess their readiness for each of these areas, and build a specific plan for how they're going to approach each of the areas that clients are feeling

Krista Niles: Worried about, or even have really severe, even some trauma, or, some, mental health issues that are, that are gonna be obstacles to them being able to, do that area.

Allison Puryear (she/her): Amazing. When I just think about how... how ripe the situation is, like, you were mentioning rejection, just all the different...

Allison Puryear (she/her): Setbacks people can face, and if you're already kind of struggling with stuff, like most people are.

Allison Puryear (she/her): if you've got a lot of eggs in one basket, I'm like, okay, well, now I'm gonna... I'm gonna meet the person, and I'm gonna meet them, like, this week, on this app, or, you know, you get your hopes up so high, or you've been talking to somebody that seems really great, but when you meet in person, like, it just doesn't click.

Allison Puryear (she/her): How do you...

Allison Puryear (she/her): How do you keep them on track with their ultimate goal, even when these hard things have happened?

Krista Niles: This is... One of the hardest parts about this.

Krista Niles: ... Clients... ... Clients, oftentimes, they have these goals.

Krista Niles: that are... are great. You know, if you're working with clients who have made great career strides, have a lot of success career-wise, especially if they work in a corporate environment, they're gonna set goals like, I'm gonna go on 2 dates a week. And...

Krista Niles: That is actually not something that you can really control.

Krista Niles: ...

Krista Niles: It's not actually in your control whether you're getting enough messages from enough good people that you can go on two dates a week.

Krista Niles: So much of meeting your partner is still luck.

Krista Niles: these... all of these things that they are doing, it's about biasing the odds in their favor. It's about increasing their luck at meeting somebody, because they're buying a bunch of lottery tickets, you know? Because they're creating so many different opportunities for them to win the lottery, but they still have to get lucky.

Krista Niles: And, ... so, being able to help clients focus on what can they control?

Krista Niles: Are they going on that app?

Krista Niles: Are they going on every day for 20 minutes, maybe even up to an hour? Are they sending 3 to 5 messages to new people every day?

Krista Niles: even within that, there are times when that's not going to be possible, because you live in an area with fewer people, right? You've kind of gotten to the end of the app, there's nobody else.

Allison Puryear (she/her): It's on there.

Krista Niles: There's gonna be times, holidays, summer, there's this unfortunate chunk of months in the summer where everybody's, I guess, traveling, I don't know what. The app usage is lower, and so you're gonna get to the end of all the people on the app real quick.

Krista Niles: And, and so, helping clients to understand, alright, so, you know, what can we control here? You've gotten to the end of the app. Do you want to try logging on to another app and try that one instead? Oftentimes, I will recommend

Krista Niles: that clients are on one of the swipe apps, Hinge, Tinder, Bumble, in addition to being on one that has kind of those longer profiles. So that's gonna be OkCupid is usually one I recommend. Or for folks who are in their 50s, 60s.

Krista Niles: 70s, Match.com is often a good option, but they have longer profiles where you're gonna write more about yourself on there.

Krista Niles: And, so I oftentimes I'll recommend, like, why don't we switch for a little bit and try this other app and see if there's different people on there, if you're getting different traction on there, or, switching to offline dating. But helping clients to know, like, these are the things that I can actually control.

Krista Niles: to continue to bias those odds in my favor, and not focusing on things like, I'm gonna go on 2-3 dates a week.

Krista Niles: That... that would be awesome! Hopefully you're getting enough

Krista Niles: Messages for that, but that is not actually the experience of most people on these apps.

Krista Niles: It is oftentimes much more sparse than that. Or there's gonna be times when it's just like.

Krista Niles: boom, there's so many people, you are going on, like, 4 dates this week, like, whoa, where did that come from? And then it's gonna die down again, and it's just not... there's so much of it that is kind of ebb and flow, and not within your control.

Krista Niles: And sometimes you're waiting, as I was, for your partner to leave the person that they're with and be ready to meet somebody new.

Krista Niles: And I had to hang out for 8 months, waiting for my amazing husband to be ready to try online dating, and, and, you know, and he got lucky, because he was... he went on 2 dates before he met me, but I went on 35.

Krista Niles: 45 first dates. 64 dates total, over 8 months.

Krista Niles: Before I, before I met him, and so just knowing that you can have the best of goals in here, but if you can drill down and focus on those objectives, am I sending my messages? Am I using the app every day? Am I switching apps? Am I switching up my strategy when things are sparse?

Allison Puryear (she/her): Yeah. I'm curious, anecdotally, what you see with maybe,

Allison Puryear (she/her): this isn't working, I'm gonna give this up, maybe some rejection sensitivity, those kinds of things, with the 20-somethings versus, like, the 60-somethings.

Allison Puryear (she/her): Is one group, in your experience, more likely to be like, maybe this isn't for me?

Krista Niles: You know, ... I generally tend to find that, like, confident 20-somethings

Krista Niles: aren't... they aren't necessarily gonna need all of this, right? And so if you're... if you're working with a client, and they're like, yeah, I'm gonna hop back on the apps again, you might be like, cool, do... do you want to check in about an area or two, make sure that you're confident on some of the areas that we know really help, and...

Krista Niles: oftentimes, clients will be like, oh, yes, definitely. But when I start to go through those areas, they're like, oh yeah, no, I have photos, oh, yeah, I message all the time. And so you'll be able to really suss out, like.

Krista Niles: oh, this person's super confident. I will say that that does tend to be more in the younger demographic, that people kind of... maybe they grew up more in an online world, or this has been so much more normalized for them. Like, I remember when I started dating in 2005, I mean, it sounds like you were on

Krista Niles: at the same time, but it was...

Krista Niles: stigmatized, I was kind of secretive about the fact

Krista Niles: I did it, I felt a little bit ashamed, and ... every time I met somebody, it felt kind of like this

Krista Niles: secret clandestine thing that I was doing, and I kind of wanted to sit at the cafe, but away from other people, so I didn't...

Krista Niles: let anyone know that we were on, like, an online first date. And I think that younger generations have grown up with, like, oh no, this is absolutely how you meet people, and this is

one way to meet people, and it sucks, and it's annoying, but it's definitely one of the tools you're gonna use.

Krista Niles: And, just... so, absolutely, I do think that, some of us in the older demographics have a little bit of a different perspective on this, and might need a little bit more help and more support, and we'll kind of come to this point maybe more quickly of, like.

Krista Niles: This isn't working. But the truth is that you're gonna find folks in any age demographic.

Krista Niles: Any body size, just any, physical ability level, who just... who kind of feel like, oh god, this isn't working, or...

Krista Niles: more specifically, and this is why I think therapists are so perfectly poised to work on this, like, this isn't working for me.

Krista Niles: I cannot get this to work for me.

Krista Niles: There is something uniquely damaged, weird, unlovable about me that makes it so that I will not be able to meet my partner doing this, even if other people are having success.

Krista Niles: And so being able to, break through that with, just clients just of all stripes are gonna have, have that, that particular worry and that particular fear come up for them. And even the confident ones will be like, oh, no, I got this. And then 3 weeks later, they'll be like, ugh.

Krista Niles: God, I don't know if I'm ever gonna meet somebody in...

Krista Niles: So even with somebody who doesn't need the, like, nitty-gritty step-by-step work, like, being able to do that deeper confidence work with folks is so important.

Allison Puryear (she/her): Yeah, I was thinking about, like, the folks, the older folks in their 60s or 70s, and they, like, they've been through so much life, they probably have so... built so much resilience.

Allison Puryear (she/her): But I was wondering if it was like, oh yeah, that one didn't work out, but on to the next, or if it was more like, maybe I'm gonna try something else. Yeah.

Krista Niles: It's a pit.

Allison Puryear (she/her): It just depends on the person, right?

Krista Niles: I think it is the nature of online dating, it is just so discouraging.

Krista Niles: It's so disheartening.

Krista Niles: It's the kind of thing that, like.

Krista Niles: It's so powerful that even the most confident

Krista Niles: Person, or somebody who's just, yeah, seen so much of life.

Krista Niles: Will, will kind of have that, like, will extrapolate from their experiences and say, you know what? This is just not working for me, it's not gonna work for me.

Krista Niles: And ... yeah, so I think as therapists, just, just being ready, it shows up in a number of different ways. So you're absolutely right, so, like, for an older demographic, a lot of times what I see is, or...

Krista Niles: I should just say, for folks in their 60s, 70s, like, what I am seeing is that,

Krista Niles: Like, the way people kind of get to the point where they're like, oh, this isn't working for me, is they'll just say, you know what, I'm just not focused on this right now. I'm gonna focus on other things.

Krista Niles: And so just being attuned as a therapist to, like.

Krista Niles: Oh, is this person making a really healthy choice to take a break from something that is really stressing them out, and I can help them do that? Or is this some anxious avoidance here?

Krista Niles: Is this something that I could actually...

Krista Niles: challenge for them and help them do differently, versus with younger people, they're gonna blame it on the app, right? They're gonna, they're gonna be like, you know, the 20-somethings are gonna be like, these apps are lame, like, they don't work, right? Like, they don't work for anybody, and that's gonna be a little bit how they come to the end of the line, of their dating, is that they're just gonna say, no.

Krista Niles: I'm... I'm not gonna even try to use this app, so it definitely looks different.

Krista Niles: But just, you know, knowing your client well enough to know, like, is this them, ducking out of the process? Is this them saying, no, no, I can't make this work for me? And if so.

Krista Niles: Challenging that, leaning into that, because that is... that's gonna impact their internal working model, it's gonna impact their ability to see themselves as a lovable person in this world.

Allison Puryear (she/her): Yeah, yeah.

Allison Puryear (she/her): So I think about how we...

Allison Puryear (she/her): like, with social media, at least, it's also curated. And it sounds like there's a healthy curation you're encouraging with the photos they choose, those kinds of things, of like, let it be something you love. Like, it gives them a picture of your life. I think... I live in the South, so, like, everybody talks about how all the men have fish, right?

Krista Niles: all the men have guns, yeah.

Allison Puryear (she/her): And so, like, okay, well, that's something to talk about, potentially, or to swipe the other way, one or the other.

Allison Puryear (she/her): So, in images, I'm understanding how you're guiding your clients on, showing up authentically. With these bios.

Allison Puryear (she/her): How are you helping them...

Allison Puryear (she/her): really show up as themselves. Not everybody's a great copywriter. How are you... how are you helping them really, ...

Allison Puryear (she/her): not, you know, like, wuss out on it. Like, to really show up as themselves, and not some... some... what I've seen, I'm thinking about, like, a few clients who've shared their dating profiles with me, and you know, as a marketer.

Allison Puryear (she/her): I'm like, oh gosh, we gotta up some people in and out with this, and you're just, like, vanilla all the way across. Like, nothing is, specific to you, really. It's like being where I live and being like, I like hiking. Like, yeah, everybody likes hiking. How are you helping people find...

Allison Puryear (she/her): The copy in themselves to show up for these longer bios.

Krista Niles: So, I strongly recommend actually doing this work in session. So you might have them just kind of bring their phone into session with you if you meet in person, or send you screenshots if you're meeting virtually.

Krista Niles: If they're on one of the apps, so OkCupid, for example, that you can access from the computer, from a website, you might actually have them screen share with you so that you can look at

Krista Niles: what they've written. Oftentimes, clients are very amenable to this. This can feel a little vulnerable if you're still getting to know a client, or if they're more on the anxious side, but a lot of times, clients are like, yes, oh my god, please help me. And so what you want to be

looking for are those things where it's like, I'm looking for somebody nice, funny, and trustworthy. And you want to actually, lean into helping them

Krista Niles: To, get really specific about that. Nice? What's a... can you paint a picture of that? Like, I'm looking for somebody who leaves treats out for the neighborhood... neighborhood cats, right? Like, that's... that's a way of illustrating nice.

Krista Niles: Like, you can actually, help them to paint that picture and, and give these really...

Krista Niles: specific niche things for people to latch onto. If you have a client who's really into something very niche, or likes a really specific type of music, or something like that, encouraging them to put references to that in their profile.

Krista Niles: I put tons of references in my profile. I quoted a poem that I loved, I, quoted a song, and it was so funny. So I dated both men and women on the apps, and when I was dating women, I had quoted from an Indigo Girls song.

Krista Niles: And the quote is, I'll pick you up with a cooler and a two-day suitcase.

Krista Niles: And every lesbian of a certain age knows

Krista Niles: that song, and would message me about it. No, when I was dating straight guys, none of the straight guys had any clue, and, you know, people would be like, oh, like, sounds like a road trip, that sounds fun, right? Like, and they wouldn't quite get the reference, and it doesn't matter, right? Like, it's just, you know, it's about, kind of.

Krista Niles: having cool wording, it's about, just kind of showing things off about yourself, and you never know when somebody's gonna pick up on that. Always remember in 2005, I had this strategy, and I, quoted a song where the quote was, I hate a lot of things, but I love a few things, and I, like.

Krista Niles: quoted something like that on my profile, and I remember some guy messaged me and was like, instead of talking about the things that you hate.

Krista Niles: why don't you talk about the things that you love? And I was like, okay, so maybe, maybe that line is a little too niche for people, maybe people are.

Allison Puryear (she/her): jumping.

Krista Niles: up on that line. And that's another thing I really want you to encourage your clients to do. This is trial and error. You are not... the line I use with my clients a lot is, you're not going to scare away your soulmate by getting your profile wrong.

Allison Puryear (she/her): Oh, I love....

Krista Niles: away your soulmate by writing this... writing a really niche profile that nobody gets.

Krista Niles: You know what? You can come back later and edit it. And my experience around this was, so my last round of dating, I was going on... I was getting a lot of interest in going on these dates with people who were just a terrible fit for me. And I was like, you know what? Fuck it. I'm just... I'm gonna, change my profile, I am going to...

Krista Niles: just make it so that, like, everything in there is kind of, like, something of an inside joke that only somebody who really gets me would get, and I changed my profile and made it, like, super niche. And I remember I ran it past, ...

Krista Niles: A friend of mine, and he was like.

Krista Niles: Okay. And I was like, but is it funny? And he was like...

Krista Niles: Yeah, yeah. I was, like, perfect. I was like, great, because I don't want to date you, I want to date somebody who, like, gets it. So that was my profile, and I swear to God, I did not get a single match for 3 straight weeks. Not a single match, because the profile had changed to something that, ...

Krista Niles: it wasn't really gonna work, and so I... that... I actually changed it to be a little bit more inclusive, but still more reflective of who I was, and right after I changed it, that actually, that's when, coincidentally, I met my husband. And so....

Allison Puryear (she/her): Good timing.

Krista Niles: Finger clan. I know, exactly.

Krista Niles: just helping our clients to think a little bit about, like, ... like, okay, I've put this, that, and the other thing in my profile. Am I getting connections that I want? Am I getting any messages at all? If not, how can I change it up? And then...

Krista Niles: Just two things to really look out for in your profile. So I mentioned that I had put the, like, I hate a lot of things. Like, having negatives in your profile at all tends to be not the best idea.

Krista Niles: So, and oftentimes those sound a little bit like, please don't message me unless you're serious about meeting up, or even just these, like, discriminatory things that are like, don't message me if you're under 5'5".

Krista Niles: It's just like, dude?

Krista Niles: like, no, you cannot screen people out like that. Or sometimes it'll be, like, a little bit of an insecurity, like, I want you to know that I'm a plus-size woman, and I want you to be sure that you're okay with that before you message me, and it's... there's vulnerability in that.

Krista Niles: And what I want to, encourage therapists to do is actually just help your clients to build this, like, positive, affirmative profile that shows off the fullness of their life.

Krista Niles: With the understanding that they're gonna be able to get into some of those conversations as they're messaging with somebody, down the line, or they're gonna be able... somebody will show themselves to be, like, ready to meet up or not.

Krista Niles: down the line, and that that's a much better way to stress test that. A colleague of mine actually talks about a particular form of this, and she calls it, like, arguing with an ex.

Krista Niles: And you, like, your clients will see this. They will see so many profiles that are like, well, I'm looking for somebody who actually shows up and is trustworthy and isn't gonna, like, isn't gonna break my heart, or things like that, and you can tell that it's like, this is a conversation with somebody specific.

Allison Puryear (she/her): That's something.

Krista Niles: specific, and it's, like, super off-putting, and so just helping clients to kind of remove any of those pieces that can come from relational trauma and really wanting to make sure that you are screening out the people who are going to treat you in the way that you have been treated in the past.

Krista Niles: And it's understandable, but it is off-putting in a profile.

Allison Puryear (she/her): Yeah, and I think we've all seen those. I think those are pretty common. And it's something that I'll... when I'm talking with my clients, I'm like, okay, what hasn't worked for you in relationships in the past? How do we avoid that? And it's not by saying, like.

Allison Puryear (she/her): I want somebody who will actually remember to let the dog out without being reminded. You know, like, it's not that way. It's looking at what's the converse positive for that. Like, I'm looking for somebody who is just an initiative taker. They're always doing something cool, you know, like, that kind of thing.

Krista Niles: Absolutely. Yeah, and be specific about that. Like, somebody who loves their dog so much, they can't wait to take them on two-mile walks every day, right?

Allison Puryear (she/her): Like.

Krista Niles: Something like that, and ... and there are gonna be some people who read that, and they're like, pfft, no, right? But there are gonna be some people who are like, oh, they love their dog, me too, right?

Krista Niles: And that's... you want to think about that, that you're creating a marketing message that brings in your ideal match.

Allison Puryear (she/her): Yeah, yeah. And I'm thinking, too, this overarching,

Allison Puryear (she/her): Kind of need for somebody else's eyeballs.

Allison Puryear (she/her): on your profile, whether that's a coach, whether that's a close friend, whether that's a person you don't want to date, but having some clarity, because we're too close to ourselves sometimes.

Allison Puryear (she/her): And I think about your point that therapists are so well-positioned with this, because we have... we see all these beautiful, wonderful things in our clients.

Allison Puryear (she/her): Even when they're mired in their self-consciousness, or they're feeling less than. Like, we see that, and we know them so well in a very specific way, but a way that can be...

Allison Puryear (she/her): Helpful and clearly communicated in something like a profile.

Allison Puryear (she/her): That if we're helping them pull from themselves these things we see in them with our therapist magic, then there's this opportunity for them to show up as very confident in their profile, instead of, like.

Allison Puryear (she/her): I am a plus-size woman, I hope that's okay, you know, instead of that kind of energy coming of, like...

Allison Puryear (she/her): Like, I'm fat and hot, what you want, you know?

Krista Niles: Right. So...

Krista Niles: Absolutely. Absolutely. And, I think sometimes, especially if you're looking at profile after profile online, you're gonna just see, like, oh my gosh, well, everybody's a backpacker, everybody's a rock climber, and you're gonna see these, like, trends, and, clients will feel like, well, but I don't...

Krista Niles: I don't do those things, or... well, but I haven't... I have backpacked in the past, but I haven't recently, and so, like, what do I put, and am I being misleading?

Krista Niles: And you really, yeah, you want to help them to dig into, like, you do not have to be, like, a mountain climber or a lion tamer to, you know, to put something interesting on your profile. Like, that Settlers of Catan night that you organize every Friday, that's awesome and nerdy.

Krista Niles: Right? Like, that beautiful pie that you baked, that you're pulling out of the oven, that is photogenic, like, get that, in there. Like, people will message you about, like, what kind of pie was that? Right? Like, these are the things that are...

Krista Niles: super worthy and interesting about you. I even, sometimes clients have

Krista Niles: like, photogenic jobs, right? Are you a tattoo artist, or do you do something where, like, it looks cool, on a photo? Like, put that on there, like, it doesn't have to be something wild, it can just be something just really normal and mundane about you that... that is pretty cool.

Allison Puryear (she/her): Yeah. I was just thinking about, like, a therapist profile just, like, looking really, like, intentional and concerned and interested. Not like that. Don't do that, y'all. ...

Allison Puryear (she/her): Okay, so... I'm thinking about how, ...

Allison Puryear (she/her): How well-positioned therapists are to help people with their profiles, to help people with their confidence around dating. But we also have this really, like, deep understanding and knowledge of their early relational experiences, their family systems, trauma histories, things like that.

Allison Puryear (she/her): Which can have a really big impact on dating in general.

Allison Puryear (she/her): ...

Allison Puryear (she/her): how... well, let's take, for example, like, family systems. How can we, as therapists, help our clients see that the families that they grew up in, even if they don't feel like

Allison Puryear (she/her): there's a big problem right now, it might be impacting whether or not they choose to go on that second date, or whether or not they feel comfortable making that first reach-out.

Krista Niles: Ugh, there are so many pieces to this, and this is one of the reasons that I am strongly in favor of therapists, and not dating coaches, doing the primary work around dating, because I do think that everyone hits on that deeper family systems piece at some point.

Krista Niles: So...

Krista Niles: you know, were you pigeonholed into a certain role in your family of origin, and is that making you feel like you can only seek out certain partners now? Do you... were you made to be the, the caretaker, and so now you...

Krista Niles: over and over and over again seem to be attracting and meeting and being attracted to people who have a lot of their own work to do, but maybe aren't doing it, and need to be kind of dragged along. Helping clients to see some of those patterns as they are moving back into dating can be really helpful.

Krista Niles: Sometimes I use the piece about, like.

Krista Niles: You know, growing up, you experienced XYZ, and you were not parented well, and you weren't taken care of, and you spent your whole life caring for other people in this, that, and the other way. You deserve something different as an adult, as a grown-up. Like, you deserve to have an adult relationship.

Krista Niles: that is really caretaking and wonderful. Or, you experienced this growing up, and your first marriage was also like that.

Krista Niles: Let's get you something different now. Let's look for something different. And helping clients to kind of understand, like.

Krista Niles: When you meet somebody who doesn't have any work to do, does that feel boring? Does that feel uncomfortable in some way? Does it feel like...

Krista Niles: Maybe you're not good enough to be with somebody like that, and that you do need somebody who is kind of damaged in some way. Helping clients to understand, too, that, ...

Krista Niles: The vast majority of people on dating apps are gonna be a truly awful fit for you, and...

Krista Niles: of the remainder, like, the vast majority of that are gonna be, like, only an okay fit for you. And it's gonna be this very, very small number of people who are a really unique

Krista Niles: Fit.

Krista Niles: for what you're looking for and what you deserve as a client, as a person. And... and so just... just helping clients to...

Krista Niles: Understand, like, just because this seems like it's kinda working out, or this person could go for you, or you could like them enough.

Krista Niles: doesn't mean that that's something you should continue to lean into. And looking at some of the family systems reasons why they might kind of want to have this checked... the box

checked and figured out and settle for somebody, rather than continuing to, put the time into finding somebody who is an incredibly good fit for them.

Allison Puryear (she/her): Just helping people, too, a lot of times.

Krista Niles: Just people will have a reason why they want this to be done and figured out, and there's dating-specific reasons, but there can also be trauma and family systems reasons why they want to just figure this out and meet somebody and be done.

Krista Niles: And as a therapist, helping them to be more comfortable sitting with the uncertainty.

Krista Niles: Sitting with the process. Sitting with, this is a marathon, rather than a sprint. How does that feel? This just takes time.

Krista Niles: This... it takes a lot of time sometimes. It's lonely waiting for this to work out. What... how do you conceptualize loneliness in your life? What does that mean, that you're feeling lonely right now? Will you wait to meet somebody amazing? Does that mean something negative about you? There's just so much opportunity for work here.

Krista Niles: I mean, one piece that I just mentioned right at the beginning of our conversation here I want to come back to now, too, is that, you don't want to get stuck doing the trauma work, the family systems work.

Krista Niles: That can't be the only work that you're doing with clients who are really struggling to get started with dating. They need help with the skills, too.

Krista Niles: And, it's... we are uniquely positioned to help them because we know them so well, and we can do this deeper work with them, and we can dive into

Krista Niles: some of the roles that they have internalized for themselves, and how that's continuing to show up in their current dating and their adult relationships. That's really important to do.

Krista Niles: But you can't only do it. And, a lot of times, clients want to do that work first. Like, first, I have to solve

Krista Niles: all of my relationship issues, everything that's wrong with how I approach relationships, and then I can date.

Krista Niles: And that is an understandable desire. The truth is that a lot of those problems will be solved IN relationship with somebody who is a really good fit for you.

Krista Niles: As opposed to somebody who is activating your attachment style in this really negative way, somebody who's activating a relational trauma in a really negative way, that being able to, just trust that you will be able to continue to do that work

Krista Niles: Even once you meet somebody, that's a really important piece for therapists to stress.

Allison Puryear (she/her): Yeah, I had a supervisor back in the day who would always say, like, we get sick in relationships, and we get healthy in relationships.

Allison Puryear (she/her): Like, it's always in relationship that... We heal.

Allison Puryear (she/her): So, she was a big rejector of the whole, like, you can't love anyone else until you love yourself, which I feel like is such a thing that people believe, like, they need to solve themselves, and have, like, just unconditional, constant love for all parts of themselves before they're willing to...

Allison Puryear (she/her): invest, which I think is, like, just anxious avoidance, right? It's, like, a great excuse to not engage in what's... what's pretty scary, ultimately. Right.

Krista Niles: Yes, it's anxious avoidance, and it's also that expectation, distortion, right? It's the idea that you can figure yourself out, like, right? That working one-on-one with a therapist, that you can just...

Krista Niles: do all your work, and figure it all out, and then be done, and then you can move forward, and you'll be healthy, and you'll never run into those old trauma issues ever again. And the truth is that, man...

Krista Niles: That's just the work comes up here, the work comes up there, it gets easier over time, if you, you know, have certain skills that you can use to manage that work when it comes up. But, listen, like, we're gonna be doing our work over and over again, and yeah, allowing yourself to seek out that really good connection.

Krista Niles: With somebody to continue that work with.

Krista Niles: In a partnership, it's just a really powerful way of looking at it, as opposed to, the expectation of, like, I'm gonna get myself right.

Krista Niles: And then... and then... Everybody will want to meet me, and I'll be... I'll be good to go.

Allison Puryear (she/her): I'm thinking about the skills conversation, and, like, they're the skills that you talked about before, like, it's a skill to create a good profile, it's a skill to reach out, and to, like, hold on to yourself while being the first one to reach out. It's a skill to manage rejection.

Allison Puryear (she/her): What about those, like, in-the-moment social skills? Like, you're on a date, and how to be, and that kind of thing. How do you teach people about that?

Krista Niles: Absolutely. This is, this is one where I think we can really draw from some, social anxiety treatment, where in social anxiety treatment, there is a component of teaching actual social skills.

Krista Niles: So, things like preparing in advance, what topics are you going to talk about? Do you have some questions, some open-ended questions prepared that you can ask the person? Do you have a couple of anecdotes about yourself that you...

Krista Niles: can offer. Watching out for talking too much about yourself.

Krista Niles: Right? And letting the other person do all the listening, or all the questioning. And then also being sure that you're not interrogating them, or making it seem too much like a job interview, because you're not sharing anything about yourself.

Krista Niles: So just oftentimes kind of, like, assessing for whether clients feel like they have a good, sense for that, or if clients are feeling a little bit.

Krista Niles: paralyzed about that, giving them those concrete social skills, even practicing. A lot of times, clients don't want to practice that, but suggesting to them.

Krista Niles: That they practice, maybe at home, in the mirror, or while they're driving, just kind of talk to themselves and pretend like they're on that date, and ask those questions, and tell that story. Especially tell that story in a nice, light-hearted way, leaving out the, like, pain point that might be more of a fifth-date conversation.

Allison Puryear (she/her):

Krista Niles: Oftentimes, I will model, just even if they don't want to practice, I'll just be like, absolutely, so, you know, what you might think about is saying a little bit of XYZ. A lot of times, if clients are coming to you for treatment for something really hard, really sad, really painful, or if a client has gone through

Krista Niles: Just cascading traumas recently.

Krista Niles: They will want to know, like, I mean, but like...

Krista Niles: how do I talk about that? And how, like... like, do I talk about that? And you can help them to think about, kind of like, first date conversation. You might have a little bit of, like, an elevator pitch, kind of, glaze over of what happened, that you're not going to go deep into it, and...

Krista Niles: But if you're getting questions about, like, well, tell me about your family, and there's, like, man, is there pain in there? That you might say something like, well, there's parts of that that are more of a fifth-date conversation, but...

Krista Niles: yeah, I got two siblings who live here, and my parents live there, and, right, it's just, you know, that you might hint at there's more, there's more, without going deeper into it, and then... and then you help them think about, like, well, what's the third date conversation where you might start to actually lean in?

Krista Niles: And then what is the fifth date conversation, where you're really getting to know somebody, and it's like, well, here's something you should know about me, and here's what happened to me. And so just kind of preparing clients for...

Krista Niles: how to have that, like, light-hearted approach. Sometimes I do a little bit of teaching for clients around, like, flirting skills, and can you give a compliment? Can you try some light-hearted teasing?

Krista Niles: Can you do things like, oh my god, you know what we should do is we should check out that new ice cream place, like, kind of a little bit of future planning.

Krista Niles: A little bit of touch. Oftentimes, like, a real easy one sometimes is just, even on a first date, is, like, if somebody has, like, tattoos, you might just, like, allow yourself a little touch of their tattoo, if that, if that feels comfortable to you, and it, you know, if it feels... if you get the sense that it might feel comfortable to them, and just be like, oh, tell me about that tattoo.

Krista Niles: But, just a little bit of touch here or there can be, just a really good flirtation skill. And then also just letting clients know, like.

Krista Niles: I know it can feel like there's one right way to do this, but, like.

Krista Niles: you know, remember my experience of my 35 first dates, 64 dates total. Like, you are... I'm so sorry to tell you this, but you are probably gonna become an expert on this before you're done, and just allow yourself to try a skill here.

Krista Niles: Be intentional about it there, allow yourself to be more instinctual about it on that date, and just allow yourself to kind of become that expert over time. Don't feel like you have to kind of get it right, and that there's only one right way to do it from the beginning.

Allison Puryear (she/her): I love that. Yeah, and I kind of... I love the idea of you gain expertise as you go, because you really do. Like, I remember at some point in my late 20s, I was like, yeah, yeah, I know first dates really well, like...

Allison Puryear (she/her): I know how to do this. I feel comfortable going on them now. I'm not nervous anymore. And I know how I'm gonna show up.

Allison Puryear (she/her): And, ... Yeah.

Allison Puryear (she/her): It's interesting, too, this is one of those areas where therapists need to be mindful of, like, their lived experience is not their client's, and we gotta be really careful not to...

Allison Puryear (she/her): like... Give dating advice based on our own experience.

Allison Puryear (she/her): And instead to, like...

Allison Puryear (she/her): Like, you're talking about, like, what does the data say? What treatment modalities are effective here? That kind of thing.

Krista Niles: Right, absolutely. I do strongly recommend that you, think of yourself to some extent as, like, a scientist, especially if you haven't ever done any online dating, or if you met your partner, like.

Krista Niles: The old-fashioned way, way back in the day, and this just isn't an area that you have any first-hand lived experience with.

Krista Niles: Just seeing yourself to some extent as, like, a scientist. Like, you and your client are going to look at this with clear eyes. Together, you're gonna look at, what does the client's data say?

Krista Niles: they're on Tinder, how's that working for them? So another thing the Pew Research Center found is that about 40% of people who are doing online dating are looking for a serious relationship, and to be fair, like, that is what this skill set is aimed at, is people that are looking for a serious relationship.

Krista Niles: as people who are looking to... for hookups, or to have fun, or to... to do real casual dating. ...

Krista Niles: So, 40% of people are looking for, a real relationship, something more serious, and 40% of people are looking for hookups. And so, you know, are you on an app?

Krista Niles: my experience, at least in my area, was that Tinder was very biased towards people who are looking for hookups. Right. And that's its reputation, right? That's its reputation as well! And so, yeah, not just going by what the reputation is, too, like, what is a client's lived experience?

Krista Niles: You know, because these things are constantly changing, like, oh, whoa, has Hinge now become a hookup app? Like, where did that come from? Or, like, maybe in your area.

Allison Puryear (she/her): That's kind of what that app is geared towards all of a sudden.

Krista Niles: And so just as a scientist, just kinda, you and the client are gonna look at the data together and adjust and make decisions based on what the data is telling you.

Krista Niles: And, and so the more you can kind of think about, like, how can I have...

Krista Niles: that more empirical mindset here. How can I help my client be, you know, in grad school, we call this, like, a single subject's design. So the client is the only subject here, but what is the client's experience? What is the client's data here? And what can we extrapolate from that? And to help, you know, you can have that more objective view of that.

Krista Niles: If you can allow yourself to, yeah, pull back from any bias or experiences where... that you have had, that you can actually help the client to see with clear eyes, like, what is the data telling them?

Allison Puryear (she/her): And the data is also... it lets you know where the problem in the...

Allison Puryear (she/her): funnel is, kind of, right? Like, if you've got a profile but nobody is responding to you, nobody's getting in touch with you, like, you know that it's something in your bio needs some work, whether it's bio, picture, whatever. Maybe even the app itself.

Allison Puryear (she/her): If you're getting interest, but maybe you're not getting to a first date. Maybe there's something in your communication in between being matched and that first date. If your first dates never lead to second dates, like.

Allison Puryear (she/her): Maybe that's the quality of the people you're pulling in with the bio you have, but maybe that's also, like, some quiriness going on on that first date that isn't...

Allison Puryear (she/her): working. So you also kind of get...

Allison Puryear (she/her): Along the timeline of things happening, you're getting some data to be able to figure out what needs tweaking.

Krista Niles: Absolutely. And, yeah, also helping clients to draw the right conclusions from that.

Allison Puryear (she/her): Because....

Krista Niles: is... It is extremely common to join a dating app, and there's crickets.

Allison Puryear (she/her): It is extremely common to send message after message after message.

Krista Niles: And no response.

Krista Niles: And, to be able to help clients to know, you know what, we're still within the realm of what's normal. Let's... like, I'm not seeing anything in your profile that is concerning to me. You've got good, positive stuff in there, you've got hooks in there, they're specific, these are things that people will be interested in.

Krista Niles: Your photos are great. Like, we don't...

Krista Niles: we don't need to change anything right now, let's hang out and see if something shifts. Is this a lull in the dating app usage? Are we in the holidays? Is it summertime? Is it some random lull that, just happened to happen right now?

Krista Niles: Like, allow yourself to hang out, and sit tight, and keep doing the work, and see if something shifts over time.

Krista Niles: So yeah, helping clients to, to...

Krista Niles: You know, to interpret the data, is, you know, is a really helpful skill as well.

Allison Puryear (she/her): Yeah. And, I mean, how long are you hanging out and waiting? Like, I'm guessing 6 months, nobody's getting back in touch with you, nobody's... like, that might take some tweaking of the profile itself.

Krista Niles: Oh my goodness, so many tweaks that you can make in there. Yes, how long do you hang out? I mean, I don't really like for clients to have, like, no engagement for, say, 3 weeks in a row.

Allison Puryear (she/her): Okay.

Krista Niles: Right, so it's, you know, so you really want to, you wanna think about, can you get some clients some engagement here? Can you get clients some activity? And so that, that, obviously that includes, like, are they getting messages, back?

Krista Niles: Are they setting up a first date? And so things to kind of look at there, like, are they maybe being a little too picky about who they message? Are they kind of like, ugh, there's nobody? You might be like.

Krista Niles: Let's just...

Krista Niles: are you okay with double-checking this? Will you screen share with me in this session, or bring your computer to session, bring your phone to session, and we can actually... I'll watch your process of how you make a decision about somebody? Because, yeah, sometimes clients will be like.

Krista Niles: So, I'll use an example that is almost universal among cisgender straight women looking to date cisgender straight men.

Krista Niles: They want someone taller than them.

Krista Niles: And that is one that I will oftentimes lean into challenging. There is really good reasons for wanting that, and at the same time, right, like, that is not a good predictor of, is somebody... is that person gonna bring you soup when you're sick?

Allison Puryear (she/her): Is that preferable?

Krista Niles: gonna give you a, you know, a Christmas present that is just, like, shows how much they know you? Is that person gonna listen to you after a hard day? No. The stuff that really matters, height is not a predictor of that.

Krista Niles: And so helping clients when they're kind of like, ugh, and like, no, but I want to date, is getting back to me, like, well, are you... are you maybe screening out some of the wrong people? But yeah, absolutely, switching up the app.

Krista Niles: Taking a break if they... it was kind of like they were getting engagement, suddenly it stopped. Like, alright, take... let's take a break and come back in 3 weeks and see if, like, the app has refreshed.

Krista Niles: With new people, and when they take that break, they're doing an active break, and they're going on meetup.com, finding meetups they want to go to, or they're signing up for a cooking class, or volunteering, or...

Krista Niles: saying yes to a party invitation, or hell, throwing a party themselves, and just working on some good networking skills. Even just, you know.

Krista Niles: chatting with somebody, flirting with somebody at the gym, you never know, right? Yeah. Like, just kind of using some active, offline dating skills while they're... while they're waiting, and then coming back to it.

Allison Puryear (she/her): Yeah. Love it. Amazing. Krista, thank you so much. I hope that, like, therapists can take this, integrate it, and really be thoughtful about how they're working with their clients who are dating, because it's... it's a thing. It's a whole thing.

Krista Niles: It is a whole thing.

Allison Puryear (she/her): Amazing. And where can people find you if they want to get in touch with you?

Krista Niles: Yes, so I am building out a project on this, but I already have some pieces up if people want to find out a little bit more. I have a website that's called Help Your Clients Find Love. HelpYourClientsfindlove.com.

Krista Niles: And, it is... it just, just, it's got a course up there for clients that they can take, and it's got, the worksheet that you can download to do that assessment with your clients, and there's gonna be lots more coming as I build out that project.

Allison Puryear (she/her): Awesome. Love it. Thanks so much, Krista.

Krista Niles: Absolutely.

I hope that broadened your clinical horizons! Head over to notboringces.com to get your CE credit. Wanna have a Not Boring conversation with me about your clinical area of expertise? You can apply there, too. If you like this conversation, leave us a five star review, tell a friend, and be sure to subscribe for future conversations.