

# Ep #116: Uniquely Difficult Situations in Life



**Full Episode Transcript**

**With Your Host**

**Dr. Marie Murphy**

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Hi everyone, I'm Dr. Marie Murphy. I'm a relationship coach, and I help people who are engaging in anything they think counts as infidelity to deal with their feelings, clarify what they want, and make decisions about what they're going to do. No shame, no blame, no judgements. There is a lot of "advice" out there about infidelity that is little more than thinly veiled judgment, but that is not what I provide. I believe that you deserve guidance and support that respects the fullness of your humanity, and the complexity of your situation, no matter what you're doing. If you're ready to talk about your infidelity situation and find some RELIEF, you can schedule an introductory coaching session with me through my website, [mariemurphyphd.com](http://mariemurphyphd.com). I can't wait to meet you.

Okay, it's that time of year again when American Thanksgiving is right around the corner and we're entering the period of time that many of us think of as "the holidays." I'm always a little reluctant to say "the holidays" because it seems to imply that a certain set of holidays are the only holidays that count, or are celebrated by everyone... and that is not what I want to convey. However, "the holidays," such as they are, are definitely a Thing, and they definitely tend to have interesting implications for all things related to infidelity.

Last year I recorded several episodes on the subject of infidelity and the holidays, and if you want to listen to those episodes, they are numbers 63, 64, 65, and 66. I wasn't planning on dedicating an episode to the holidays this year, but I recently had a conversation with a client that prompted me to reconsider. And if you're listening to this, client who will not be named, you'll know who you are, so consider this your anonymous shout-out. This episode is relevant to the holidays, but the themes I'm going to talk about apply across the board. So this is a holiday-ish episode, I guess we could say.

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This client and I were talking about their situation, and about how the way they plan to handle it is partially contingent on holiday plans, like guests coming in from out of town, and possible family travel, and the extent to which they wanted to disrupt holiday plans. And this is the kind of stuff that I know a LOT of you are contending with right now. Taking any kind of action related to, or even making any decisions about our infidelity situation can seem really difficult during the holidays for a lot of reasons. Part of it may be about travel, and family gatherings, and part of it may be about the significance that some people attached to certain holidays, and when we put all of that together, it can start to seem like we literally CAN'T do anything about our infidelity situation during the holidays.

To echo what I said last year, you always get to decide what counts as a good reason to postpone taking any kind of action related to your infidelity situation. If, now that the holidays are coming up quickly, you want to wait until January 2 to do anything or even think about doing anything, that is your prerogative. Obviously.

My only exhortation, as usual, is to make these kinds of decisions consciously. And to that effect, today I want to emphasize that although we so often think that if we wait until later to do something that we think is going to be difficult, it will get easier, it rarely works out that way.

There are a lot of reasons for this, and one of them is that there are some situations in life that we might consider uniquely difficult, and non-negotiably difficult. As I've said in other episodes, whether something is difficult or not is a product of our thinking, but that's okay – there are some situations in life that we might not want to think of as anything other than difficult. For instance, if I found out I had a year to live, I wouldn't try to

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convince myself that that was just great. I would not want to spend TOO much time cursing the gods or lamenting my fate, but I also wouldn't want to try to convince myself that I had to be happy about the situation, or pleased the turn of events. If we don't like something, but want to make peace with it, we have to allow ourselves to dislike whatever it is first. We don't want to try to convince ourselves to rush to being fine with something we not, at the moment, fine with.

Now, you might consider telling your spouse that you want a divorce a uniquely difficult situation. You might consider telling your affair partner that you have decided to stay in your marriage a uniquely difficult situation. Those are just examples, of course - there are many other things related to an infidelity situation that could be considered uniquely difficult situations, that may initiate a uniquely difficult episode in one's life.

Uniquely difficult situations in life may never become easy to deal with. Put differently, there are some situations in life that we may never cease to consider difficult. Yes, we can learn how to manage our thinking, and digest our emotions, so that we don't burden ourselves with unnecessary suffering. That's always incredibly worthwhile. But even when we do this WELL, there are some things in life that we're probably going to find moderately to severely difficult and uncomfortable no matter what. Like, we may never enjoy the experience of firing people, or repossessing people's cars, or telling people they have a terminal diagnosis. We may have to learn how to handle doing these things as part of our job, but we may never feel awesome about doing these things, and we might not WANT to feel awesome about doing them. And we may never enjoy breaking up with someone, especially if it's someone we care about a lot, and have spent of lot of important time with.

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If we are going to deal with our uniquely difficult situations in a way that we feel good about, we have to be willing to allow and engage with the difficulty. If we are actually going to do something that we consider hard, we have to be willing for it to be hard. We have to be willing to do whatever it is we want to do, even if the uncomfortable feelings don't go away. What we so often do instead is hope and wait that the difficult thing will become easier. I get it! I do it too sometimes. It's human! But things don't just automatically get easier, for the most part.

All of this is to say that if you're going into the holidays thinking that it will be easier to handle your infidelity business after Thanksgiving or after Christmas or after Hanukkah or after the New Year or after a holiday that I have not mentioned, you might be mistaken. And instead of putting your energy into hoping that doing what you plan to do will be easier after the holidays, you might want to invest your energy in cultivating willingness to do something hard.

When we give up on the idea that something should be easier, everything changes. Put differently, when we stop hoping that something will cease to be scary or difficult or otherwise, everything changes.

When we're WILLING to feel fear or apprehension or anxiety or whatever else we may be feeling, it becomes easier to tolerate these feelings, and then they don't have to become or remain roadblocks. We can do the thing we're afraid to do, even if we're scared.

Now, nothing that I've said so far means you should NOT wait until after the holidays to do whatever you need to do. Not at all. Some people tell me that their partner or their affair partner absolutely loves a certain holiday,

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and they just cannot bear the idea of breaking up with them before that holiday. If you feel good about that decision, and your reason for making it, that's great.

But what you do need to remember is that you cannot know for sure what anyone else will prefer. Let's say you want to break up with your affair partner, but they LOVE Christmas, and you don't want to break up with them before Christmas and ruin their Christmas. So, maybe you break up with them on January 2. If you do that, they COULD say to you, "Have you been thinking about this for a long time? Did you know you were going to do this before Christmas? How could you not have told me this already?" They could tell you that you have permanently ruined the holidays for them because every year they will think about the Christmas when you effectively lied to them by not telling them that you were planning to end things.

Now, I'm not suggesting that you shouldn't attempt to be considerate of other people. Consideration can be great. But we never know for sure how people are going to receive our consideration. Sometimes our good intentions are not received as such.

So by all means, wait until after the holidays to break up with your person if you want to. Or to do whatever it is that you are planning to do, in relation to your infidelity situation. But in addition to knowing that waiting may not make things any easier for you, also keep in mind that sometimes people prefer getting bad news sooner rather than later, and even if people don't prefer that, you have the right to tell the truth about what you want in a relationship at any time.

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And if you do intentionally or accidentally give someone a divorce for Christmas, or break up with someone right before guests come into town, or otherwise deliver some major news in the thick of the holidays, guess what? Everyone will survive. Yeah, you might have a shitty holiday. Or someone else might have a really shitty holiday. But they will survive, and so will you.

Sometimes uniquely difficult moments in life essentially just happen to us. We get fired. We get sick. Someone we care about dies. We're struck by a natural disaster. Our partner tells us they've been cheating on us and they don't want to be with us anymore. We have every right to not LIKE these kinds of occurrences, especially when they first land at our feet. We have every right to be stunned and hurt and angry and bewildered and sad and displeased and all the things. And I want to suggest that our power lies in being WILLING to feel all of these kinds of feelings, and willing to move through them, moment by moment by moment. We may find our uniquely difficult situation excruciatingly painful, and that is fair enough, but if we're willing to, we can get through the excruciating pain one moment at a time. And I would suggest that that is the ONLY way to get through excruciating pain.

HOWEVER. What we often do when something happens that we don't like is tell ourselves – and anyone else who will listen – that what has happened isn't fair. Or isn't right. Or shouldn't have happened. Or shouldn't be happening.

Here's the deal, people. When something has happened, it has happened. If something is happening, it is happening. And there's a very big difference between saying that we don't LIKE that, and saying it should not be happening. As you've heard me say on this podcast before, should

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feels like shit, and when we tell ourselves that something that is in fact happening shouldn't be happening, we are effectively arguing with reality. And as Byron Katie says, when you argue with reality, you only lose 100% of the time. And not only do we lose 100% of the time, we feel terrible 100% of the time when we argue with reality.

I am totally sympathetic to the fact that humans often get really, really, really attached to their ideas of how things should be. I do plenty of that myself. But here's the deal, people. The universe will not always cooperate with our ideas about how things should be. Full stop, the end. And when we do not get what we want, we can either acknowledge that we don't love what's happened, and choose to move through our disappointment and anger and pain and hurt and bewilderment, OR we can insist that things should have been different, or should be different, and compound our suffering.

Accepting that something has happened doesn't mean we have to LIKE what has happened. Let me say that again: accepting that something has happened doesn't mean we have to LIKE what has happened. I think this bears repeating because so much of the talk about "acceptance" suggests that accepting something means that we aren't bothered by it at all. Right? So often people tell me, "Oh well, I just have to accept this" as if accepting something means you have to be okay with it. And I think there are a lot of voices out there in the self-help/personal development world that either suggest or explicitly state that accepting something DOES mean that you are okay with it, or become okay with. And I totally disagree. I do not know of anything within Buddhist teachings that say that acceptance equates with convincing yourself to like something that you really don't like. Rather, we are encouraged to relate differently to our aversions.

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So often we think that if we dislike something, that means that something has gone *WRONG*. And believing this never feels good, so we often try to deal with this by attempting to convince ourselves that we don't dislike whatever it is that we dislike. And if you like doing that, that's fine with me, but so often we really *DON'T* like how we feel when we try to do that. When we really, truly do *NOT* like something, it usually feels terrible to argue with our own deeply held preferences. *AND*, it also feels pretty bad to tell ourselves that we aren't allowed to have preferences.

And I want to tell you that you are allowed to have preferences and aversions, and you don't have to talk yourself out of them. But you *WILL* find a lot more peace and freedom if you can learn to hold your preferences a little more lightly. You will suffer a lot less if you can allow yourself to dislike whatever you dislike without latching onto the belief that you not liking something means that something should not be the way it is, or should not have happened the way it did.

For some people, this is a pretty radical idea. How can we allow something that we don't like to happen and not try to fight it? Isn't the whole point of acknowledging what we dislike to *DO* something about it? My answer to those questions is, we might indeed want to do something in response to a situation we don't like. We don't just have to roll over and play dead if something happens and we think it's a problem. But we're in a much better position to do something effective in response to the problem if we can own our dislike of whatever is happening, without buying into the idea that our sense of what's right and wrong constitutes the absolute standards by which everyone else should live.

So, for example, if you're planning a lovely holiday with your family and you can't wait to engage in all of the familiar rituals and all of a sudden, your

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partner tells you on the eve of your favorite holiday that they've been cheating on you and they want to split up, you don't have to like that. You don't have to like that at all.

But there's a difference between not liking that, or even HATING that that has happened, and believing that something has fundamentally gone wrong in the universe.

Here's the deal, people: we live in a world where sometimes people who are married decide they don't want to be married anymore. We live in a world in which sometimes people make certain commitments to their partners and then don't fulfill those commitments. We live in a world in which people step outside of the bounds of their agreements. This stuff happens. There's nothing you can do to eradicate these human behaviors. And there is no way to absolutely ensure that these behaviors never enter your life, whether through your own doing, or someone else's. And I do not say this to suggest that you should just be okay with any of the things I just mentioned if they happen to you. Not. At. All. But for better or worse, we live in a world where stuff happens sometimes that we don't like.

For better or worse, the human experience includes a broad range of happenings. People love each other and care for each other and they also lie, cheat, and steal. People kill each other sometimes. On purpose! And I don't love that! I don't want to kill anybody, and I don't want anybody to kill me. All kinds of crazy shit happens on this earth, and there's a lot of stuff that I'd rather not have anything to do with. But sometimes, stuff happens to us that is beyond our control. Sometimes stuff happens to us that we don't like one bit, and once it has happened, there is no way for us to un-do it, or have it un-done.

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Now. Here's where we often get tripped up. We may be able to accept, at least intellectually, that things are going to happen that we don't like, and that our lives will include some uniquely difficult episodes. We can often get our heads around that. But we have a harder time accepting that this will be true for other people, too. Other people, including people we care about, will have things happen in their lives that they REALLY don't like. And not only that, sometimes we, or our behavior, is the thing that someone we care about really doesn't like. We tend to want to try to prevent that from happening entirely.

But let me tell you, you ARE going to be the occasion of other people's pain, at times. You ARE going to be the initiator, or instigator, of uniquely difficult episodes in life, which are difficult for you AND for people you care about. Most of us find this prospect extremely uncomfortable to contemplate, and we THINK that if we just find the least-bad way to do whatever it is that we are planning to do that we think other people will not like, the whole experience will be easier for everyone. And of course, what this sometimes looks like, around this time of year, is putting stuff off until after the holidays.

What's essentially going on when we try to find the least-bad way to do something that we think is almost certainly going to be difficult is that we think we need to solve for other people's discomfort. And this is a big problem, because we CAN'T solve for other people's discomfort. Just like we can only digest food for ourselves, we can only digest emotions for ourselves. We can't digest other people's food for them, and we can't digest their emotions, either. And nor can we prevent anyone from ever feeling discomfort. Just like we can't prevent anyone else from having indigestion. Especially when we get intimately involved with other people, it is inevitable that we will be the occasion of their pain, at times. We may not

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like that, but trying to AVOID this creates a lot more problems than accepting it does.

When we're worried about other people's pain, what we really need to solve for is our OWN pain, or our own discomfort. If you're concerned about someone else being upset, or hurt, or angry, YOU are already experiencing uncomfortable emotions yourself. And it's your job to attend to those feelings. It's your job to bear the discomfort that you feel when you're anticipating someone else's discomfort, and when you're witnessing someone else's discomfort.

And a lot of us do not know how to do this, and have not had much practice doing this. And that's fair enough. No one teaches us how to deal with our own discomfort effectively in general, and how to deal with the discomfort we feel when we believe we've caused pain for people we care about in particular. But I teach people how to do this, I teach people how to relate to other people's emotions differently, and I can teach YOU how to do this.

The point, for today's episode, is that it's totally fine to decide that you are going to wait until after the holidays to do whatever it is you want to do in relation to your infidelity situation. You don't have to give anyone a breakup for Hanukkah or Christmas. Or whatever. You don't even have to make DECISIONS right now if you don't want to. My point is not that just because uniquely difficult episodes are a part of life that none of us get to avoid, you should choose to deliver news that you think someone will not like during the holidays just because you can.

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Rather, my point is that whether you wait until the holidays, or any other particular period of time is over, there is no way to ensure that your difficult situation will be less difficult for you or anyone else involved.

And that is not bad news if you're willing to deal with your own discomfort, and willing to deal with your uniquely difficult situation, even though it's difficult. There are so many things in life that we willingly do, even though we consider them hard. You can approach dealing with your infidelity situation in this way to your great advantage. We don't have to wait for something to be easier in order to do it.

Now, I will tell you that sometimes we can do difficult things on our own. And sometimes it REALLY helps to have someone there to guide us and support us as we deal with a uniquely difficult situation in our lives. And that's what I'm here for. If you've been trying to sort out your infidelity situation on your own, but you still aren't sure exactly what you want, or don't believe you can have what you want, or you know what you want but you haven't quite been able to do anything about it, I can help you move forward. Listening to this podcast can be great. But the difference between listening to this podcast and having me as your coach is like the difference between watching someone make a complex dish like a souffle on TV, and having someone in your kitchen to guide you through the process. You may be able to pick up some important stuff from watching the chef on TV, but when someone is right there in your kitchen helping you, they are attuned to your unique learning process. And the specifics of YOUR unique kitchen. And they can catch what you're doing that might make or break the souffle in real time. And if you care about learning how to make a souffle, you might WANT one-on-one guidance in your very own kitchen. You might not want to be left to your own devices any longer. You may want to make efficient progress, and you may want the coaching that can help you make it.

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By the way, I haven't had a souffle in YEARS. Decades, probably. But I have actually helped make souffles a few times, and without the guidance of someone more experienced than me, I never would have gotten a souffle to rise.

All right! If you would like my guidance and support, if you would like me to help you resolve your infidelity situation in a way that is truly right for you, then head on over to my website and schedule an introductory coaching session with me. As of this recording, I have a couple of intro sessions open in December, so grab them while you can, or secure a time to talk with me in January. You can book your appointment through my website, [mariemurphyphd.com](http://mariemurphyphd.com). I can't wait to meet you.

Thank you all so much for listening! Have a great week. Bye for now.