

The Practice Space Episode 1

Stacy Remke ([00:07](#)):

Hello everyone. Welcome to the Practice Space where we'll explore ideas and skills to support us in our professional practice. I'm Stacy Remke, a clinical social worker, and currently a professor at the University of Minnesota's Graduate School of Social Work. Before coming to the university, my practice experience was in the field of pediatric palliative care where I dealt with complex themes like grief loss, child welfare, and sustainability. Within the field, I have a great interest in exploring how social workers can find support and develop skills to sustain their important practice.

Sara Remke ([00:40](#)):

And I'm Sarah Remke. I'm a practicing end of life doula and a meditation teacher. I have a particular interest in energy and boundaries. I also have a private practice where I work with individuals and professionals, often therapists and caregivers, where we explore these various concepts and how they intertwine with our work and what does our energy communicate, how do we discern our own energy versus someone else's energy? And how do we create and maintain these boundaries? I find these subjects absolutely fascinating. And I am the sister of Stacy Remke.

Stacy Remke ([01:21](#)):

Thanks for joining us in this space, the Practice Space. We would like to talk about the intersections between our meditation practice and our various clinical practices and how we've found these skills to be really helpful with promoting our wellbeing and also our engagement with our clients. One of the things that we keep coming around to is the need to have a toolkit or some skills to help sustain ourselves in practice. So that's what we hope to talk to people about in the next sessions.

Sara Remke ([02:01](#)):

Yes, as you know Stacy, one of my big focuses is on boundaries and energetic boundaries. And for me, I got into this work, I was a pretty angry person and I didn't really know why. And what I began to learn is that a lot of times that was actually other people's energy in my space, and that really can have a big effect on us. And when you're working with people in trauma, you're picking up all kinds of things that you're maybe unaware of and what can happen to you. You can become exhausted, you can become angry, you can become depressed, you can feel overwhelmed, right.

Stacy Remke ([02:43](#)):

Or just kind of shut down, also

Sara Remke ([02:45](#)):

Shut down, yeah.

Stacy Remke ([02:46](#)):

And I think a lot of people might wonder what we mean by when we talk about our energetic space. And I would just kind of invite people to think about a time when maybe you've kind of walked into a room and felt the energy of the space. Maybe it was somebody who was extraordinarily sad or upset or maybe somebody that was really a group of people that were really happy and upbeat. And you can kind of feel that literally in your own body, in your own sort of spirit as you move into those spaces. And so if

we think about that as kind of a natural process that's happening all the time where people are exchanging energy, it's kind of what happens with human beings naturally. But then as you point out, we can absorb energies unconsciously and we can not necessarily see them as other people's energy. And then that becomes very problematic.

Sara Remke ([03:41](#)):

Yeah, I mean, the way I talk about it is we have this egg shaped energetic body that surrounds us. And for women sometimes that can be five or six feet out from your body, and you literally are interacting with other people's energies all day long. And I think the more you become conscious of that, the more you begin to notice it. And then the question becomes, well, what do we do about that and how do we deal with that?

Stacy Remke ([04:10](#)):

Yeah. I think about things that are talked about very commonly. Things like, oh, the person's in my space, they're standing too close to me, or I need a little more space between me and the next person on the bus, or whatever. And so I think, again, those are sort of acknowledgements in small ways. I think that people do experience this kind of flow of energy in various ways. I even think about times, I used to work in a psychiatric hospital many years ago, and I just remember there were some people and they were floridly psychotic, felt like their energy field was very big. It was sort of all over the place literally. And I of course didn't have this way of conceptualizing it at the time, but as I was learning to kind of meditate and use the system more, that's helped me make sense of what was happening. And again, give me more tools with how to respond to that. Somebody's tendency might be to just back away, but there are in fact other ways to deal with that.

Sara Remke ([05:15](#)):

And I would even add that people who enter into the professions that we're talking about, social workers for instance, tend to be very sensitive, empathic people. And so you are feeling that and you just may not have the language for what it is that you're experiencing. And so I think what we can help people do is to find that language.

Stacy Remke ([05:37](#)):

Yeah. One thing I think about is I talk to people about intuition being that information that you gather below your level of consciousness. So it's real information, but it's just coming at you so fast, so intuitively that you don't even necessarily register where it came from. This is when people talk about, I just know oftentimes that's it. I think of brain scans I've seen of very young children where they've been able to document very rapid within tenths of a second, the way infants can register the affective display of their parent. They can see quickly if that parent is happy or unhappy and just literally a split second.

Sara Remke ([06:27](#)):

Isn't that incredible?

Stacy Remke ([06:28](#)):

It is. And now they can prove it. And so I think about, for example, child welfare workers who are walking into family settings where those kinds of dynamics are occurring, where oftentimes there are families that are living in very challenging circumstances, and there's been a history of children registering the difficulties of those family situations on an energetic level. And that's kind of different

from being able to find, say something that's neglectful or overtly abusive. There can still be that kind of atmosphere that's impacting that child.

Sara Remke ([07:13](#)):

Well, let's talk about that. I mean, that child that's coming from a survival technique,

Stacy Remke ([07:19](#)):

Correct?

Sara Remke ([07:20](#)):

That's where that comes from. And that child, and they are able to read that. And so it's really important for us to validate what those children are seeing and experiencing.

Stacy Remke ([07:31](#)):

Of course. And you think about what we know more now too about intergenerational experiences that those kinds of can get passed on through generations, those patterns of behavior. And so do you think about how do we disrupt that? I mean, we typically use things like education and therapy and social control kind of mechanisms, but this is another level to work on it. This kind of addressing the energies of those messages, those experiences in a way that at least in my experience, profoundly help people move it in ways that, for example, just education or psychoeducation or therapy might not quite be able to do as well, or I think as efficiently actually

Sara Remke ([08:25](#)):

Agreed. We're getting pretty deep, pretty fast.

([08:30](#)):

And I think that's another thing that people who have experienced a lot of trauma or grown up in families where there could be a lot of chaos or trauma, we don't know which came first, the chicken or the egg, but they do develop super sensitivities to reading everything that's happening around them. And it's important to remember that that comes from a place of that they want to survive. I mean, that's a survival mechanism. Sometimes if that's not something that language is brought to, they can begin to feel like they're just in that constant state of heightened looking for the hairbrush to fly at any corner. I mean whatever, someone to go off the handle at any moment or they're always on the lookout for those dangers. And that can be a really hard way to live.

Stacy Remke ([09:26](#)):

And I think about what we're recently learning from polyvagal theory, for example, about the kind of hyperactivation super activation of those fight, flight, freeze fawn kinds of responses. And we know that takes a toll on the body as well, and that it's not just a survival strategy, but it actually can have implications for survival and health. So again, just so many important reasons to develop some skills and how to disrupt those patterns of the movement of energy in and through and around us.

Sara Remke ([10:06](#)):

You bring a great point because while it is a survival mechanism, if we are just in it 100% of the time, that's when it starts working against us, right? So you want to honor both where it came from, but then you also want to look at different ways of like, okay, am I really in survival in this specific moment? And

the answer may be no. And you need to start being able to ask those questions and help whoever you're working with to ask those questions. Sometimes it can just be that everything in your whole life becomes about survival, when in fact every decision may not be about that.

Stacy Remke ([10:47](#)):

And I think of one of the things that we talk about in this meditation system, which is we should say, referred to as psychic psychology. I guess it comes from the work of John Friedlander and Gloria Hemsher. They've been studying this and teaching about it for decades now and written some wonderful books we can share information about, but they talk about the importance of cultivating neutrality and to be able to deal with things as they are, not just as we wish they would be. When I started to figure that out and started to carry that into my own practice, I found sort of a freedom. Yes, I was there to change things, but if I start with what's happening now, it was almost like magic. It felt like sort of honoring what's happening in the moment. And I would probably start this inside myself with some very simple, basically meditation slash self-regulation techniques that I had learned. And so if I would start there that I felt like I carried into the room an acceptance of what was happening now, which actually helped kind of settle down, well, it helped me avoid some tensions and confrontations. I think certainly I felt better walking into the situation, and I felt like I had more access to my own wherewithal, my own knowledge and skills as a social worker. For example, my own kind of emotional stability, if you will.

Sara Remke ([12:26](#)):

One of the things that I do with my students is that you, for instance, if you were to walk into us, because you're talking about a home visit, right?

Stacy Remke ([12:35](#)):

Or a hospital room, which hospital? I worked a lot in pediatric hospitals.

Sara Remke ([12:39](#)):

Okay? So you walk into the room and you just notice everything that you can that's happening in that room. You notice the sound of the breathing machine. You notice maybe the call light is on, maybe there's a machine that's making a sound, maybe there's a other family member there. You just notice every single thing that you can notice in that room. And what that does is it brings you into that exact moment. It's very, very easy way to become very present instead of thinking about, this is what I have to go in and change and blah, blah, blah, blah, blah. And then it also brings you into the current time of your client patient and where they are living in that exact moment. These are all the things that surround them.

Stacy Remke ([13:34](#)):

Even if you start with noticing out loud to the client, I notice that there's the child's crying in the next room. I notice that you appear to be distressed. I wonder if you could tell me more about that. That's a less judgmental approach too than saying, you look upset. Maybe that's not the best example, but I'm trying to use a word that's more neutral than upset. I am trying to use, there's a look on your face and I'm not sure what it means. I wonder if you could tell me how you're doing. And that gives the person an opportunity to respond in a way that hopefully helps them feel little less judgment on the front end, a little bit more openness.

Sara Remke ([14:21](#)):

That's a really great point. I mean, I was seeing a client a couple of weeks ago, and there was a guy down the hall who was moaning and saying, help me, help me. And I was becoming very aware of that, and I knew that the patient was very aware of that. And then the aide was also aware of that, but she didn't want to go into that room because she said, oh, he has to wait his turn. And when I go down there, he's really nasty to me. So I just said to myself, okay, there's a lot going on in this room right now. But the thing was to bring into the open that tension that we all felt from that guy's crying down the hall. So like you say, if you're a kid in the hospital and you're hearing crying in the next room even to just say like, oh, is that crying loud for you? Or do you notice that crying? And then they might go like, oh, yeah, what's wrong? What's happening? Is something wrong? They may not even notice it until you bring it to their attention. That's what you're saying. Right?

Stacy Remke ([15:27](#)):

Or even acknowledge their experience with, maybe they put effort into tuning it out because they don't feel like they can do anything about it. And so just acknowledge like, wow, that's even a lot of energy, just to not respond to that. Which again, it's sort of addressing the dynamics hopefully with less judgment, but just sort of an acknowledgement.

Sara Remke ([15:52](#)):

It's really an interesting point too, because probably kids are really easy to not be bothered by other kids crying, but if there's a parent in the room that for sure is going to be stressing that parent out

Stacy Remke ([16:06](#)):

Yeah for sure.

Sara Remke ([16:07](#)):

And so to think of that everybody in the room is who we're dealing with. We're not just dealing with the child, because then if the parent is stressed out, the child is going to be more attuned to that. And so it's important to address all of those people who are there.

Stacy Remke ([16:25](#)):

Yeah. I think of another way that neutrality helped me in practice was appreciating that people are free to do whatever they feel is right for them. And so what that means is letting go of shoulds have to and oughts, and I tell my students this, just take those words out of your vocabulary

([16:48](#)):

Because nobody has to. I mean, and I think again about child welfare, there's a lot of shoulds that the whole system perpetuates. And we recognize now that issues with things like structural racism and inequities, there's a lot of shoulds that certain members of our community experience much more directly and acutely than others of us are privileged to not have to notice. And I think of just sort of walking as a child protection worker walking into a home, for example. There's a lot of shoulds that come in with you. And so to affirm the agency of the person is critical, and how do you do that when the stakes are so high? And I think part of it is to think about, well, there's natural consequences that could unfold if the person chooses not to follow certain advice, for example. That's different from saying you have to or you should. And so I hope people can hear that difference.

Sara Remke ([17:59](#)):

I do an exercise in my classes. I love this. So for a week, every time you hear yourself saying, you should, or I should, or you have to, or I have to, or You ought or I ought, you stop yourself and you choose another word. And it really makes you become conscious of that. And so instead of saying you have to put your coat on, so you go, well, I don't know. It's kind of cold though for me. I'm going to put my coat on. What do you want to do? So you're immediately putting the choice back to the other person. That's what you're saying? Yeah.

Stacy Remke ([18:33](#)):

Or even to say, I'm concerned. It's so cold out. If you don't wear a coat, you're going to be very uncomfortable. So I would prefer you wear a coat, or I wish you would wear a coat. That's different too. That's a great exercise. And I think of another one where just a practice for yourself in your own mind. Think about something that's really going on that you typically would think I should. For me, it's like I should give up sugar right now after the holidays, but another way I could reframe that to myself is I really want to give up sugar. And the feeling inside of myself is so different, and I would just invite people to try that very simple exercise.

Sara Remke ([19:15](#)):

Absolutely.

Stacy Remke ([19:16](#)):

And see how that feels.

Sara Remke ([19:18](#)):

It becomes a chosen action as opposed to a punishment

Stacy Remke ([19:22](#)):

Right. Just literally in my body, I feel like an openness and kind of a lifting of spirit and energy that's very different from like, oh, I have to, or I should, or la la, which essentially is a self-criticism.

Sara Remke ([19:35](#)):

A lot of times. Yes, it's enforcement, I would say, as opposed to saying, gosh, I'd really, I want to give up sugar because I know I feel better, or I want to lose weight, or whatever your reason is. I don't want to get a cavity. So instead of saying, if you eat sugar, you're going to get a cavity. When you just say it from the other side, it makes a difference. Yeah.

Stacy Remke ([20:01](#)):

I prefer not to eat sugar, to spare my teeth, whatever

Sara Remke ([20:05](#)):

I care about my teeth, so going

Stacy Remke ([20:07](#)):

To, or I care about my body all those ways. And I think of smokers and people trying to give up drinking and stuff like that. It's like those are particularly helpful self-talk messages,

Sara Remke ([20:19](#)):

Because we naturally go into resistance with those words, did have to or not. We naturally go, you can't tell me what to do. So you begin to resist it, where you turn it around and you say like, gosh, I really would like to smoke less. There's nothing to resist there.

Stacy Remke ([20:38](#)):

I'd like to breathe free or whatever.

Sara Remke ([20:41](#)):

I don't want to spend all this money on cigarettes. I'd like to spend less. That becomes an active choice, and I think that's really key. And sometimes it's really hard to find another word. It is a really fun exercise, and it will increase the vocabulary.

Stacy Remke ([20:59](#)):

Well, good. So we could offer that as one simple thing that people could start with to start to cultivate neutrality and to kind of start to engage their own desires for growth and change rather than that kind of opposition and should have toss and not or that resistance, I guess.

Sara Remke ([21:21](#)):

Yeah. I would even take it, say it. Sometimes it's hard to know what neutrality really means, and I think just for this week, every time you hear yourself saying, should have to or ought, stop yourself, choose a different word. That in itself will help you see how often you have those judgments. And as it stops you, you'll be developing more neutrality in a very fluid, easy way.

Stacy Remke ([21:51](#)):

And I'll just point out, this is sort of tracking very nicely with cognitive behavioral strategies for those who like to see things in case and theory and whatever science. But I'm thinking maybe in the next few minutes here, we could actually do an exercise to help a meditation exercise to help people experience a little bit of that more neutral space inside themselves. I think of going to the center of your head or,

Sara Remke ([22:19](#)):

Yeah, I mean, we can just take a minute and breathe deeply into your belly. I would suggest, okay, are we going to do it right now? Let's just everybody,

Stacy Remke ([22:31](#)):

Let's share an exercise that people can do at home.

Sara Remke ([22:34](#)):

So just sit, relax, close your eyes, breathe deeply into your belly, just breathe in as deep as you can. Nice big exhale. And as you breathe in, just imagine bringing back all the pieces, all the parts of yourself that you left at anywhere, and any time that could be throughout the day, throughout the week, throughout the lifetime. Just breathe all those pieces of yourself back in. And then just imagine the egg shape that

surrounds you. It could be three to five feet out from your body in all directions, and that's your energetic body. And just give it a nice color, nice band of color, maybe blue, green, pink, all the way around your body. You're just demarcating your own personal space.

[\(23:29\)](#):

Go underneath your feet and above your head and just notice where your body sits within that egg shape. And you can make any adjustments. If it's too close, you can push it out a little bit. If it's too out, bring it in a little bit. Just smooth out the edges and see if you can just begin to notice that space that your body sits in. Breathe deeply into your belly, nice big exhale, and say hello to what we call the center of your head. That's about two finger widths behind. If you go straight back from your eyes and just above your ears, imagine where those lines would intersect and just see if you can find that space. Don't try too hard to see. Just really relax into that space. It's always a little bit lower than I think it's going to be. Just thank your body for taking those couple minutes. Just allow yourself to begin to feel those spaces that you do have, and as you begin to operate from that center of your head, you'll be less reactive. It takes practice, but you'll find that you'll become less and less reactive and more receptive to what's going on around you. Thank your body for being willing to change, and when you're ready, you can open your eyes.

Stacy Remke [\(25:47\)](#):

I think that's good. And I think of finding that center of your head space. For me, I always need to remind myself to settle. That's the word I used to myself, settle a little bit further, deeper in. And what I learned somewhere along the way is there's a tendency for us to be reaching out ahead of ourselves all the time. And so when I find myself doing that, that's a good reminder to just take a deep breath, connect with the center of my head, and then it's sort of in a way, moving into that space feels more spacious. That's why I've experienced sort of more space inside myself.

Sara Remke [\(26:33\)](#):

Exactly.

Stacy Remke [\(26:33\)](#):

In a nice way, sort of a calm place. Yeah.

Sara Remke [\(26:36\)](#):

That's good. The way you describe it of it's kind of like we're reaching out in front of us instead of

Stacy Remke [\(26:42\)](#):

Sitting in our own center.

Sara Remke [\(26:44\)](#):

Yes. Yeah, that's a good way to describe that,

Stacy Remke [\(26:48\)](#):

Which I think is the goal of this work, which probably we won't ever achieve quite in our lifetimes, but to try and function or operate out of our own center with neutrality instead of being always ahead of ourselves or outside of ourselves or in other people's space, in other people's

Sara Remke ([27:08](#)):

Business. I mean, for me, these techniques, the very simplest one can help you or you can keep going and refining, refining, refining. I don't know that we get there. That's the beauty of it. A little bit of it can really help you reduce stress and help you to find yourself, and if you're drawn to it, you go further and further into it. But very simple things can help you to restabilize yourself or operate from your center, as you say, or,

Stacy Remke ([27:38](#)):

Yeah, those are elegant strategies in the sense that they're, like you say, simple, but the more you repeat them, the more depth of insight you just get a better sense of self-efficacy, I think agency.

Sara Remke ([27:52](#)):

Yes. And we just keep refining them, and the world becomes so much more interesting when we're not judging everyone and know what they should be doing.

Stacy Remke ([28:06](#)):

Yeah. Well, that reminds me of another key tenant of this meditation system is curiosity and to kind of invite curiosity. When you're encountering a situation that feels unfamiliar or you're having a reaction to, it's very easy to want to put up defenses, but if you can instead maintain curiosity like, gee, what just happened there, or What just happened to me when that happened? Things like that can be, it can really shift your sense of what you're dealing with in the moment and kind of give you more options.

Sara Remke ([28:42](#)):

Yeah, curiosity, and I would add to that, self reflection and you're just reflecting all the time on what just happened, what was my part in that,

Stacy Remke ([28:51](#)):

Right.

Sara Remke ([28:53](#)):

How can I do better

Stacy Remke ([28:55](#)):

Or what can I do differently next time? Yeah,

Sara Remke ([28:57](#)):

Differently,

Stacy Remke ([28:58](#)):

Which is all of course key to social work practice as well. We're always wanting to

Sara Remke ([29:03](#)):

Good,

Stacy Remke ([29:03](#)):

Good. Yeah. Good. Okay. Well, so we've, I think, shared a little bit of an overview of some of the challenges that confront practitioners and some strategies and concepts that might help people begin to craft a little more space for themselves in their practice. Anything else you want to add for this kind of overview or general information?

Sara Remke ([29:35](#)):

I mean, there's so much to talk about.

Stacy Remke ([29:37](#)):

And we will, we will talk about it.

Sara Remke ([29:42](#)):

Well, that does it for our practice session today. We hope you will practice these skills on your own. Let us know how it's going, and we'd love to hear from you. Thanks for listening. Thanks for joining us today. Bye.

Speaker 4 ([29:58](#)):

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