

#98: Using Awareness Against Yourself



Full Episode Transcript

With Your Host

Marissa McKool, MPH

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Hey you all, I'm Marissa McKool, and you're listening to the *Redefining Rest Podcast for Public Health Professionals*. Here we believe rest is your right. You don't have to earn it, you just have to learn how to take it and I'm going to teach you. Ready? Come along.

Hello there friends. I am recording this episode after being sick for the third time this past month. Yes, you heard that right, three times all flu cold like illnesses. I don't know what's up. It is so frustrating. Hopefully this will be the final time but we shall see. But as you all know life is 50/50 so that's kind of the shitty 50 that's been going on. The exciting 50 that's been going on is I just recently went to Vegas to see Adele live which was amazing, worth every penny, worth all the effort to get the ticket and I got some quality time with one of my best friends who lives across the country, it was truly so amazing.

And as you are listening to this, as this goes live this episode I will be in Miami. I'm going for a coaching event and then Jared's coming down and we're staying a couple of extra days to just hang out on the beach. So although being sick has really sucked and I have been getting frustrated with the continuation of it. There are other amazing things happening. So I hope in your life you can really look at what's going on through the 50/50 lens and see even if there are some challenges, even if there is some shitty-ness, there are bright spots, there is exciting stuff too and really live into that space as well.

Last week we talked about taking responsibility for your life. And today I'm going to be talking about something that happens with nearly everyone who joins my one-on-one coaching program. At some point they struggle with this and we coach on this which is they learn their thoughts cause their feelings. That was all last week's episode was about. And then when they notice themselves on their own or in coaching, I point out their thought. They start to blame and shame themselves for thinking it. I'm going to talk more about this which is essentially using awareness against yourself.

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And what I'm talking about today which I'll be talking about in the context of coaching and thought work you can use to apply to any awareness you build, not just your thoughts creating your feelings. Maybe you become aware that you have ADHD and it makes it more challenging to remember things. Or you just learn the proper form for weightlifting. Perhaps you just completed a leadership training for motivational interviewing. You built awareness, you learned something new that's supposed to help you.

And you find yourself shaming yourself or judging herself for not changing right away or continuing to do things the way you have in the past. When you use awareness against yourself what that means is you learn something new, something that is intended to help you and immediately you think you 'should' have it down pat, that you should just get it, that you should just be changed, that the information should just be easy to implement. And if it's not then something's wrong with you, you've done something wrong. And you're hard on yourself and you blame yourself and you shame yourself.

That's what using awareness against yourself is and it is absolutely not helpful. This is what it looks like in the coaching context. Maybe you've learned your thoughts create your feelings. No one else creates them, other circumstances, your past, nothing else creates your feelings but your own thoughts. Maybe you've been learning it a while listening to this podcast. Or maybe you're new and you just learned it on last week's episode or today. Maybe you're one of my clients in my one-on-one program learning it deeply and you built that awareness.

You have the awareness. So when you think a thought it creates a feeling. So for example, maybe you figured out that when you think I should be a better friend you feel shame. You have learned that the only thing creating that emotion of shame is that sentence in your mind, I should be a better friend. Maybe through coaching or listening to this podcast or reading

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books or therapy you're finally able to see that this thought, I should be a better friend, isn't a fact, it's 100% subjective.

Some people think a 'good friend' is determined by how much you text or call, the quantity. Where other people think a 'good friend' is determined by if you show up, the times it really matters, the quality over quantity. And you're starting to see that what counts as being a good or bad friend is subjective and your thought, I should be a better friend is optional and that is what's creating your shame, not how you show up, not what you do, not what the other person thinks.

You are starting to see that when you don't remember someone's birthday that might not mean that you're a bad friend. So you are starting to really understand that the shame you feel is not because you didn't remember their birthday, or they were sad and are upset, it was because of your thought, the thought I should be a better friend. The purpose of learning that and building that awareness is simply to know that information, that's it. I know all of you think the purpose is to change something right away as quickly as possible but that's not true.

The purpose of learning it is to learn it. Eventually yes, you may decide to use that information and make change but the purpose is not to make quick immediate change. And that expectation is setting you up to use awareness against yourself to actually make it harder to feel better and change eventually. I see this so often with so many of you, so many of you I coach. You learn something new and then three minutes later think it should just be different already, you should just have it down. You should have it memorized. You should do it perfectly.

The next time your friend texts you to hang out and you don't want to, that thought comes back up, that thought, I should be a better friend. And not only do you feel shame from that thought when you think it but then you double down on the shame because you second that and think I shouldn't

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be thinking that. I know that creates shame, I need to stop thinking about that, and you resist that thought.

And you come into the coaching session and tell me your thought and say, "I know it's just my thought, I shouldn't be thinking this. How do I stop thinking about this?" And you really use the awareness against yourself to make it harder. Of course you still think the thoughts you just gained awareness around. Really think about it, you've been thinking thoughts over and over and over again unconsciously mostly or consciously you've been thinking them but believing they're facts for a long time.

Then you get the awareness that these are optional thoughts and you immediately think you should be able to change them, take them out of your brain, feel differently. No, of course those thoughts will still be there. The purpose of awareness is not instant change. In fact it's not even necessarily change, it's just to gather the information, to learn, to know more, to get curious, to understand yourself better, to have compassion.

What you are really uncomfortable with, the root of really using awareness against yourself is that you are uncomfortable with sitting with this knowledge and just letting it be there without changing anything. Witnessing it like you witness the snow falling without running out to shovel right away which is not really the best metaphor especially for my family and friends in Tahoe because right now there are extreme weather conditions where you really do need to shovel right away but you get my point.

Let's say you delivered survey results to a local school you're working with. You work at the Health Department, you're an administrator on a teen health survey. And you collect the data and you tell the administrators, "Hey, we found 60% of the students say they're experiencing bullying." And then the very next day you get an email from the principal that says, "Oh my God, another student reported bullying today. We are failing. This

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should have changed by now. What's wrong with us?" What would you say to them?

You would tell them, "Of course, you just got the data. Nothing is going to change overnight." And then if they said, "Well, we have to fix this right now, what do we do?" You'd probably say, "Listen, we need to look at the data more. We can't just implement something right away. We need to understand the context more. We need to determine the best program to implement change. We need to implement the program, understanding the culture here. And even then when we get to that point, we will learn things and need to tweak things."

The point being that there is a period of awareness, of looking at the data more, of questioning it more, of learning more, of building hypotheses, of getting more curious, of painting a fuller picture. The more you do that the more helpful it's going to be. And the actual less painful it's going to be in the long run. Right now when you're using awareness against yourself and not doing this, you're creating more suffering for yourself. This is exactly what you need to do with your own self-work, with your thought work, with redefining rest, with changing your experience.

One of the most important and valuable skills you can build, to create the life you want, to feel better, to have more time, to get more rest, whatever it is you want. Is to be able to sit in the awareness of what you are learning about yourself, about your brain and when your existing thought patterns come up again because they will. To not react, to not resist, to not shame yourself, to not judge yourself, to have compassion instead and patience and be curious.

There is this quote one of my yoga teachers recently said that I love. I can't stop thinking about. I go to a studio where there is a mirror on one side. And when we switch to that side in a position they said, "You have an option, to use the mirror in front of you for judgment or alignment." Which

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that alone I love, I think about that all the time. But I want to elaborate in the context of using awareness against yourself. The mirror is a tool in the metaphor or example of yoga.

The mirror is a tool that gives you information but the only way to make an alignment is to actually hold space for the awareness that the mirror, the tool is giving you. You have to look at your back and how it's angled. You have to tune into your body and how it feels. You have to notice the way your legs are positioned. You have to let yourself look and learn and hold space for that awareness.

If you've gone to 10 yoga classes and you get into that same pose every time and you jump into using the mirror to align before you really use awareness because you think I should already know. I've been here 10 times. I've done this class. And then you feel pain or still have the instructor come and correct you. Then you tell yourself, I should have known better and then you feel shame. That doesn't serve you at all. It doesn't help you. The same goes with your thoughts and your thought work.

When you use what you are learning from this podcast or our coaching sessions if you're one of my clients to shame yourself for not changing fast enough you are not serving yourself. To be able to notice a thought and know it creates your feelings and not be an asshole to yourself when you still think it and still believe it, it will get you so much farther than trying to force a change right away and shaming yourself when it doesn't. Because the latter gives that thought actually more power.

When you just let it be there and not use your awareness against yourself you get the power back. So I know for some of you this might have been a little meta. If you are new and this is your first episode I would go back and listen to last week's episode which will help you understand this a lot better.

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Before we go, there are only a few weeks left to schedule a consult to join my coaching program. And I really only want to speak to a handful of you listening. I want to talk to those of you who have been thinking about it. For those of you who maybe this is your first time listening, you can go check it out but I'm not really speaking directly to you. Those of you who have decided for sure no, not really talking to you. I love you all but I really, really want to talk to those of you in the middle.

You've been thinking about it, you've been wondering, you go back and forth. Maybe you read my emails. You click on the program page but you don't sign up for a consult. Or every week you listen to the podcast and you think that might help me but you don't actually take action. I'm talking directly to you because you are in the maybe hole. Remember that episode from several weeks ago, that place of passive indecision seems so innocent but it's really, really not.

It is draining so much of your energy because right now you have moments of hope and optimism when you think about maybe doing the program. And then when you don't follow through on scheduling a consult to make a definitive yes or no you shut down that hope and optimism and feel more hopeless and defeated. But from a place where you're not making a confident decision and you're still in the maybe hole. This is not where I want you to be. I would rather you be a decisive no than be in the maybe hole.

That is such a waste of your time and energy and it feels like shit. Right now when you're in the maybe hole it doesn't feel quite like shit, it feels normal to you but when you get out of that you realize, oh my gosh, what a waste of energy, that felt terrible. Here's the deal. You are not going to get to a decisive no or yes from where you are right now. Again, this is only for those of you who have been ping-ponging, passively thinking about it but your brain's finding all the reasons that you shouldn't sign up for a consult but you still keep wondering and you go back and forth.

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If you are in that place that means that you thinking more about it on your own will not help you get to a definitive decision, if it did you would have already done but that hasn't happened, you're still thinking maybe. From where you are, the only way to get out of maybe hole and get to a clear confident decision is truly to jump on a consult call with me. That will help you decide either way yes or no and get out of that hole.

One of my coaches calls it the miserable maybe. No more maybe, no more indecision draining your important energy and capacity. Go to mckoolcoaching.com/coaching, sign up for a consult. It's no obligation. It's totally free. We chat, if you say no that's great. Actually I would prefer for you to say not than be in this indecision place. And if you say yes then awesome, we'll work together. But I want you to get out of this hole and the call will help you do that. It will help you address any concerns your brain has, any questions, any doubts, any lingering thoughts.

And wrap those all up, those loose ends so you can have a certain decision, feel good about it without second guessing, without regret, no more ping-ponging, no more questioning, no more doubt, no more going in circles. All of that's gone so you can use that energy to do something else. So mckoolcoaching.com/coaching. Go sign up, only a couple of weeks left. With that you all, I'm going to let you go. I'll talk to you next week, bye everyone.

If you found this episode helpful then you have to check out my coaching program where I provide you individualized support to create a life centered around rest. Head on over to mckoolcoaching.com, that's M-C-K-O-O-L coaching.com to learn more.