

## #44: Experiencing Intense Emotions with Self-Care and Kindness



### Full Episode Transcript

With Your Host

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## #44: Experiencing Intense Emotions with Self-Care and Kindness

If you're two to five years out of your MPH degree, love public health, but find yourself secretly unhappy at work and maybe even thinking about quitting your job, then this is the podcast for you. I'm Marissa McKool, host of the *Thoughts Are Your Root Cause* podcast. Join me each week as I share tips, tools, and resources to help you have the career you've always dreamed of without any of the stress you are experiencing right now. Come along.

Hi, everyone. How are you all? I'm so excited that you're here with me today no matter where you're listening or what you're doing, whether you're on your way to work, or cleaning, or walking the dog. I'm so glad you've decided to join me for today's episode. Today I was going to talk about setting and honoring work boundaries because I know so many of you struggle with this and it's because you're doing it wrong. Sorry, but that's just the truth. But I decided to push that back. You'll get that episode next week for two reasons.

One is the first step to being able to actually do boundary work is to be able to manage your own emotions. And if you don't know how to do that part or you don't practice doing that part, your boundaries will fail. Either because you've set the wrong boundary for the wrong reason or because you don't hold your boundary. And then the other reason is I actually have had an experience this week of dealing with an intense emotion. For me it's been shame and I am still working through it, and I wanted to share it as a perfect example of how to be with an intense emotion.

And I did think about waiting and recording this episode later, but I actually think it'll be really powerful and useful for me to share this while I'm going through it in real time. And so, I will say I may get emotional. I don't know if I will but I'm going to be talking about what I'm experiencing right now so I just want you to know that. We have talked about allowing emotions before way back, I think it was episode two. I outlined the basic process for allowing emotions and the reasons to do so.

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So, the quick footnote version of this is emotions don't happen to us. We create our emotions with our thinking consciously or not. When we think a thought our brain fires off signals to our body to respond. One of the ways it responds is by physical sensations which we then label as an emotion. When you think about tripping in your dance recital you might feel a knot in your stomach which you might label as worry. And processing emotions means allowing those physical sensations to be there, noticing them, not running from them, not avoiding them, not pushing them away.

If you struggle with identifying your emotion then the practice in that case is to go to your body and feel them. So, episode two, if you're interested, goes through that whole process and kind of guides you through that. I want to talk about what this looks like in practice when you are processing an intense emotion. So truly any emotion can be intense but what I'm talking about here when I think about an intense emotion is an emotion that for most, if not all people creates an intense experience.

So, shame, fear, grief, some people sometimes anger and despair and maybe there are others. And also, there are the occasions where an emotion has been so heightened or suppressed that then when it bubbles up it feels very intense. That can happen a lot with anxiety, or even guilt, or again, anger. Any emotion can be intense. But I want to focus on the emotions that many of us struggle with which are shame, fear, grief, and anger.

And partly the reason that we struggle so much with these emotions, and they feel so intense is because when they come up our response is to avoid, suppress or resist them because we don't want to feel them. We think they're bad. We're scared of them. We're told we shouldn't feel them, that it means something bad about us. And when we do this those emotions don't go away. They continue to grow. And partly because the thoughts we're thinking that create that emotion it feels so true and so real.

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So here is the cut and dried process of being with an intense emotion. And then I'm going to go through more details of my experience this week so you can get an example. So, the first part is just have enough awareness to notice something is off with how you feel. So that's step one. And then when you do that, step two is deciding to get curious about it and do some thought work.

And by thought work I mean maybe you get a pen and paper, and you ask yourself what you're feeling and why you're feeling that way. Or if you have a coach, get coaching on it. Or if you have a therapist, talk to your therapist about it or even talk with a trusted person to help you figure it out. And then step three, once you're curious and have some more information, identify the feeling you're having. And once you identify that feeling, step four is giving yourself space to be with that feeling.

And we're going to focus mostly today on this final step, how to be with your feeling. So, here's a recent example from this week in my life. So, as I've started my business a lot of intense emotions have come up over the past year. And I have gone through this experience many, many times. But this past week, on paper one of the days would seem great to anyone else. I got everything on my calendar I'd scheduled to do, done. I had three people in one day sign up for coaching. I went on a run even though I didn't feel like it at first but then felt really good after.

I had new appliances installed which I've been waiting to get and purchase since I moved into this condo four years ago. So, on paper it was check, check, check, everything's great. But on my walk with my partner at the end of the day I noticed I didn't really want to talk. And to me I know that's a signal, me retreating and not communicating. And then when he was talking I wasn't really listening.

And then when we got home I noticed I was being really short and reactive with him. He was putting some stuff away without me asking which

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normally I'd be like, hallelujah, praise Jesus, something I want him to do. And then I noticed I was getting irritated by it, and I told him to stop. So, I had the awareness that something was off, I just didn't know what. I could tell I didn't feel great, I was grumpy, and it wasn't just like, I didn't sleep well grumpy. I knew I had some awareness something was off.

So, then I decided to just sit down and do some thought work. And for me, to really help my brain get to that place I decided to dim the lights and light a candle. To me this was a signal to myself, okay, we're taking time for ourselves right now. And what I did was I first closed my eyes and I scanned my body to see what the sensations were. Because when I don't know what's going on with me, when I can't see what I'm thinking I find this to be the most helpful to start with.

For some of you, you might already know what you're thinking or feeling and so you can start by writing that down and then going into your body to get in touch with the sensations. I did the opposite, and it doesn't really matter which way you do it. But I noticed I had a tight jaw and a tight throat. I noticed the kind of back of my head, nose area was kind of tight and congested. I noticed some shallow breathing. And when I asked myself what are the three possible emotions I could be feeling I wrote frustration, shame, and shock.

And here's what I want you to know, whenever I do this work on myself or I'm working with a client, if the following emotions come up I always have a start here, shame, fear, anger, grief. Brené Brown calls, at least shame, calls shame a full contact emotion. And I actually would call the other fear, anger and grief can be full contact emotions too. And if these emotions are coming up for you I would recommend you kind of get curious about those first even if you have other emotions like sadness or anxiety.

Give space to the shame, the fear, the anger, or the grief first. Yes, those emotions can feel intense. And yes, your brain might think it will be harder,

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but this is why we want to start there. So, I asked myself why I was feeling shame. And I answered as honestly and as unfiltered as possible because my brain just like yours will do, when we work on these intense emotions your brain is not going to want to be honest and open. You have to decide on purpose to be honest and open.

And what came up for me which as I'm about to share with you all, my brain right now is like, don't tell them you thought this because that's what shame does and a lot of these other intense emotions that tells us something's wrong with us. We shouldn't share, it will be embarrassing, something's going to happen, people are going to judge us. But I think it's important for you to see what I was going through so you can use my experience to help you if you go through this or when you go through this.

So, what came up for me were some deep core beliefs about being liked, about wanting to be liked and then shaming myself for wanting to be liked and then wishing I was different. So, I've kind of worked through this on a different level. Now this is just deeper level. I always thought I was a really confident person but under that it was kind of like a false confidence. And when I first got coaching I realized I'm actually really insecure. And I worked through that specifically in dating and now it's coming up in business again, wanting to be liked, wanting to be popular.

And then my brain goes, you shouldn't want to be liked, you shouldn't want to be popular, something's wrong with you, you should be different. And it created and it still is creating so much shame inside of me. And as I was doing this thought work my heart was racing, I was uncomfortable, I was scared to admit it just to myself. So that was step one through three. Step one, notice and have awareness that something is happening, something's different, something's heavy. Step two, give yourself space to get curious and learn about it. And step three, identify the feeling.

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So, let's talk about the final step, giving yourself space to be with the feeling. This step is not fun. I really want to emphasize this. It doesn't feel great. It's not what we think of or see in the movies. It's uncomfortable. It's heavy and that's the way it's supposed to feel. Now, if I just listed on paper all the emotions and actions I went through you might think, that sounds nice, that must have been relaxing, you must have felt so much better. Probably look like a marketing ad for self-care, or a motivating kind of cheerleader campaign for you can do it.

But I think what's missing when we talk about self-care, and allowing emotion, and all that is how it feels to do that stuff. So, I'm going to share what I did, why I did it and most importantly, how I felt while I was doing it. There is no prescription. There is no do this activity for this long and then do this activity for this long. No, it's about doing what you can in that moment to be with you and your emotion. That is the only goal, be with your emotion. There's no goal to get rid of the emotion, there is no goal to feel better. The goal is to simply allow and be with your feeling.

So, for me that was giving myself space to be with my shame which my brain did not want to do. Shame feels intense, and scary, and the thoughts feel super real. And what I did first was I sat, and I colored. I turned on rainforest music, dimmed the lights, got my adult coloring book out and used coloring pencils to color. And the whole time I was doing that I felt tightness in my chest as I thought about my shame. I felt the tightness in my throat as my brain replayed my thoughts. I noticed how much my brain wanted to watch TV to avoid my feelings and I allowed all that to happen.

And it felt terrible, but I allowed it, I gave the space in my body time to sit with the shame. I wanted to run but I didn't. And I finished about a 16<sup>th</sup> of the drawing and then I went and talked to my partner. I wanted to apologize for being short and kind of lashing out. And then I shared what I was going through. I didn't want to, I was so uncomfortable and embarrassed. I started to cry. I told him I thought it was stupid. I cried some more. I was

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mortified at the fact that I was sitting there saying, “I want people to like me. I wish I was popular.” All these thoughts.

And then telling myself, you shouldn't think that. That's stupid. That's insecure. That's superficial. And I just noticed how much my brain wanted to beat me over the head with all of that and didn't want to accept my feelings. So then after that I did an hour of restorative yoga on YouTube. I turned down the lights and lit some candles. And again, I didn't do that to feel better or Instagram it, because I felt like shit, you all. But I did this because for me that helps me signal to my mind, hey, we're taking time out for ourselves. This is what we're doing whether you like it or not.

And during the restorative yoga I sat with my thoughts and feelings. I noticed when my body felt extra heavy. I cried here and there. I felt uncomfortable. I felt heavy. I had negative thoughts. I noticed my brain wanted to drift my mind to other things to avoid it. I came back to my body. I noticed the heaviness. I recognized I was getting really annoyed at hearing my partner in the background. I started to cry. I wanted to hide my crying and then that repeated over and over throughout the whole hour.

At the end of that hour without intentionally trying, my body just started to let out large heavy sighs. I started to have these deep breaths that did not sound pretty. My dog looked at me like, are you okay. But it was like my body was releasing something deep and then I cried. Was the shame gone? No. Did I feel better? Not exactly. The shame was still there but I gave it space. I gave it the space it needed to move around. I am glad and I was glad I gave that space for myself because I know I needed it, but I didn't suddenly feel good.

I woke up the next day and there was the shame, hello, good morning, ready to greet me. My thoughts about wanting to be liked were still there and they are still there as I talk to you all about this right now. I was a little closer to myself. And I had a little bit more love and compassion for myself.



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I had a little bit of pride for myself. And then the following days the shame was still there. My brain offered me more thoughts about how I wasn't good enough, not just in business but about my body image, and relationships and anything else.

The other day I had a huge knot in my stomach while cooking and I wanted to cry, and I wanted to run. Laying in bed last night I did cry, and I let it out. And I let myself be with it. That is what being with an intense emotion is like. Right now, as I'm recording this there is a knot in my stomach, tears are welling up in my eyes. My brain tells me, stop talking, don't share this, this is so embarrassing, what are they going to think?

It's all here as I'm doing this, and this is what being with an intense emotion is like. It's not always just crying it out for an hour and then it goes away. It's not always talking about it and then it goes away. It's not always going for a walk and then you feel better. And in fact, often it's not those things at all. It's being with it presently. It's allowing it without resisting. It's giving it space without expecting it go away. And it's giving yourself space and then doing it again tomorrow. Maybe tonight you sit with it and tomorrow you take it to work.

Maybe you go to your car at lunch and sit with it some more and then maybe you take it to your happy hour celebration for a coworker. And this is what self-care and self-kindness truly is. Yes, it's also buying yourself a fun gift or giving yourself a break to go on a walk, and reminding yourself you love yourself. I'm all for that. But it is also being with yourself in the hard stuff even when you don't want to. Giving yourself dedicated time to be with intense emotions even if your brain doesn't want to. It's sitting with the uncomfortable feeling even when it's easier to turn to the TV to shut it off.

And it's not rushing yourself along, it's not telling yourself it shouldn't be happening. Self-care and kindness is allowing yourself to be exactly where you are right now even if you feel like shit being there. Giving yourself

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space to feel it and to be where you are even if it's uncomfortable and being with yourself through all of it. Listen, it is not easy. And this is why so many people, so many people don't do this, and this is why we don't do this. It's a skill, it's uncomfortable but it's necessary to move through life, to deepen your relationship with yourself.

So, I want to leave you with something from Brené Brown's book, I'm reading one of her old books right now on shame. The book's called, I Thought it was Just Me. I think it's from 2007. It's an old book. In one line she said, I underlined it. She said, "One reason shame is so powerful is its ability to make us feel alone." And I think that is exactly the same for anger, and grief, and fear. In those intense emotions where you feel the shame, and the anger, or the grief, or the fear, part of the intensity and part of what makes them feel so real is feeling alone in them.

And what happens when you allow yourself to be with intense emotion, when you go through those four steps, when you give yourself space to be in your body, when you feel the uncomfortableness of the emotion is you realize you are not alone because you have you. You are showing up for you. You are being there for you. You are caring for yourself. You are holding your hand. You are believing in yourself. And then in the midst of that intense emotion you aren't so alone anymore.

You allow the emotion rather than reject it. Meaning you allow yourself rather than reject yourself because these emotions no matter how intense they are, are a part of you. Your emotions will always be a part of you, even the hard ones, intense ones, full contact ones. And when you avoid those you are leaving yourself behind, abandoning yourself and then you are alone.

But when you allow the emotions, when you be with them, when you hold yourself through it, when you give yourself space even if it's feel uncomfortable, even if you have a knot in your stomach, even if you cry.

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When you do that you aren't alone. You aren't abandoning yourself. You aren't leaving yourself behind. You're bringing yourself forward step by step. You're holding your hand. You're giving yourself space.

And that is the power of allowing and processing an intense emotion is you take away that emotion's ability to make you feel alone because you remind yourself that you're not. And you show yourself that you're not because you show up for yourself no matter how hard it is, just like you would show up for your best friend no matter how hard that was or no matter how intense what they were going through was. You would be there.

And so doing this process is you doing that for yourself. And that is compassion, that's building self-love, that's self-kindness, and self-care, and that's deepening your relationship with yourself. And that is why allowing and processing these intense emotions are so important. It is so essential to building the relationship with yourself, to deepening it, to evolving it, to loving yourself a little bit more, to knowing yourself a little bit more. It is such a beautiful, beautiful process.

Yes, it's painful and uncomfortable and sometimes yucky but it's also beautiful, and fulfilling, and just a part of life. And when you opt out of that because it's scary and because it feels heavy, then you miss out on all that beauty that comes with it. And I don't want you to miss that because that is one of the gifts of being human. So, with that everyone, I wish you a great week and I encourage you to be with yourself even in the hardest emotions. Bye everyone.

Are you ready to make a change? Whether that's learning to love your job, making a career move, or anything in between, I can help. I'd be honored to coach you through figuring out what's next and navigating the steps to get there. So, head on over to [mckoolcoaching.com/consult](https://mckoolcoaching.com/consult) that's [mckoolcoaching.com/consult](https://mckoolcoaching.com/consult) to set up a time to chat and talk about how you can achieve the career of your dreams.

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