

Ep #261: Saying No Without Guilt: Unlearning the Good Girl Narrative



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With Your Host

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[How to Love Yourself No Matter What](#) with Amanda Hess

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Let me ask you a question. Have you ever caught yourself nodding your head or saying yes when you actually deeply wanted to say no? If so, you probably are stuck in a good girl narrative.

This show is for women who've been labeled, misdiagnosed, or misunderstood. Whether you have a diagnosis or just know deep down that you experience life differently, this is your space to stop fixing yourself and start trusting who you already are. My name is Amanda Hess. Let's go.

Let me ask you this. Have you ever caught yourself smiling and nodding when inside you're screaming, "No!"? Or saying yes just to avoid disappointing someone, even when you're actually exhausted? Or maybe you're the one everyone calls so nice, so sweet, so easygoing, but inside you feel resentful, frustrated, and invisible. If you're nodding along, this episode is for you.

Today, we are breaking down the good girl myth, where it comes from, why it's making you miserable, and how you can finally break free. Get cozy because we're going deep, and trust me, you're going to want to hear this all the way to the end.

So, I think that the first thing we really want to look at is how this shows up. So I'll give you an example. I teach spin. You know this, right? And I have noticed over the last several years that it's something that has been a net positive, but recently, it's been a net negative. I have a fibromyalgia diagnosis. I am celiac, so I have an autoimmune disease, and I'm also 49.

So I'm going through actual, like I'm transitioning into menopause, is what I'm trying to say. So there's a lot of things going on with my body. And I have been struggling with letting go of teaching spin. And it's something that I made the decision to do. I made the decision to back out of spin. And then I keep getting asked to come back. And there is this place inside of me that wants to say yes, even though I know that I deeply want to say no.

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And so I know that we all have different examples of this, right? But ultimately, I know I want to say no because my body isn't thriving. And honestly, it's pulling me away from things that I want to do in my own life, either in my business, which is a big part of this, but also in my personal life. If I teach spin a couple days a week, it doesn't seem like that big of a deal. But then if you add in, I'm skating three days a week and I'm trying to lift heavy weights three days a week and I have other things that take my time and attention that interest me and that are exciting to me, especially in the spring and summer, like getting out in my garden, getting out to our lake property, going and spending time with our kids, doing things, physical activity things with them, I can't be in pain and be completely depleted.

And so I could give up skating and keep spin, but I don't want to do that. However, I feel guilty because I don't want to let my spin clients down, because I don't want to let the studio owner down, because I know that my classes are popular and people like to come to them and that it's going to potentially negatively impact the studio. And so I have to navigate the messaging inside of me that if I'm doing something for me, it's taking away from other people, right? I want to conform to that good girl image and say, "Sure, I can do everything." But the reality is, is that I can't. And I have that inner resistance of I don't want to say yes when I need to say no, but I also don't want other people to be negatively impacted by me saying no.

And so if you find yourself in that situation where you're trying to be nice or you're trying to be agreeable or you're just trying to ensure that nobody's upset with you and that other people's lives aren't impacted by decisions that you have to make for you, that is really that good girl dynamic, right? That idea that I have to explain even why this isn't going to work for me. So I think we can and really start in on just the societal and familial conditioning that promotes the good girl narrative. And it all starts when we're very young.

I remember when I was a little girl and the teacher telling my mom that I needed to learn how to stand up for myself because people would come

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and take my toys, like in kindergarten. People would come, kids, other kids, not adults, obviously, other kids would come and grab my toys and I would cry but I wouldn't stand up for myself. I wouldn't advocate for myself. And I remember my mom thinking that it was so crazy that the teacher wouldn't get after the other child for taking something that was mine.

But at the end of the day, we all grow up and we have to start advocating for ourselves or we end up living a life that doesn't really work for us. And I think that was the first time where I look at this story that my mom used to tell me about me and realize that I grew up in a family where you always took care of other people first. And that my mom grew up in that family, and that her mom grew up in that family, and that this had been something that had been generational that we had learned. That we must be responsible, but the definition of responsible is we must be responsible for other people first. And in order to have value as a woman, as a human being, we need to ensure that we are being good, and I will put that in air quotes, when it comes to other people.

And so we work really hard to ultimately get approval from other people and we're conditioned to do that because that's how we can evaluate whether or not we are a good person. And when you look at, even just the world as a whole, in many areas, men are not taught this, but women are. And I see it like in business and I see it in fitness and I see it in so many other places where, you can be the boss but still be feminine. And what does that mean? It means that you're still nice, right? You're not a bitch. And that whole idea of don't just be yourself, be like the kind of person that makes other people okay with how you are. Make other people more comfortable.

And I'm not saying that we need to turn around and be a complete narcissist either and not give a shit about people at all. But at the end of the day, we are taught to be nice. We are taught to be agreeable. We are taught to be perfect so that we can have that validation. And we're taught that validation is required for us to believe that we are doing a good job,

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that we are a good mom, that we are a good employee, that we are a good business owner, that we are a good daughter, that we are a good friend. So understanding how this shows up for us.

And then the problem is, when we start moving into this archetype, right? We start being discouraged from telling people how we really feel. And we are discouraged from standing up for ourselves, standing out, placing a boundary, saying no, disagreeing. All of those things are considered to be not good girl traits, right? They're rebellious. But rebellious in a very bad way. And that you would be rejected from society because of that. And the other part of this is that when we are like pushed into that good girl role, we start being the kind of person that is really valuing compliance. And so we are taught that doing what you're told is more important than doing what you need.

And that is just what happens for us as women. And when we live inside of that dynamic. Now, not all women do, but I would imagine that if you're listening to this podcast, you do. You find yourself in that space. And so then what ends up happening is as we get older and we start entering the real world, we maybe have done all the right things. So potentially we went to school, we got really good grades, we did what our parents mostly wanted us to do.

There might have been a little rebellion in there, but at the end of the day, you fell right in the guidelines of I go to university or I go to college, I get my degree, I get married, I have kids. I do the things. I do the things I'm taught to do. But then we start to realize that the stakes just get higher and higher and higher. And it becomes very challenging to be a good girl in all areas of your life. It becomes very challenging to be a good girl if you are ultimately having to please your boss plus your staff, your partner plus your kids, your parents, other parents, the school, your acquaintances, your neighbors.

Everybody has expectations of you and as it turns out, they're all different. And then at the same time, you start over-functioning, right? Which is what

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last week's episode was all about, that whole idea of over-functioning. Well, the reason why we start over-functioning is because we think that's the way we get to feeling satisfied with ourselves. We think that's the way to that feeling of feeling fulfilled. And that fulfillment is not here. I can't tell you how many times I've seen a client in front of me and they've told me they've checked all the boxes.

I've had clients who have become political officials, held political office, who have graduated from a law degree, a medical degree. They have moved on and passed the bar and passed the residency to become a doctor and done all these really big, seemingly important things that we're told have a lot of value. And they've done it exactly the way they're supposed to do it and they arrive and they're so burnt out. They're just so burnt out. So if that's you, understand that ultimately, we are taught to chase a carrot but somebody keeps moving it. It's not good enough to get there. Once you get there, it gets harder. I think about it from the standpoint of once you get there, the bar goes up. You don't get to sit in the celebration of it because you've still got to be smiling and happy and making sure that everybody else is okay, and making sure that everybody else is living the way that it's supposed to be.

So you've got to make sure they're happy before you can take care of you. And as you do that, your anxiety starts to build. Because you start realizing as you get older that you don't have a lot of control over a lot of things. You don't have any control over other people, what they think, what they feel, what they do. You don't have control. You might have influence, but you don't have control.

You don't have control situationally in the world with what's going on with the economy, with what's going on in politics. We just don't have the same level of control that we thought we would when we became adults because to this point, before we got here, it seemed that we had a lot of control. But we never did. We were just given the wrong guideposts for how to create the things we really want to experience, which is feeling validated, feeling

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worthy, feeling lovable, feeling good enough. And then we start to get resentful. We're resentful of the people that won't tell us that we're doing a good job or that don't take care of us when we're too tired to keep going. We're resentful of those people because we're exhausted, because we keep chasing this ideal.

So one thing that we start to do is we start to look outside of ourselves for how we can be more efficient, how we can get more done faster. And I really notice this right now in the space of being in my late 40s because perimenopause is such a big thing and that may or may not be something that you're dealing with right now. But what I think is interesting is when I was having babies, it was all about baby brain. Everybody has baby brain, right? And now it's all about perimenopause brain. And I'm forgetting everything because I have perimenopause and listen, there is, I'm sure, science that backs that up, but it's not the whole picture.

Part of the reason why you're forgetting everything and why you feel so scattered is because you keep putting more and more and more pressure on yourself. And you keep adding more things to your plate. Most times, if I were to ask you, how much time do you spend in silence? I would say 99.9% of the women that I would talk to would say, only when I'm sleeping and maybe not even then. If you go for a walk, you've got earbuds in, you're listening to a podcast, you're listening to somebody, an audiobook, anything, anything to block the thinking, right? When you are looking at your downtime, you're scheduling it to the max.

You're making sure your kids are going to 15 different activities because you don't want them to be bored in the summertime. You are ensuring that you've got social events on the calendar and you're packing your days, plus your work life is always extending beyond where you'd like it to be. So you're working extra hours, you're putting more in. You feel like you can't catch up. That experience of your life is chasing that good girl narrative because the validation is through the productivity, which is another part of that good girl narrative. I must be productive to be a good girl so that I can

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then feel like I'm doing a good job. Except I never really produce enough. So I never really feel like a good girl anyways. I always feel like I'm failing. Like I'm a bad girl.

So the thing that I always recommend to start is tapping into self-compassion. And self-compassion isn't, it's okay that I suck. Okay? That's not it. Self-compassion starts with self-acceptance. And self-acceptance starts with everything that we do in our life is made up. And here's what I mean. Whether or not your kids are in activities is very neutral. Whether or not you have dinner plans on the calendar is very neutral. How much money you have, the kind of house you live in, the kind of community that you're in, your day-to-day life, all very neutral. Okay? And we want to start really noticing how we want everything to be perfect, but that our level of perfect always is increasing.

I will tell you that when I finally was able to understand this and implement it, my life got so much more relaxed. I felt so much more peace. My mom was the kind of mom that would clean the bathrooms every day. She changed our sheets twice a week. She vacuumed and if she didn't vacuum a room, even though nobody had ever even really stepped foot in it, we had a rake. It wasn't even shag. It was just pile carpet and we would have to rake it. We would have to hand wash the floors because it wasn't a good enough job if we used a mop.

So this is the type of environment I grew up in. If you didn't have 100% on a test, where was the other 5%? That was my upbringing. It might be yours too. And so when we start to understand that this is all just optional, we can start letting some of it go. I can clean my bathroom once a week and sometimes less and I'm good. It gets gross, I might get a kid to clean it. But when people say to me, I can't let that part of myself go, I'd say, "No, because you think there's value in that part of you." But there isn't. There's just pain. There's just pain, there's emotional pain in that part of you and we want to start being able to release it.

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If you want to experience more joy, if you want to experience more fulfillment, if you want to experience more peace, which every single person that I've ever been on a call with has told me they want, we have to learn how to let these pieces go. We have to learn how to put this down. Having the compassion even for, it makes me wildly uncomfortable to not micromanage this, to not make this overly important. This is a skill. This is a relearning. Learning how to be compassionate with yourself is a skill.

So if you say to me, "I don't know how to do that," of course you don't. Why would you? You don't have that skill right now. You've been taught to chase the carrot. Let me teach you a different way. Let me teach you a way where you can be compassionate with yourself. It requires repetition. It requires practice. It is a skill that we learn and we learn it like every other skill we've ever learned.

Some of the strategies that I think we can talk about when it comes to letting go of this good girl persona, right? Is noticing when you're defaulting to people-pleasing. And then really asking yourself, what do I actually want here? So you might say yes when you wanted to say no, and then you feel resentful and irritated, and then you come home and then you can look at it and go, "This is so interesting because I people-pleased here. Why? What was going on for me? Why didn't I feel safe enough to say no?"

Because that's the real question. And what would it look like to create that kind of safety for me? What would I need to think? What would I need to believe? And what I would say is you need to think, "I matter." And you would need to believe that people that are truly meant to be in your life want you to take care of yourself, are interested in you being okay. Those are the things you want to believe, right? They may or may not be that person. Listen, but they probably are. That's been my experience.

Other things you can do is practicing saying small, safe "no's" to build confidence. So what I mean by that is, "Hey, would you like this type of salad?" "No, thank you. I don't like that kind of salad." It's a pretty safe no.

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They might be like, "What?" They're not really going to care if you eat the salad. If somebody asks you if you want to do something that is very just generic, "Do you want to go for a walk?" "No. I don't." "Hey, do you like this book?" "No, I don't like that book." Just experiment with small nos and see what the experience of that is like for you. It will be dysregulating to your nervous system. It is okay. It is okay that it is dysregulating. Breathe. Allow, notice, and keep moving forward.

There's no right or wrong way to do your life. Okay? So this isn't about getting it right. And us good girls, we like to get it right. I know this. I feel this, but there is no getting it right. This is the life you lead. And you can change your mind anytime you want. That's the other thing. You can change your mind. You're allowed to say yes and then say no. You're allowed to say no and then say yes. There's no rules. There's nobody out there saying this is the right thing or the wrong thing or this is the good thing or the bad thing other than your own brain and we're just internalizing messages that other people have said to us and made it into our own voice. So we just now, we just get to reprogram it and the cool thing about your brain is it's reprogrammable.

One other exercise I want to offer you that can be very, very good for you is to journal. Pull out a journal, pull out a pen, and just journal on the cost of being the good girl. And ask yourself questions like: How has being the good girl drained me? How has being the good girl disconnected me? How has being the good girl detracted from my partnership with my partner? How has being the good girl detracted from my ability to be a good mom? How has being the good girl stopped me from doing things that I really know would have filled my cup? Start experimenting with looking at how there is a cost. There is a cost here and we need to explore that cost. And then we can start exploring the benefits of not buying into that. This isn't about us taking our values and having none. But I want your values to center around how you want to show up for yourself and others.

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If you find yourself always putting other people first and putting yourself last, that is incongruent with your values. Because you should also be included in the other people. You go first, but I go first too. I go first with you. You don't matter more than me. I matter at least as much as you. So I take care of all of us. I am being the protector of all of us by taking care of me too. Me too. Not just you. This is a very simple shift, right? But it has a lot of value.

One thing that we do is we do look for external validation and it gets vilified quite a bit. And I don't want to vilify external validation. I believe truly that as human beings, one of our needs is to be validated. And there's nothing worse than not being validated by anyone ever. And I think that's how we end up in these scenarios where we are just anxious and depressed and not able to function. Now, is that because other people suck? No. It's because the way that we're approaching it isn't really working. Now, listen, there is abuse, there are things that happen to people. We are bullied, we are traumatized. This happens.

So nothing about what I'm saying here is absolute. But what I will say is the way that we get out of the hole, the way that we get out of the hole is by really noticing that we put external validation above personal validation. And that's when we know there's a disconnect because they should at the very least be equal. Our personal validation should be held in as high regard as somebody else's validation and often times above. Doesn't mean that we don't want to have other people validate us and say, "Hey, you did a good job there. That dress looks really good on you. I'm so proud of you for doing this." Those are beautiful things, but they also mean nothing if you don't believe it about yourself.

I know even for myself and for so many of my friends that I have and people that I coach, when somebody says, "You look so beautiful today," you have a rebuttal. "Oh no, I don't because I've gained weight, because I didn't wash my hair, because I don't have any makeup on, because I spilled mustard on my shirt, because, because, because, because." And noticing

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that is a very toxic thing to do to yourself that we have been trained to do. And so to retrain ourselves, we need to be onto ourselves. We need to notice it.

And we need to start validating ourselves more often. And what I find is the easiest way to do this is to say it out loud. You don't have to do it in a group of people. You don't need to do it on the street, but you know, you might want to get in your car and look yourself in the eye and go, "You know what Amanda, you did a really fucking great job today. I'm so proud of you." You might want to in between meetings go to the bathroom and put your hand on your chest and take a deep breath and look at yourself in the eyes and go, "I'm really proud of you today. I see how hard you're trying."

You see what I'm saying? We don't want to wait for other people to say that to us. And the cool thing about this is you will program your brain to look for more of it. And the reason why I like saying it out loud is your brain is listening. Be careful of the words you say out loud. Everybody vents. But it's been my experience that venting is rarely productive. Venting tends to create more negative emotion, which also reinforces whatever negative thing you are saying. And so really notice it and decide whether or not you want to say that to yourself out loud. And maybe decide what you're going to say instead. Because the more that you do that, the better you will feel about being you.

When you start to let yourself lean into "I approve of me." And when you start to let yourself notice what you like and what you don't like and who you like and who you don't like and what you want to do and what you don't want to do, you will start to develop that authenticity that you're looking for. So often women will come on calls with me and say, "I feel like I've lost myself. I don't know where I am. I don't know who I am anymore." And that is largely due to this good girl narrative. Because we have been taught to not be ourselves.

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So the path forward is this, is learning to let that voice come through. Approve of her, take care of her, be nice to her. Nurture her. That's your job as yourself. Only you can do that. Nobody can do that for you. It's a skill you have to learn. And of course you can learn it, right? If you think about what I do for a living, I coach people on this every single day. And why? Because you sometimes need somebody outside of yourself showing you what you can't see.

Noticing when you're talking about yourself in a way that is derogatory, that isn't helping you, that is putting you down and teaching you how to say something different. And over time with repetition, my voice inside of your head says, "You got this, girl. You're doing awesome. Good job. I'm so proud of you. You're so beautiful." Notice how that is going to change your voice. And the more that you lean into that voice, the more you create of that voice. It's incredible. It always works.

I need you to know that there is no version of you that is perfect and I personally believe we don't want that anyways. How boring. If we were all the same, what would we talk about? What would be interesting in the world? Absolutely nothing. You're supposed to be messy. You're supposed to be imperfect. You're supposed to be loud or quiet or assertive or opinionated or introverted. And you can still be deeply lovable. People will love that about you once you start loving that about yourself. Once you start understanding that's a key to your fabric. It's what will bring people closer to you.

So once again, I want to invite you to come try a free week in the Love Yourself No Matter What membership. This is the space where you can practice being yourself, not the perfect version of you, not the polished version or the pleasing one, but the real you. And we'll hold you in that with love and support and teach you how to do it differently.

So go to joinamanda.ca. If you want to check it out, get signed up right now if you come in that membership, I will do one free coaching session with

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you just you and me. We'll do it together. And then you can participate in the membership and really see this work in progress. This is what I've got for you today. I hope you have a beautiful day and I will see you here next week. Bye for now.

Thanks so much for listening. You can look forward to a new episode of this podcast every week. And hey, if you like this podcast, do me a favor and leave a review. When you do, it helps this podcast grow, and it allows me to help more women just like you. And if you just know that you need help putting this all together, why don't you book a free consult with me? We can talk about you and what's happening in your life and put a real plan in place to manage the stress and anxiety for good. Just head on over to amandahess.ca slash book a call to set that up.