

Ep #268: Why You Keep Checking Out (& How to Come Back In)



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With Your Host

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If you've been spending your summer on your phone, zoning out, or procrastinating everything, it's not a discipline problem. It's a sign your nervous system is overwhelmed.

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.

Welcome back to the podcast. I'm Amanda Hess, and today, we're going to talk about shutdown and why so many women feel stuck in shutdown right now. This episode is for you if you've been numbing out, avoiding your life, and feeling guilty for wasting your summer.

The first thing that I need you to know is that a freeze response is a stress response. So, a freeze response is something that we experience when we are presented with a stressor that makes us feel unsafe. And a lot of times, our emotions will make us feel unsafe. So what can happen in the summertime is that we will have a lot more overstimulating activities going on, right?

Summertime brings barbecues and being outside and longer days and vacations and family get-togethers and parties and a general expectation that we should be out there just enjoying summer. And I think that what we don't realize is that even though many of these things can be really fun things to do, really enjoyable things can create really positive emotions, nonetheless, they can dysregulate us. And when you're neurodivergent or when you're sensitive, you can unwittingly plan a summer season where you have created the perfect storm for you to be in a constant stress response, where you are in fight, flight, freeze, fawn all the time.

And what I find is that summer is one of those seasons where the expectations are high. We have a high expectation of being able to experience joy, adventure, and pleasure and excitement. But a lot of times what we do is we hand off those emotions as being something that is

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created by our circumstances, and that being on the vacation should bring the positive feelings. Being at the lake should create enjoyment. Feeling the sun on your face should create pleasure.

But what we don't really think through is how am I planning for me and my brain inside of this season to ensure that I can have the most success and really ultimately get what I came for. When we're perpetually overstimulated, what happens is that stress response shows up in really weird ways sometimes, and it can be very unexpected. Something, if you've ever had that experience of something really small happening and it just sends you over the edge. That to me is the perfect example of how summer can put us in that place. But what we don't realize is that this is also true when we're scrolling our phone when we're supposed to be with our family.

When we're potentially just laying around watching TV when we're supposed to be maybe going out in the yard and doing some gardening. We will find ourselves avoiding, procrastinating, zoning out, and what you really need to understand is that those are signs of a nervous system that is truly trying to protect you. It identifies long before you realize that you are not okay. You don't even know it yet. Your body has on its own figured out that you are not okay. And so it will push you into a freeze response, which is going to be that procrastination.

So when you find yourself in that space of, I'm not doing the things I said I would do. I'm not spending the time with the people I say I want to spend time with. I'm lying in bed when I should be spending time with my kids. I'm not leaving my house even though it's a beautiful day outside. I'm not planning to do things that I know would be enjoyable in the summertime, like going to maybe a concert or heading out for a hike or a bike ride. I'm not doing those things. I'm also not getting myself to work out. I'm not getting myself to really do any of the things that I know I want to be doing, that are things that I know are a net positive for me.

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And what I find happens is that we get into this cycle, and we don't realize we're in it. And so, we will notice that we're procrastinating, right? And we will see it, and we'll see there's a consequence. I missed out on an event, or I forgot somebody's birthday and they were really disappointed, or I didn't get that work deadline done, and now I'm getting written up or whatever it is. And we can start really judging ourselves on it, really judging ourselves. And that judgment brings along shame and guilt and resentment and disappointment, and those are really heavy, big, hard, negative emotions to process.

And so because those show up for us, we unwittingly put ourselves into another stress response because we've judged ourselves so harshly for not getting the thing done, for messing it up, for being a screw-up, for not being motivated enough, for not being organized enough, whatever it is. And we experience such intense shame, guilt, resentment that it pops us into that stress response. We end up in fight, flight, freeze, or fawn, and we end up procrastinating because it's a survival response. And then after we've procrastinated, and we spend longer not doing the things we say that we want to be doing or moving the needle for ourselves, then what we will do is we will end up in another stress response because those emotions are just so hard to handle. They're just so hard to figure out.

So what I want you to know is that we have to start with really just being gentle with ourselves. So compassion and empathy for ourselves, a gentleness, an understanding that this isn't me being a bad person. This is me having a body response that is actually even in a lot of ways outside of my control is where we want to go with this. We want to start there. Where we end up if we try to motivate, if we try to push, if we try to pressure, is back into that stress response. And as I had said before, we end up in that vortex, that cycle of beating ourselves up, feeling a whole bunch of pain, going back into a stress response, and doing it all over again. And what I want for you is I want to pull you out of the stress response. I want to pull you out as soon as possible.

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And the best way I know how to do that is through compassion and through regulating your nervous system. You don't need motivation. Motivation is going to be terrible fuel. Motivation is going to get you stuck. Motivation is going to get you more ramped up. Motivation is going to create the perfect storm for exactly what you don't want in your life.

Where we begin with nervous system regulation is simply recognizing my nervous system is engaged in a stress response. And therefore, I need to move through the process of getting that more regulated. It doesn't really matter what dysregulated your nervous system, but then it also does really matter. And what I mean by this is that there are things that dysregulate us that we just don't realize are going to dysregulate us. And then there are the things that we do know are going to dysregulate us, right?

Who knew that going to the beach and having a really fun day and having some fun drinks maybe with your family and your friends and having your kids there could also be dysregulating. Well, if we logically think about it, we know that is of course the case because there are so many things outside of our control and there's so many things happening circumstantially that aren't not normally happening in our regular day-to-day life. We're not usually on the beach. Nobody has to put sunscreen on themselves and everybody else. There isn't all these strange noises, strange people. You're not having to look at your body in a bathing suit. You have way more thoughts coming at you that are outside of your regular normal routine.

Where we begin is by first of all, letting ourselves acknowledge the reality. We want to play in reality. We want to be real and truthful and honest with ourselves. And in order to do that, where we have to start is recognizing actually there are a lot of things here that are very dysregulating for me, and therefore, I am going to have to approach this from a different perspective. And you know, one thing Esther Perel talks about is putting on a new pair of glasses, and this is what I'm really inviting you to do here. Put on a new pair of glasses and really look at it.

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Hey, how is it true that I need more regulation, not less in the summertime? Because I've planned more, because the days are longer, because routine is out the window, because I'm going to be around family, because I'm going to be around people I don't know. So we start in that, that this is more of a difficult season. Now, more intense emotion. Great thing about that is positive emotion is also more intense, which, yay, we want to create more of that. But the negative emotion being more intense can send us into a spiral. So we want to just really notice, okay, where do we start here?

When you see yourself in this scenario and if you can recognize that things are not the way they usually are, then we can start looking at things like, am I spending time alone? Am I being intentional about that time? That can be difficult, right? It can be difficult if you have kids and they're home for the summer and they're small and they require your care. That can be difficult if you have a job where there are more barbecues and more this and more socialization outside of work. This can be difficult if you have any kind of situation where you're in front of people that you don't know or in front of people that you feel are judgmental towards you, that are your family, that are your parents, that are your brothers and sisters and all those people. This all is going on all at the same time, right?

And so, the thing that we want to do is really just move through, I'm going to need more care. So, I'm going to schedule time alone. I'm going to get outside. I'm going to ground through my senses. I am going to use 5, 4, 3, 2, 1, five things you see, four things you feel, three things you hear, two things you smell, one thing you taste. I'm going to use that like five times today to ground myself.

Because in these moments, our thoughts about what Aunt Marge is thinking about us and why our kid has a sunburn and how people are judging me on that and, all of the different things that we experience in the summertime. We have to recognize that those thoughts are not the truth. Those thoughts are being created by a stress response. And so we do have a negative bias as human beings. That is the way our brains work. We're always looking for the problem.

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And so another thing that we're going to need to do is shift our brain to look for the pleasure, to shift our brain to look for the positive, to look for the enjoyment, shift our brain to assuming that we belong in the spaces we show up in. Shifting our brain to thinking that when people interact with you, that they aren't coming from the worst place possible, but that in fact, it could be very neutral or maybe even better than that.

This is an exercise of coaching yourself. Self-coaching is something that we all need to learn how to do, and nobody teaches this to us. The first time I ever discovered self-coaching was when I hired a coach. I'd never heard of it. I knew that you should have positive talk, but that seemed impossible. How could I think the opposite of what I'm thinking already?

Well, the reason why I couldn't do it is because I didn't have a regulated nervous system. I didn't know how to handle my emotions, and I didn't know how to create productive thoughts that were also true that I could grab a hold of and believe. This is what's required here. What's not required is motivation. You don't need the next best guru's tips about how to get up earlier. You don't. You got to figure out, okay, I'm not getting up. Why? Am I making this super hard for myself? Am I not giving myself the time and space to do the things that I need to be doing to make me feel good? Maybe you don't need to go for a run in the morning. Maybe you just need to do some gentle stretching in bed. Really working with yourself, experimenting with things, finding the things that truly do work for you.

When we can get out of this space of judgment, blame, etc., etc., and move into regulation, compassion, but still holding the goal as being something that we do, that's when we start to see movement. What I find people want is they want the end result and they want the momentum to be immediate. First of all, the momentum won't be immediate, and second of all, there is no magical destination here, my friend. There is no place where you feel good all the time. That is a lie that we have been sold. There's so much money that has been made off that lie.

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No, no, no, you are not going to feel happy all the time because, listen, you should be feeling negative emotion 50% of the time and positive emotion 50% of the time. And that is just always true. I can give a thousand examples of how that's true. How, you know, I wanted to be able to do a certain skill in skating and the minute that I did it, I was already moving on to the next skill that I couldn't do, and I was unhappy that I couldn't do it, right? When I was a teenager and I had acne, I was so sure my life would be so much better if I didn't have acne anymore. And I didn't have acne anymore, and then I judged my body. This is how our brains work. I'm not a unique unicorn. We all do this.

So there's no magical destination, and there needs to be the first step forward and it needs to be simple and doable and something that you want to do. And too often, we are putting things in front of ourselves that are hard and painful and not something we want to do.

I was doing the private podcast for my clients inside of my membership, and I was talking about being consistent and the definition of consistency. And I know what the dictionary says about it and there's many people with different definitions. However, the way that I look at consistency is you just start again. You want to know how you get consistent? Start again. Do it again. Start again, do it again. Start again, do it again. There's no version of your life where you will never have to start. You always have to start.

So starting is not something that we beat the shit out of ourselves for. That's using motivation, that's using force, that's using pressure. Instead, we can use kindness, compassion, caring about ourselves, really tapping into what do I need to believe here and think here? How can I make this easier? How can I make this doable? How can I make this enjoyable? And once we do that, my friend, we are in the sweet spot of our life.

This is a practice. But please hear me, you procrastinating doesn't make you a procrastinator. That's not a thing. There's no such thing as a procrastinator. You don't procrastinate everything. You don't procrastinate maybe brushing your teeth or pressing the brake pedal when a traffic light's

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coming up. So you have the ability to act. That's not what's missing here. Instead, it's really getting into what makes me tick. I'm not like everybody else. And that's cool and that's awesome. But I can find out what makes me tick.

Now, listen, we're going to be talking about this exact thing on day two of my free Coachathon. It is called Take Back Your Summer, and you'll learn how to understand your shutdown responses and start working with it instead of fighting yourself. It's free, it's live, and you can even get coached on that call. And all you have to do is go to amandahess.ca/summer. I'd love to see you there, my friend. Bye for now.

Thanks so much for listening today. If this podcast is helping you, please follow wherever you listen and consider leaving a review. It truly helps this community grow and allows me to support more women like you. I'm excited to see you back here next week with a brand new episode. Until then, take care, friend.