

Ep #270: You're Not Responsible for Everyone's Emotions (Day 4 of Take Back Your Summer)



Full Episode Transcript

With Your Host

Amanda Hess

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If being around your family makes you feel like a pressure cooker, this is for you. You are not the emotional sponge for your household or your life.

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.

Hey friend, it's Amanda, and welcome back to Take Back Your Summer, the podcast edition. Today is day four of the challenge, and I'm going to tell you right now, this might be the most important conversation we've had yet. Because today we're talking about something that so many women struggle with quietly. Something we've normalized to the point that we don't even see it anymore. Feeling responsible for everyone else's emotions.

Now, let me say this to you slowly because I really want you to feel it in your body. You are not responsible for everyone else's emotions. You are not the emotional sponge for your family. You are not the pressure valve for your partner's tension. You are not your kids' emotional thermostat. And you are not broken if other people are having a hard time around you. It's not you, friend, it's them.

If being around certain people feels like walking into a pressure cooker, where everyone else gets to be upset and you have to stay regulated and calm and emotionally neutral, then you know what I'm talking about. Maybe you can't pinpoint why it happens, but you know that your nervous system feels like it's always bracing for a meltdown, for a conflict, for a disappointment, for someone else's reaction, and so you try to fix it.

You manage, you smooth, you plan ahead, you twist yourself into emotional origami just to keep the peace. You sacrifice you for them. And I know this dynamic deeply, not just from coaching so many women, but from my own life. There was a time when I truly believed it was my job to keep everything emotionally stable.

Ep #270: You're Not Responsible for Everyone's Emotions (Day 4 of Take Back Your Summer)

I wasn't saying that out loud, but every choice I made came from that place. I'd wake up and feel the energy of the house like a weather report. What mood is everyone in? What do I need to adjust about me to make this go smoothly? And the second someone got quiet or irritated or pulled away, my body would panic. And that panic would go usually one of three ways. One, I'd spiral into people pleasing and over-functioning. Two, I'd shut down completely and pretend I didn't care while dying inside. Three, I'd lose my ever-loving shit. Cue scorched earth, right?

And none of that helped because I was never actually tending to myself. I was managing everyone else's energy while completely abandoning my own. We do this not because we're bad people. We do this not because we're somehow broken. We do this because we have been conditioned to be this way. Is it nature? Is it nurture? It's both. It's both, my friend.

If you were like me and you grew up in a volatile home and you were the peacemaker, this is going to come up for you. If you were growing up in a place or living in a situation where you needed to be good all the time so everybody else could be okay, where you felt like you were the one that was fully responsible for making sure that everything went a certain way so that you could be safe, that you would fix it for them so that everybody else could be okay, so you could have a nice day, so you could have a nice vacation, so you could have a nice Christmas, so you could get through your mom's funeral without a fight, whatever. This is where this comes from.

So, I'm going to give you some more common examples, and maybe you'll recognize yourself here. Your kid comes home grumpy, and suddenly you're reorganizing your whole afternoon to cheer them up. Your partner makes a passive-aggressive comment, and now you're deep in your head analyzing every word you've said. You're at a family barbecue, walking on eggshells because one person's mood has dictated the whole atmosphere.

You apologize a lot, even when nothing is your fault. You are hypervigilant of everyone's reactions. You have a radar looking for how everyone is

Ep #270: You're Not Responsible for Everyone's Emotions (Day 4 of Take Back Your Summer)

doing, and then you adjust your personality to match. What you need to know is that this isn't being kind. This is emotional enmeshment. It's losing touch with where you end and someone else begins.

When we have this happening, we can find ourselves in a position where we know that our behavior isn't what we want it to be, that we're not acting and showing up the way we want to be. But we don't recognize that what we need to do is drop responsibility for how other people feel because we can't control it.

This came up so clearly in one of the live coaching sessions that I did that I put here on this podcast.

Amanda: Your mom's an addict, right? A recovering addict. Can you think of a time in the last year or so where you saw that, where you were talking to her and something happened? Maybe you don't know fully the specifics, but she said or did something and then you reacted and you didn't like that what that created.

Guest: I'd say when she asked me to pick her up somewhere and I was like, "Where's your car?" And she's, I left it at the mall because somebody's getting to go and work on it. And I was like, "Why would you leave your car at the mall with your keys in the vehicle?" So right away, my brain was like, okay, you're doing drugs again.

Amanda: Okay.

Guest: I flipped out.

Amanda: And when you flip out, you don't have to give me the nitty-gritty details obviously, but what does that kind of look like? Because everybody's flip out is different, right?

Guest: Yeah, it just looks like me accusing her of doing drugs again and it not making any sense to me why she would leave her car there.

Ep #270: You're Not Responsible for Everyone's Emotions (Day 4 of Take Back Your Summer)

Amanda: Okay. So you accuse her of doing drugs, let her know it doesn't make any sense. It doesn't make any sense why you've left your car there. So really, what you were thinking in that moment was really, truly, you're thinking she might be doing drugs again, right? That's the thought that's going through your head. And then when you said that, then what happens after that? What is the result of you saying that to your mom typically?

Guest: The result is and like the outcome I want is just for her to be honest because I know she has had slip ups lately. So it's really just me like trying to get it out of her, but she will never actually admit she's doing it.

Amanda: And what are you feeling in that moment? What is the emotion that comes up for you? Do you know?

Guest: I just feel like my inner child is just like broken again. Like she shattered, like here we go again. It's happening again. But it really does no good when I ask her anything about it because it just gets so escalated to like the point where she's getting out of my car.

Amanda: Yeah. Um, do you think that the emotion you're feeling is fear when that happens, or do you think it's something else?

Guest: No, I think it could be fear, for sure. And just like really feeling let down again.

Amanda: So disappointed.

Guest: Yeah, really disappointed. Yeah. Because I get my hopes up a lot, you know, like it's going to be, it's going to turn around, she's going to be clean, she's going to be there for like when she has grandchildren and stuff. So I get so excited and I'm like, finally, she's going to recover. And then something happens, and I know all the little signs, like I can tell by just a sentence she says.

Amanda: Yeah. I guess like where I think we could go, and you can tell me if you feel comfortable going here, is talking about the disappointment

Ep #270: You're Not Responsible for Everyone's Emotions (Day 4 of Take Back Your Summer)

aspect and you feeling disappointed over sort of the actions that she takes and maybe just exploring whether or not that's something that you need to guard yourself against. Does that make sense to you?

Guest: Yeah.

Amanda: I'm looking at it from the standpoint of there's always, we always have more than sort of one version of a relationship with somebody, especially our parents. Because we have our adult relationship with them, and then we have our child relationship with them, right?

Guest: Yeah.

Amanda: And for you, I think also because you guys have had a very complicated relationship because of her addiction and how that's shown up in your life. I would imagine that the child version of you is trying very hard to keep you safe.

Guest: Yeah. And that's what I can always go back to. Like, she's just not fully healed yet. So anything just triggers that. And I'm having a hard time sometimes separating it from that's my child, that's how she felt, and then like I'm an adult now, I can choose to not, yeah, take all that.

Amanda: Yeah. I mean, it is, I will say this, I have a philosophy that we don't actually fully heal those parts of ourselves, that we actually just have parts of us that remain unhealed, and I personally don't think it's a problem. The reason why I think of it like that is just because I think it's easier to manage if we're not expecting ourselves to never feel that desire to react in that way, to have that, you know, I was even, I was being coached by my coach in my business this week and we were talking about I was triggered with a family member and she was like, "You know, you need to remember that when you're triggered, it's an involuntary response."

So it's very involuntary when that happens, when you feel that fear, and it's, it's so strong that you want to find out right away. It's like, "You need to tell me if you're going to do this again so that I can get ready." Right?

Ep #270: You're Not Responsible for Everyone's Emotions (Day 4 of Take Back Your Summer)

Guest: Yeah. That makes sense.

Amanda: But there's a couple of things that I think we could maybe look at addressing. And I think the first thing is that we spend a lot of time thinking that what we need to do is we need to address what we're doing in the moment. And I find that once we're in the moment, we don't have a lot of access to much.

Guest: Yeah.

Amanda: Because once we're reacting, we really are in that, if you think about being in a stress response, which is what happens, you go to fight, flight, freeze.

Guest: Yeah.

Amanda: Right? And that's immediate. And once it's taken place, there are things you can do, and I'm sure that you've been into enough therapy that you know, you're like, I can take deep breaths, I can try to just allow the discomfort of how I'm feeling in that moment. I can just wait for this emotional wave to pass through. And all of those things are valid, and you should try to do all of them. But I also think there's two things. The first thing is I think you need to have compassion for yourself and remind yourself that it's actually not the end of the world if you have that reaction.

Guest: Yeah. And it's so funny because I tell people that, I tell my clients that when it comes to myself, it is so much harder.

Amanda: Yeah.

Guest: Yeah, it's just funny. I've actually never been to therapy though. I just have learned all my coping like strategies from just like seeing it or just trying it myself. But...

Amanda: I love this so much about you. I think that's so great.

Guest: Yeah, thanks.

Ep #270: You're Not Responsible for Everyone's Emotions (Day 4 of Take Back Your Summer)

Amanda: The thing is that when we are in that experience, it's an urge, right? We have an urge to do something. And the reason why we have the urge to do it is because we feel so uncomfortable because that emotion and that fear is so uncomfortable that we want to act. We want to get rid of the feeling. So the reason why you say to your mom, like, "Are you using again? What are you doing? That doesn't make any sense. Why were your keys in your car?" And you start grilling her about it.

Guest: Yeah.

Amanda: Which I would assume is sort of like, I have teenagers, so I feel like it's like the opposite side of that same thing, right?

Guest: Yeah, it's like me trying to parent my mom.

Amanda: Yeah. I think that in the moment, where we can find some space is first of all, understanding and exploring the idea that the person responsible for your mom is your mom, right?

Guest: Yeah.

Amanda: Even though her actions affect you, you're not going to be able to control her actions, no matter what you do.

Guest: Yeah.

Amanda: What do you think about that?

Guest: I think you're totally right, and I have thought about that before. I just think I so deeply want my mom to just be like that version of herself when we were super young, and she was such a good mom, and I just want that so desperately. I want that like for my kids so she can be like that grandma to them, but I just, yeah.

Amanda: Yeah. I think it's okay to want that, but I think it's also important to remind yourself what you can control and what you can't. And when you look at this situation with your mom, it's taking that step out of the

Ep #270: You're Not Responsible for Everyone's Emotions (Day 4 of Take Back Your Summer)

relationship and the closeness to it and really finding safety in other areas outside of your mom's behavior.

I think that the reason why I ask you to find it in your body is to find a place inside of yourself where you recognize that I can feel this feeling and I can still be okay. And noticing the discomfort of that feeling and noticing more of an awareness of how that feeling feels in your body will make it easier for you to be less reactive in the moment. So starting to feel it when it starts to come in, right? Because we can always feel it, but sometimes we don't feel it till it's like here and we're like, "Oh my God."

Guest: Yeah.

Amanda: Versus noticing it creeping in so that you can have an awareness of, "Oh, I'm getting this feeling, this disappointment, this fear, and I'm noticing that I'm starting to be over-functioning. I'm starting to be hyper-responsible." So that's a clue that maybe I need to take a beat, maybe I need to go for a walk. I need to take some time and really decide how am I going to show up to this if my mom's feelings are my mom's feelings and my mom's problems are my mom's problems. And that's hard.

I know. And one thing that I think I missed, I don't know, I think I got off track, was talking about the concept of grief, like growing around your grief, growing around your trauma. This is what this looks like. Like you growing capacity is also you building the belief in yourself that like, I can have a really exceptional life and my mom gets to decide whether or not she's going to be in it.

Guest: Yeah.

Amanda: And that is a powerful shift because it gives you a lot more control because it's like my life's going to be great and I would love for you to be a part of it. But only you can decide whether or not that's something you can do. And I will let you in as long as you are showing up in a way that is healthy and okay for me.

Ep #270: You're Not Responsible for Everyone's Emotions (Day 4 of Take Back Your Summer)

Guest: Yeah. That's a big boundary. It's good though.

Amanda: Yeah. And, you know what, Jess, that is the big girl work. Like, I'm 48, you're a lot younger than me, and I will tell you, it's always the work.

Guest: Yeah.

Amanda: But the more you do it, and you already do it, like I already know you and I know you do this, and you do a really good job of it. But also the work for you is really deeply loving yourself and being so kind and compassionate because you're doing it, you're trying, you're showing up. And to me, that's all you can do.

The woman I was coaching described a moment where her mom, who's a recovering addict, made a small, unexpected decision, leaving her car at the mall. Now, to someone else, this might not seem like a big deal, but for her, it was a trigger. Instant panic, instant suspicion, instant hypervigilance because her body remembered years of unpredictability. It wasn't about the car, it was about the meaning her nervous system attached to the car. She felt responsible again for managing, for monitoring, for anticipating, for being the adult to the adult.

And that's what I coached her through. One thing that we dove into is something I call responsibility hoarding, and you can actually find an episode of that in this podcast. I'll make sure to put it in the show notes where you start to believe that if you just do more, manage more, anticipate better, everyone will be okay. But what it is it's a false sense of control.

When we find ourselves turning ourselves inside out, hypervigilant, overmanaging all of the other adults in our life, we create a false sense of control. It makes you feel safe in the short term because you're doing something, but it does keep you stuck in survival. And what it is it's the adult version of emotional codependency. If I just stay perfectly calm and fix everyone's mood, then maybe I won't get hurt.

Ep #270: You're Not Responsible for Everyone's Emotions (Day 4 of Take Back Your Summer)

I heard one of my clients say this to me this week and it was a major red flag right away. I just need to figure out how I can show up as my best self to all areas of my life. That is responsibility hoarding. That is perfectionism. That is steeped in the idea of I can only have safety with myself if other people in my life are okay, emotionally okay.

The problem is, when you try to regulate everyone else, no one is regulating you. And then you're left depleted, you're left unseen, and often times you're left resentful because when do people start taking care of you? I hear this reframe a lot. How do I get to be the one being taken care of for once? When is somebody going to consider my feelings? Why can't they show up for me and regulate me once in a while?

So the way that we get to a new place is by establishing some emotional boundaries. Because if we are responsible for regulating ourselves, which we are, then we have to give regulation back to the people around us. Emotional boundaries are not about pushing people away. They're not about pretending you don't care. They're about learning how to stay with yourself when someone else is having a hard time.

It's saying, "You're allowed to feel that and I don't have to fix it to be safe." And my friend, even if they want you to. Even if they ask you to, even if they demand that you do. It is essential that you begin to understand that it has never been and never will be your responsibility to take care of another person's emotions. Because you can't do that. It's not possible. What we learn how to do is to stay rooted in our own nervous system even when someone else is spinning out in theirs. And this is a skill. This is a skill. This is something that we must learn and we're not taught. We are, in fact, as women in particular, and especially I would say neurodivergent women, taught to do the opposite. I have to take care of others. If my behavior is unsettling for another person, it's my job to mask that so they're okay.

If I'm having a hard time, then they're going to have a hard time and that will be my fault. And listen, we've had people say that to us. It's been reflected back to us. People have told us that again and again and again

Ep #270: You're Not Responsible for Everyone's Emotions (Day 4 of Take Back Your Summer)

and again. But what I need you to know is we need to unlearn that because it was never true. Other people are responsible for their feelings even when they're around you, and vice versa.

So if we have to take care of how we feel and how we're going to do it is not by changing other people, how do we do that? In the coaching session that I provided, I shared a few tools that you can use when you feel yourself getting pulled into someone else's emotional storm.

First of all, naming the emotion, noticing what it is, noticing how it feels in your body, and learning how to ride the emotional wave, learning how to allow and process emotion. Breathing, feeling it, and not making it do anything other than knowing that this emotion will come up and this emotion will go down and you will be safe and okay. The next part is having compassion. You need to know that you're not too sensitive. It's just not a thing. You can't be too sensitive. It's like being too blonde or too tall. Says who? I am how I am. You know what I mean? You are who you are.

You're not a bad person for wanting to make other people feel good so you can feel safe. It's not a character issue. It's just a response. You're having a very normal response. Your body and brain are responding the way they're designed to respond. But we want to change that to be able to give you a better experience.

The last part is to just separate their emotion from yours. They have their emotions, I have my emotions. I get to decide what I'm going to think about this. They get to decide what they want to think about this. I understand that their reaction is not my fault. Their reaction is 1,000% not your fault. These are small shifts that create some space, and space is what makes us more able to make different decisions, to come at things from a different standpoint, to show up differently.

Before I move on and I want to talk to you about creating emotional capacity and I want to talk about honoring trauma, I want you to know that there's no version of this where we are never in a position where we try to

Ep #270: You're Not Responsible for Everyone's Emotions (Day 4 of Take Back Your Summer)

manage other people's emotions. Because it's always going to be the urge. We're always going to go to that in our head because our brain is programmed for that. But what we're working on is, is we're installing another program. We're installing a different program, and the more we use it, the more we use it, and the better it gets.

This type of work is not as complicated even as it might sound in this episode. It's actually just taking it one scenario at a time and reframing it, which is why coaching is so effective and why I want you to come to today's live coaching call. It's at 2 p.m. today, Pacific. Go to amandahess.ca/summer, sign up, come to the call. Let me show you what I mean. It's easier that way. Bring something that you're struggling with. Let's talk about it.

Before we wrap up, I want to talk about one more thing, which is emotional capacity and expanding it. We've talked about this on this podcast before, but I just think we can't talk about it enough. What is emotional capacity? Emotional capacity is building a room that's big enough to house the emotions that you are experiencing. Ultimately, it's the ability to experience an emotion and not tip into fight, flight, freeze, fawn. And instead be able to stay in the more logical part of our brain. So when we look at it like that, we have this ability to approach it differently.

When we look at things like deeply held beliefs, trauma, grief, anything big like that, right? We want to understand that in a lot of cases, it won't shrink. I always use the expression of grief because for me, it is the easiest to understand because I've processed it, I think the most. But we can do this with trauma, we can do this with some other maybe core beliefs that you might have had programmed into you as a child that have that sort of like muscle memory. But at the end of the day, we keep thinking that thing needs to shrink. And a lot of times, I think that when we go to therapy and we are getting helped with things, we want things to shrink. We think that we can only handle so much and it's too much to handle and so the thing needs to shrink. But how I look at it is that thing doesn't need to shrink.

Ep #270: You're Not Responsible for Everyone's Emotions (Day 4 of Take Back Your Summer)

Your capacity needs to grow. So we can grow the container around that one thing. We can get bigger, we can get stronger, we can become more able to handle it. And because of that, it will get easier, not harder. Many times people will say to me, "Amanda, I don't want to get stronger." And I just want you to know you do. You do. Because if you can handle this, then you can handle this forever. And then you can just move on and move forward and keep going and have that capacity built in for you. You don't have to absorb as much if you grow more. You don't have to feel so anxious if you grow more. That's what emotional maturity looks like. It's not perfection, it's not shutting down. It's just rooted presence.

So if this is resonating with you, if you're nodding along and thinking, "Oh my God, I do this with everyone in my life," then come to the live coaching today. We're going deeper into the beliefs that keep you stuck in other people's emotions, the nervous system wiring behind it, and how to start reclaiming your peace without feeling like a bad mom, partner, daughter, or friend. You don't have to be cold to have boundaries. You don't have to detach to protect yourself. You just have to come home to you.

We're going live today at 2 p.m. Pacific and you can still register at amandahess.ca/summer. And yes, if you want to get coached on this, and this would be an amazing thing to get coached on, there's still time to grab a VIP coaching spot for tomorrow. You don't have to carry this alone. You don't have to keep bending yourself into emotional shapes to keep everyone else comfortable. This is your moment to step back into you. So go sign up, amandahess.ca/summer. Even if you just come to listen, that's more than enough. You don't have to be the one holding the room together. You've just got to be you, fully, finally, without apology. I'll see you live, 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.