

Ep #275: How to Advocate for Yourself When Others Don't Understand You



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With Your Host

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Feeling unseen and unheard is exhausting. Today you'll learn how to ask for what you need without overexplaining or abandoning yourself. Today we're going to cover why advocacy feels hard, how belonging and loneliness mess with your brain, and three concrete communication tools you can use this week.

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, hey my friend. Welcome. Welcome to the podcast. Today is a juicy episode, and we're going to talk about the problem. I think that the problem, and you might not see it as this, right? But the problem is feeling misunderstood, feeling like you're too much, feeling like you're hard to read.

I think that ultimately, what ends up happening, and I've been coaching on this a lot lately, and it's interesting that this tends to seem to come up in the summer months. And it could be because we are so much more social in the summer.

But one of the things that I really see is the feeling that you're not able to be yourself with groups of people. That if you want to be with groups of people, then that means you need to change how or who you are, or that in some way, you actually feel like you need to perform. And so I really want to cover that for you, and I really want to talk about it because it's a really important topic.

Last week, we talked about emotional safety. And this week, advocacy is how you use that safety. Now, where we can begin is why we don't advocate. Why don't we advocate? Because many times we have the urge, and in fact, we experience the dissonance and the disconnect of wanting to speak up, but then at the same time, wanting to fit in. And because of that, we don't actually advocate.

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A lot of times why we're not advocating is because we're having a nervous system response. We are having a fawn response in that we are people pleasing. So really, all a fawn response is, is I'm going to try and make you happy so that you will be happy with me, so that I can be included, so that I can feel okay, so I can feel worthy, so I can feel acceptable. I don't want to deal with your negative reaction, so I'm going to people please.

And a lot of times why we're not advocating is really for that reason. And the way that you might actually talk about it is having rejection sensitivity, not wanting to put yourself in positions where you could be rejected and having been rejected in the past and potentially having stories of rejection that play over and over in your brain that create more of that painful emotion, and so you're just very sensitive to rejection.

You also might have a conflict hangover, in that you have advocated in the past and the conflict has been so painful and so difficult that you're still not really over that experience. So that can be another reason why we don't advocate for ourselves.

Another layer of this, which we definitely covered last week, is the socialization of being a good girl, being easy, not making waves, being easygoing, being the one that everybody likes, being likable.

And what I do find is for many of us that have this going on for us, where we're not advocating and we are somewhat hypersensitive to rejection, and I would identify myself in that category, in that there are enough core wounds that I experience that rejection is something that I have to coach myself through.

When we are nervous about being rejected, we won't advocate, right? That just is the reason why. It's not because you're not smart enough. It's not because you're a pushover. It's not because you're inherently not okay as a person, that you're lacking some way in your abilities or in your character. More so, it's just I haven't quite figured out how to not have that wound show up so strongly that I can't actually advocate.

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You know, for those of us that do class ourselves as being neurodivergent, for myself, for instance, or for many of my clients, there's a processing lag in that when it's happening in the moment, we might actually not advocate only because we haven't really figured out what's going on for us yet. There is a sensory load that's happening, and it could be situational in that it could be the actual experience of where you are and what's happening. Let's say being in a loud restaurant or being out on the lake or, you know, all these summer examples come to mind when it's summer.

But the other sensory load is noticing that we can have a sensory load from the emotions. So somebody says something, we want to advocate, but we don't advocate because the emotion that we're experiencing is so significant that we can't, and we want to avoid the emotion. We don't want to deal with it.

So the reason why we don't advocate is because of these things. It's really always because of these things. Even if you think I don't advocate because I don't want to be difficult, really notice that, right? Like, I don't want to be difficult. I don't want to be a problem. I don't want to make them think that I matter more than them. I don't want them to think that I'm a problem, that I'm an issue, that I'm somehow not worthy of being friends with, connected with, partnered with. These things are going on for us.

So why does that happen? You know, I've posted some content lately over on TikTok about rejection and how when we're afraid of rejection, it is because we're rejecting ourselves. And this is the truth. This is the truth, but it is - it is convoluted. It is interwoven.

The first thing you need to know is that as human beings, we are wired for belonging. So that is a part of our nature. We are born into the world looking to belong. And it's a survival mechanism. We need to belong for survival. If you think about back many, many, many years ago when we didn't have houses and we didn't have the wonderful amenities that we have now, we needed other people to help us to make sure that we had shelter and food and that we were protected. So belonging is wired into us.

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And then the other part of this is that many of us were trained to earn our belonging, and we were trained to earn it by self-erasure, right? Erasing ourselves. We have been trained that the best way to belong is to not be ourselves.

I was coaching a client today and she was telling me how when she's engaging with other humans and when she's trying to create friendships, one of the thoughts that she's thinking is, I need to make sure that I don't talk too much. So when she goes and she speaks with somebody, the way that she is interacting is already judging herself. Make sure I don't speak too much. Make sure I don't talk too much. And in fact, I think the words she used were, don't take over the conversation.

And I wonder how many neurodivergent people feel like that. I mean, that deeply resonated for me when she shared it. But as her coach and being in a coaching space, it really to me was such an interesting depiction of being told that how you are is not enough or not okay. And therefore you need to make it muted, not show it to people, really be intent on fixing that about yourself.

And when we're doing that, when we are basically going out in the world and hyperfocused on how other people are receiving us, which we do do, what will happen is we will be hyperfocused on ourselves without meaning to be.

It's always very interesting to me when I'm speaking to someone about belonging and connection and then being able to deliver a boundary or to ask for something that you want or something that you need, right? Whenever we're talking about that, there is a lot of talk about the other people and who they are and how they are. And there's not a lot of talk about who you are, what drives you, what you do for you.

I think that something that we need to reframe right away is changing this dynamic and changing this conversation inside of our brain to I belong with me first. I belong with me first. And in speaking to what we spoke about last

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week, you go first. I belong to me first. If I want to belong with others, the first thing I need to do is belong with myself.

Now, in speaking of belonging and speaking of connection, I like to get in the weeds here a little bit so that we have a little bit more clarity. Because there's being alone, and being alone is a circumstance because you are alone. There is only you. The only way that you are alone is if you're the only person there. Otherwise, you're not alone, right?

But being lonely is different. Lonely is a feeling. I feel lonely. And the reason why we feel lonely is it's a mismatch between us being seen and known, and it's a mismatch between how we define it for ourself and how it shows up in our environment.

And what I will say is that this conversation right now, when we're talking about it, is something that is extremely nuanced. Extremely nuanced. But what I will say to you, something that I know for sure, is that there have been times when I have been alone and felt deeply connected. And there have been times when I have been surrounded by humans and felt epically lonely.

So our circumstances don't define whether or not we feel lonely. And that's important to know because a lot of times we're chasing people to try and cure loneliness, and that's why we're not advocating. So we're collecting people and putting them into our space, into our world, and we're not really considering that the people aren't going to change how we feel about ourselves.

We think that's what comes first, that if people are loving and accepting me and I'm part of groups and I'm, you know, in the flow of having this community, that then I will feel like I belong. And that is just the lie.

Actually, what happens is when you feel good enough, when you decide you're good enough, when you take care of yourself emotionally, when you are making sure that you validate yourself and that you're running things through your set of values of how you want to be in the world, then you can

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start advocating. And advocacy, I would argue, reduces loneliness because you're known, and you're known by you first. And that's amazing.

Where we feel lonely is when we're not known. And we're not known when we don't advocate for ourselves, when we're not saying what we need, when we're not saying what we mean, when we're not showing up in the world as the full version of ourselves, we feel more and more and more lonely, no matter how many people we plug into place.

We spoke about this last week a little bit, but I want to just have a bit of a revisiting of this, that if you have boundaries and if you're advocating for yourself, that means you're being bitchy, or you're being difficult, or you're being too much. When we do that, when we are looking at advocacy as meaning that we take from other people, then we will always struggle with being able to do it.

I see so much content these days with respect to boundaries online, and - and I think boundaries are wonderful, but boundaries are the tool, and no tool is any good if we don't know how to use it.

So being able to advocate, being able to have boundaries, that is deciding what is going to protect your peace and also what is in alignment with how you want to be in the world. Rather than outwardly facing the world thinking, hey, how do I change myself to make this work?

Instead, we go inwards and decide, this is who I'm going to be and how I'm going to be for myself. This is who I'm going to be and how I'm going to be for others. These are my values. I love myself, I accept myself, I will not reject myself. I treat myself with authenticity and with respect.

When we do that, and that is how we show up in the world, then the world gets to show up back in a way that works for you. Because you actually do want to be rejected by the people that are not going to respect that about you. You want to be rejected by them, and it will open up your world to the people that are supposed to be there, that need to be there.

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The reason why we must learn how to advocate is because we have been taught to advocate in a way that doesn't work. I've coached on this in so many different ways in the past couple of weeks, but it looks like making a request of somebody, but you do it in such a way that they don't even really know there was a request because it was kind of like a PS at the end of a letter, right?

And then because they don't pick up on this very light request, and then you feel that you've delivered it one time and that they should be treating you in a different way, then what will happen is you will start believing that they don't care about you, that they don't like you, that they're not interested in you.

And the longer that you think thoughts like that, it creates disconnection, it creates frustration, it creates resentment, it creates all kinds of things. It also disconnects you from you because you think, hey, it doesn't matter what I do, people don't care. They're not interested in caring about me. So we need to look at the energy with which we deliver these things.

Real advocacy will protect your energy. Real advocacy will clarify your relationships. Real advocacy models consent. Real advocacy creates self-trust, and the cost of not advocating will always be resentment, burnout, and self-abandonment.

The thing about advocating for yourself that I think is important to just find the nuance here and dig in a little bit, is really understanding the concept of being the version of you who is delighted to be this way, all right? Versus being this version of you because you feel like you have to, and so it feels like a grind. It feels like this is the only way to get what you want. You have to dig in, and it has to be so hard. Think about something that feels really hard and think about something that you're delighted in doing and notice the difference, right? Notice the difference.

When we are performing and we are showing up in our life, and it's just a perpetual I'm trying to be this way so I can get you to be that way, when it's

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that type of interaction, that's tiring. You're going to get tired real fast. It's not sustainable. You might be able to do it for a little while, and then you're going to fall off, and you're just going to repeat back into the same pattern.

So this isn't about performing. This is about coming from a place inside of yourself where you determine, hey, I - I really matter. And I'm not doing this to affect your behavior, although, of course, I want it to change, but I'm doing this because I'm speaking from a place of authenticity inside of me. So I don't feel connected to you in this moment. I don't feel validated by you in this moment. Could be the conversation with a partner, right?

But even if you consider doing something like this at work, where you are making sure that you understand that you're allowed to ask for what you need, even if other people don't see it. That that is not just okay, that is how you want to be in the world. The energy becomes more empowered, and it becomes easier for you to deliver that, and it will come from a more authentic place. It's not for them, it's for you, but they will actually react differently to that.

We need to be so in tune with regulating our nervous system, with being conscious of the thoughts and the feelings that we are experiencing, by getting back into that empowered state inside of ourselves. We need to start becoming more practiced at that.

Because as we do that, we are going to be more able to advocate. You know, there are quick nervous system resets. You can exhale longer than you inhale. You can think about softening your jaw and then softening your tongue. You can drop your shoulders away from your ears. You can slow the cadence with which you're talking or moving. These are all very effective, quick nervous system resets. But your energy is extremely important.

The other part of this is looking at our beliefs about belonging and connection. The reality is that why we don't advocate is because we're worried we won't fit in one way or another. And we need to look at the

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thoughts that we're thinking. You might have a belief like, if they're upset, then I'm unsafe. Now, your thought might not be super clear like that. It might be, if they're upset, I'm not okay, right? Which I think would be more of the thought. Or if they're upset, I have to fix it.

And instead, what I'll offer is the idea of holding two things being true. So rather than having to put down our thoughts and our beliefs and everything else about other people because those are just like riding around in our brain, we can have two beliefs and hold them true. One, my need is valid. And two, someone else can also have feelings here. And when we do that, it gives us a jumping off point that is going to potentially craft and foster connection.

When it comes down to it, when you think about advocacy, it creates that nervous energy inside of us. And what I'm really talking about here is finding a way to exist with it and move it on through.

As we discussed previously, I just want to reiterate that we've got to ask ourselves, does what I'm doing here align with my values of honesty, kindness, and respect for them and for me too? If yes, then say it. If no, you might want to spend a little time, think it over, adjust the wording, adjust the boundary, look at the thoughts that are underneath it, look at the emotion. Maybe give yourself the time to process and allow a little bit longer.

When I say this topic is nuanced, part of the nuance is untangling the idea of being likable versus liking yourself. And we can get these comingled in a way that doesn't really work for us. So we can look at it from the standpoint of, in order for me to like myself, I need to have proof that other people like me. You might not think that that directly, but that is kind of the thought.

And the thought that I'm really offering you is I get to decide upon my likability in advance. And one really radical thought I want to offer you is what if you're always likable? What if you're always likable? Listen, you might not be likable in every moment, but you are a likable human at your core. What if that's true? What if you could just believe that?

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Because it is optional to think it, because there's no thought police wandering around that I've last saw. So what if you just decided I'm likable? And every time your brain's like, oh, she didn't like that, or she didn't like me. No, I'm - I'm really likable. Just starting that additional thought line inside of your brain. It's incredibly helpful.

Another thought that I really love that you can use is, I'm willing to disappoint others to stop disappointing myself. Let that one sit for a minute. I'm willing to disappoint others to stop disappointing myself.

Too often, what's happening is we're trying to advocate from the standpoint of, I need this person to stop disappointing me. But have you ever considered that it's actually you disappointing you by not holding boundaries, by not advocating, for not deciding what's important for you and making sure that you hold it true, even if other people don't agree?

One thing that we can also look at is just the idea of enjoying your own company. And I want to sit here for a minute because this is something that I used to really struggle with. I used to really struggle with liking my own company. The idea of being by myself sounded horrible. And I would do anything to change it.

So I had a lot of friends when I was in adulthood, right? After I had my kids, I had a lot of friends. I got very, very practiced at being a chameleon, at being good fun, about being out in the world and making sure that I was like, extremely likable, obviously, long before I found coaching.

And what I found in doing that is that if I wasn't busy and I was alone or there was like downtime, I would just crash and I would feel so depressed and so down and so not able to cope.

And a lot of the reason for that is how dysregulating it was for me and then how I would have all of these very painful thoughts being delivered to me like, you're unlikable, nobody enjoys you, everybody hates you, nobody even wants to do anything with you, you have no friends. Like those types of - those types of thoughts, right? That would be what is happening for me.

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And I would just go out of my way to never be alone. And it was so interesting because a lot of times the things that I would end up doing would be things that I didn't even want to do. And I would be not enjoying doing them.

So one thing that I've become really practiced at, especially after COVID, is being alone and being okay with being alone. And you know, here's what I'll tell you. At the beginning, even for me, there are times when it's really dysregulating. But when I get into the groove and I remind myself, this is not a problem, being alone doesn't mean you have to be alone.

You're not lonely unless you decide you're lonely, that I actually enjoy my own company. I like having time to do things like work in my garden or read a book or crochet a blanket or just quite frankly, watch some really, really garbage TV and just enjoy every second of it and not have to converse. This is a joy for me sometimes, right? And I don't need to be in other people's company constantly. I can actually enjoy myself, enjoy my own brain, enjoy my own time.

Now, if you've never done that or if you don't do that, or when you do do that, it feels really terrible, what I would like you to do is do some practice. Go for one solo coffee or go for a walk after you advocate, after you set a boundary, to teach your body that you're still safe. Just go out and start beginning to try these things on, to practice them. It is really going to change your life when you start to understand how to do this.

There's three communication strategies that I'm going to offer you today. And the first one is called the cap format. So what the cap format is, is it's a clear ask, plus an anchor, plus a path. So the clear ask is you ask for what you want or what you need, and then you anchor it with a brief why or a value, but we don't get defensive. And then we offer a path, a boundary, or an option. And that's how we do the communication of advocating for ourselves. So the cap format, clear ask, anchor, path.

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How that could look is, I'm not available for X. I'm prioritizing Y. What I can do is Z. And here's an example, okay? I'm not able to move the call to 7 p.m. I keep evenings for family. What I can do is tomorrow at 1 p.m. or Thursday at 10. Now I want you to notice, there's no overexplaining in that. We are not trying to make the other person understand. That is not the purpose here. The purpose is to advocate for yourself and stop. All right?

Communication strategy number two is called the pace check, and it's pause, assess, choose, and execute. So first we pause. We take some breaths and we do a body scan. And then we assess, is this about safety, preference, or pattern? Is this about me being emotionally safe? Is this about me having a preference and doing this? Or this is a pattern that's going on here? Then we get to choose. We get to have a value-aligned micro ask. And then we execute with one sentence and we drop the essay, okay?

The script would be, I need us to stick to the agreed plan. If that doesn't work, I'll blank. Here's an example. I need us to stick to no drop-ins. If that doesn't work, I won't be opening the door. That is a boundary. Pause, assess, choose, execute.

The third is called the two truths frame. And it's where we validate without collapsing. So we're going to acknowledge their reality and then we're going to state yours. What the script would look like is, I get that you're disappointed, I'm still a no. Okay? Here's another option. I hear that you prefer last minute changes. I work best with 24 hours notice.

Why this works is it keeps empathy in, but it keeps people pleasing out. It can be so tempting to hear things like I've just shared with you and decide that you've already tried them. I've already done that. But my challenge to you is to actually consider how all of this could apply to you and how you might be missing a piece.

The piece that I see most people miss when they're advocating for themselves and then feeling like they're not being heard or seen when

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they're advocating, is because they are overexplaining and they are not stepping into the full version of, I am going to advocate. I'm not going to boss you around. I'm not going to try to make you understand. I'm going to stand in my truth. I am going to tell you exactly what it is, and then we're both going to sit in the discomfort of that and see what falls out. But what I'm not going to do is back down, overexplain or hyper function for you.

Here are some lines that you can steal. I'm not available for that. Here's what I can do. Here's a good one. I'm okay if you're not okay with my boundary. Or, I choose being in integrity over being agreeable. Now listen, I think about that line and I think it's more of a thought than something you say out loud. But you could say it out loud if somebody is really pushing you. Lastly, I don't need you to agree to my need for me to honor it.

Some of these can be said out loud, some of these are thoughts that you can think in your head. At the end of the day, you want to just be noticing what we spoke about at the beginning of this episode, which is really being intentionally creating your sense of belonging, validating yourself, being there for yourself. This skill, and it is a skill, which means that we learn it through specificity and through practice. This skill is grown from having emotional safety. So if you haven't listened to last week's episode, you need to go listen to it.

Here is what I have to offer you moving into next week. Boundaries aren't mean, they're clear. And today we're going to start practicing the words that keep them clear.

I really hope that this landed with you in a way that you can use it for yourself. But one caveat I have for you here on this episode is to ensure that anything you hear me or anybody else say that you're using for you, you're using to advocate for yourself inside of yourself. Use this information, these episodes, to help you be more in alignment with you in a loving, empathetic, go me kind of way. Don't take any of this and start beating yourself up with it.

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One of the things that I just really notice when it comes to things like advocacy is that we begin to beat ourselves up for not advocating. And that's why I really prefaced like emotional safety comes first. We need to create that emotional safety. We need to have that soft cushion within ourselves to be able to show up and advocate.

And all of this, in my mind, is an ecosystem. So it's not a matter of changing just one thing and your life just goes and opens up and it's like, ha, and the heaven shine down, right? That's not how it works. Your life works to a certain extent.

But what we're doing is we're making small shifts in the ecosystem over time to create a more positive experience for you to be able to live inside of, for it to be, I guess less than positive, I don't love that word, but more hospitable. A more hospitable place for you to live inside of. We only live inside of our own brain. So let's make sure it's a hospitable place.

As always, if you want personalized practice with what I've shared here, go and book a discovery call with me. All you have to do is go to amandahess.ca/bookacall and we can map this out together. I can help you figure this out. All right, my friend, that's it for now. I'll see you next time. Bye.

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.