

Ep #285: It's Not Your Fault: Why You're So Hard On Yourself



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With Your Host

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What if the reason you're so hard on yourself isn't because you lack confidence, but because as a kid, safety meant never messing up? Let's unpack that.

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 my friend. Welcome to today's podcast. Did you grow up in a house where everything had to be someone's fault? Me too. You know that expression, don't cry over spilled milk? I lived in a house where the shit hit the fan if somebody spilled a glass of water. So if you're a person who's incredibly hard on yourself, just know this isn't your fault, but it is something we can change, because this way of thinking might be the exact reason your life feels so damn hard right now.

I think it's really important to understand that the way that we show up in our life has been directed by so many different circumstances. On one hand, you have your genetics, the way you're built, the way that you were always going to be because of the way that your brain works. But then on top of that, you have your upbringing, being a kid and your brain forming from a baby up until adulthood, and that being the way that your brain is put together.

The truth is that the things that stick with us from our formative years stick there for a lot of different reasons. And one of the biggest reasons is because they were being formed while your brain was growing. So as your brain was growing, it learned how to be in the world. It learned how to function in the world. And more than anything, and I think the most important thing to understand, is that it learned how to be safe in the world.

One thing that we need to know about the human brain is that its number one job is going to be to keep you alive and to keep you safe. And

Ep #285: It's Not Your Fault: Why You're So Hard On Yourself

therefore, it is going to learn how to show up for you as the people in your life are showing up.

The thing that I really notice, and I don't know if this is a Gen X thing, I don't think that it 100% is, but I know that a lot of people that grew up around the same time as me, we had the same experience of childhood. And that experience was that blame was used as control in our homes, and blame was also used as an emotional discharge. The both things would happen. And here's how it would show up.

If, let's say, you were that kid sitting at the dinner table and you knew that you had spilled a glass of water, and then one of your parents freaked out and yelled at you and got upset with you, how you react and respond to that is going to be trying very hard to keep yourself both physically and emotionally safe. And the reason why that's happening for the other person probably has nothing to do with you.

Now, as a parent now, I can tell you that it didn't really have anything to do with the kids. But for the child growing up in that, they don't have that context. All they know is that the person that they rely upon for food, for shelter, for love, has now lost their shit, right? And so because they have, we then learn to show up to that in different ways. We don't want something to be our fault if we grew up in a home like that.

I grew up in a home where everything had to be somebody's fault. So if something happened, who did it was the most important question that needed to be answered. And if you grew up in a home like that too, I think this episode is really going to help you. I know that not all of us have grown up in homes like that. I know that there's many of you that did not grow up in a home like this, but I also know there is a large number of women who have grown up in homes like that find themselves being told that they are too emotional, that find themselves being unable to hold boundaries, that find themselves in situations where they're people pleasing, and ultimately start living their lives feeling like they're going a little bit crazy because they're trying to hold all of these things up so that they can feel safe.

Ep #285: It's Not Your Fault: Why You're So Hard On Yourself

They need other people's emotions to be regular so that they can feel safe. You know, the reason why people-please or try to control how other people feel or get into the weeds with how somebody else is thinking is because they want to feel safe inside of themselves. And today's episode, we're just going to really talk about how do we get there and then where do we go from there? And I think that those are really important things to understand.

When we were a kid, when we were younger, or potentially maybe even as you were older, and maybe you were involved in an abusive relationship, which I also was, right? When you were involved in those kinds of relationships as an adult, you are going to be trying to create safety because you're trying to hold on to love, right? You want to be loved, you want to be accepted, you also don't want to get hurt, physically, mentally, emotionally, you don't want to get hurt. So that goes on in an adult relationship. But then this also shows up when you think about childhood and you think about being the young person growing up in that particular situation that is just wanting to ensure that they are safe, that they are loved, that they are fed, that they are included, that they are not harmed.

And so that version of us is going to show up anytime in adulthood that our safety feels like it's on the line. It does not matter if it's your physical safety, your emotional safety, your mental safety. If your safety feels like it's on the line, that's going to happen. So when you look at adulthood and you see yourself being self-critical, when you see yourself over-apologizing, when you see yourself people-pleasing, when you see yourself being attached to perfectionism, of course you do, because your brain has linked being good with feeling safe. And that's where all of this comes from.

I want to give you some examples of how this shows up so that you may be see how this is coming up for you in ways that you might not have recognized. So for instance, you maybe replay conversations again and again and again and you wonder what you did wrong. And you might ask other people and ask for validation, and then think again and again and again about what you did wrong.

Ep #285: It's Not Your Fault: Why You're So Hard On Yourself

You might feel really anxious if someone's quiet around you because it must be because of something that you did. You find yourself in a position where you can't rest until every loose end is tied up. Nothing can be left undone because then it would be left to chance and something could go wrong and then you would not be safe. You take responsibility for everyone else's moods. So your partner needs to be happy, your kids need to be happy, your friends need to be happy, your boss needs to be happy, your dog needs to be happy.

This is all a manifestation of what has happened in your past. You're not doing this because you're neurotic. You're doing this because your nervous system was trained to find fault before anyone else could point it out. The thing that I find super interesting about this as well is that a lot of times when women come to me for coaching and we're talking through this, what will happen when we're coaching on their day-to-day life is their judgment of everyone around them. They, in turn, are hyper-judgmental of everyone else. And they recognize it as being a problem. They know that they don't want to be so judgmental. But whenever they find themselves under duress, under pressure, they are judging everyone around them.

And what I have really come to learn over the years, because this is something that I experienced for myself as well, is those that judge outwardly the most, judge inwardly the hardest. This is typically where this comes from for every single person.

Now, I want to talk about how we shift it and how we move from that place of I am hyper-aware of all the things that could go wrong and I am actually trying to fix all those things perpetually in my head, outwardly, trying to ensure that all the people do and say and think all the appropriate things, including myself. The way that we move from that is first of all understanding that safety doesn't come from being perfect. Safety does not come from being perfect. And it's really important to understand this, but what I find is that we understand it on a like a psychological level, but we need to learn how to embody it. We need to learn how to embody the thought, the belief that safety doesn't come from perfection.

Ep #285: It's Not Your Fault: Why You're So Hard On Yourself

The truth is that safety will come from being kind to yourself when things go wrong. What tends to happen is something will misfire. It won't be going the way you want it to go. And you will find yourself in this position of feeling that panic come up in you. It is so visceral, it's so automatic. When your brain decides you're unsafe in the background, your body doesn't know the difference between a lack of safety from the standpoint of, oh, I just, you know, messed up a report versus, oh, you really messed up and you're going to get the shit kicked out of you. Your brain doesn't know the difference. It's going to show up the same way. We're unsafe. The panic is going to rise. You're going to feel your heart rate speed up. You're going to feel your palms get sweaty. You're going to feel this intense urge to create some control so that you can be emotionally safe. And I get it.

But what we actually want to start doing is we want to start being able to slow things down. We want to be able to ground, pull back, find safety before we move forward. And that is going to go against every instinct that you have in your body. And what you need to know is nothing's gone wrong. That is okay that it shows up like that. That is normal. That is what you can expect.

It's not about being perfect. You being perfect is not the thing that's in question here. It's not the thing that we need to fix. The goal is not to never spill the water. It really is not to lose yourself trying to mop it up, right? One of the big things that I teach, and if you've been listening to this podcast for long enough or you're my client, you know one of the biggest things I teach is nervous system regulation and this is why.

We're going to talk about the thoughts that you can think here, but before we can even dive into them, we have to understand how our body shows up to this. Your body shows up for you. She wants to help you. But the problem is that she has been given the wrong mission. She's like, oh my God, you're not safe. Let me help you out. And she's there, just ready to fight for you. But actually, we don't need that. We want to slow it down. We want to notice the fear that shows up, and it's almost always fear. When I see people being hyper-critical, it's typically fear that's showing up there.

Ep #285: It's Not Your Fault: Why You're So Hard On Yourself

And fear is just so visceral. It just creates such instantaneous action in people, and it makes sense. It's how we're designed. We're supposed to work that way.

But to be able to slow that down, we can't really get into the emotional experience until we regulate more. So thinking about taking three deep breaths, right? Putting your hand on your chest, breathing in for three, holding for three, and then blowing out for three. And feeling yourself down-regulate, right? Moving one peg down on the emotional scale.

Why is this important? Because it slows it down. We realize that, oh, I was talking really fast, I was thinking really fast, I wanted to do things really fast, I wanted to text back really fast, I wanted to write the email really fast, I wanted to snap back really fast. We slow it down. We slow it down and recognize it for what it is. This is because I don't feel safe, and that is okay. And I'm going to take my time with this. I'm going to go for a walk. I'm going to go for a drive. I'm going to go be alone for a little while and I'm going to regulate.

Now, when we're talking about self-criticism, right, when we're in our own head and criticizing ourselves, it really actually typically is what creates the criticism of others, that hyper-critical nature that you might have, that I share. This is my set point. This is my go-to point. Because I grew up in a home where emotional safety was never a given, then what happens is we unknowingly, not on purpose, go out and do the same. And the way forward with this is not through judgment. So if you're listening to this and realizing like, holy shit, I do that to my partner, I do that to my kids, I do that to the people in my life, it's okay. This is the human experience and it is meant to be messy, my friend, and there are no perfect people in this world.

So I need you to know that because your critical nature is going to try and come and solve this problem, okay? And we've got to be so intensely kind with ourselves, so emotionally generous with ourselves here and understand that this is something that was baked into us, not on purpose. I

Ep #285: It's Not Your Fault: Why You're So Hard On Yourself

look at my upbringing and I look at how my parents were raised, and I realized that they did the best they could. And honestly, they did much better than their parents did. They did. Hands down. No doubt about it. I hold no ill will towards my parents at all. I really don't. But that doesn't mean that some of the things that went on in our home didn't create a problem for me as far as my internal messaging when I went out in the world. And it wasn't just my parents and it wasn't just your parents. It's also school. It's the way that society is set up. It's living in a capitalist world. It's all of those things.

This is a problem and it isn't a problem. So what I mean by that is, this is a problem because the solution is understanding what the problem is, okay? But it isn't a problem in that nothing's gone wrong here and it's okay. It's okay that you're a self-critical human, I promise. Doesn't feel awesome. It doesn't always manifest itself in ways that we enjoy, but it is okay. It is okay that you are this version of you, okay?

The way that we move forward is by that nervous system regulation that we talk about all the time, grounding, allowing ourselves to just be, to get through the discomfort that comes with the emotions that pop up when we realize we're never going to be perfect, and it's okay. That I don't need to be the perfect mother, the perfect daughter, the perfect partner, the perfect friend, the perfect worker, the perfect human. I don't need to be those things. So we start to heal that within ourselves.

A big portion of this is going to be you setting your intention with yourself. When we find ourselves being critical, it can simply just be a red flag that goes up for us when we start to see it for what it is. The red flag isn't, holy shit, Amanda's a terrible person, right? The red flag is I'm being very critical, which tells me I don't feel safe right now. And that's the starting point. And I promise you, it will change everything. It will allow you to be less critical of yourself. It will allow you to be less critical of others.

Now, we are fighting against the wind here, and I want you to know that because your mom and dad or whoever raised you, or the people that are

Ep #285: It's Not Your Fault: Why You're So Hard On Yourself

still part of your life might still believe that them being critical is what's required and they'll continue to be critical of you. This might be true, okay? And also, the world is going to continue to be critical of you. You know, those keyboard warriors, they're just going to come in and do their thing. They are. There is going to be so much out there where there's so much judgment. In fact, we live in a world right now where judgment is, I mean, I personally believe one of the biggest problems that we have in the world is how we believe that we're on the opposite side of every single problem.

But when you can start to see that criticism is not helpful is when you can start to change this because I promise you, you don't need to be criticized to grow. You can evaluate and grow. You can determine what went really well and what you might like to do differently next time and grow. But that can be brought through a filter of kindness and love for yourself and for everyone else that gets to be a part of your life.

If you can start feeling safe in the mess, that's when you'll see a way out that doesn't require self-flagellation. And when you don't have to flagellate yourself, so therefore you don't have to feel the pain, you won't have to protect yourself by making it other people's fault, because it can be nobody's fault.

One of the biggest lessons that I've learned in my life that I want to give to you is that it doesn't have to be anybody's fault. What if it's nobody's fault? And every now and then I'll ask a client this and they'll look at me like I just grew three heads. And their response will be, well then how do we solve the problem if it's, you know, nobody's fault? And I just think that if we were on the same side and tried to solve the problem, life would be so much easier because the solution would present itself in a way that is collaborative, that is moving with the energy of you, that allows you to meet your own needs, that gives you the opportunity to see that maybe you are lovable at all of your levels. And maybe you are useful, and maybe you are smart, and maybe you're not stupid, and maybe you're not lazy.

Ep #285: It's Not Your Fault: Why You're So Hard On Yourself

Because I will tell you right now, I have said all those things to myself many, many times in a row, and I have watched call after call after call, either with my clients or with people on discovery calls, or simply I'm just having a conversation with another human, and I hear it every day and it breaks my heart. It breaks my heart because it's not the truth about you. You're not lazy. You're not stupid. That's not true about you. What is true is that you're not perfect, and maybe perfection isn't required.

Some food for thought as you know, I move towards wrapping up this episode, is to consider that the absence of perfection is what makes life fun. The absence of perfection is what makes life interesting. The absence of perfection is what gives life meaning. We work so fucking hard to be perfect, me included. But every day we can take a few reps, right? Like build that bicep. If you think about building a bicep, what are you going to do? You're going to just lift some weights and do some bicep curls. If you keep lifting those weights, you will build biceps. If you keep leaning into self-love, if you keep leaning into having your own back, if you keep leaning into I don't need to be perfect to be lovable, if you keep leading into I am safe being myself, if you grow that muscle, it will be there for you when things go wrong, because if there's one thing that's true about life, it is that shit will go wrong in your life for sure. It just will because that's life, because life is messy.

If you can grow the muscle of being there and with yourself when those things are going on and being kind and creating internal, real emotional safety for yourself, you will get through them quicker, with less pain and with less damage to others. And they will see you and learn from you, and they will show up differently to you. The way we can change the world is by changing how we treat ourselves, and that will always be true.

So my friend, if that resonates with you, I want to invite you to come and book a discovery call with me. You can just go to amandahess.ca/bookacall. The reason why I tell you to book these calls is because one session can help you see what you maybe couldn't see before. And then if that feels like the right direction for you, we can talk

Ep #285: It's Not Your Fault: Why You're So Hard On Yourself

about what that would look like moving forward, having me as your coach. Coaching with me will change your life because of how you will learn how to look at yourself. And once you learn it, you can't unlearn it. All right, my friend. It's what I've got for you today. This is a really heartfelt message. I hope you felt it. I hope you use it, and I will see you here next time. 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.