

Ep #8: Why Nobody Can Make You Feel Anything



Full Episode Transcript

With Your Host

Nicole Symcox

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A person has to be able to generate a feeling of love on their own before other people can influence that emotion. And in my experience, most people who can't generate feeling loved tend to be wrestling with depression or anxiety or traumatic experience or some other kind of mental health disorder that might be protecting them from being hurt, or it might be blocking them from feeling this feeling of love, or for some of us that grew up in abusive households, we may not even have really a reference point for what love even really is because it was never really modeled for us. And so it might be something that we have to learn again as adults.

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Here's your host, educator, coach and licensed psychotherapist, Nicole Symcox...

Hello, my friends. Welcome to episode number eight. Today, we are talking about how people cannot make you feel anything. What? Yes, it's true. It is very, very true. No one can make you feel anything. The truth is our feelings come from past experiences and the meaning you've made from those experiences, not from other people.

So for many of us, that's really hard to get our heads around because we notice, when we're around certain humans, we feel a certain way. So it's really natural for us to believe what people say or do equals how I feel, or they make me feel this way because they behave this way.

But that's actually false. The brain is not wired to be influenced in that way. We can only feel what our experiences, our thoughts, and our own emotions tell us to feel. Now, people can trigger those emotions out of us,

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but that's because they're already there. That's totally different than a person creating something for you.

You're creating it for yourself. We have buttons or triggers that develop in our nervous system as far back as utero. And these can be positive triggers or negative triggers depending on your experience. Your brain only feels what it already knows how to feel and that largely comes from past experiences and the meaning that we've made out of those experiences.

So, from an external relationship standpoint, no one can make your brain feel anything. The brain just doesn't work that way. Our brains are kind of selfish in that way. It's interesting because we've talked about in previous episodes, like they're kind of lazy but not really. It's just efficient and things get put on autopilot.

In this way, the brain is just trying to keep you alive and surviving, so it really only sees things through the evidence it's accumulated over time because even when we empathize with someone else's experience or someone else's feelings, most of that is being created by our own doing through our imagination.

We generate a feeling based on what we imagine the other person is going through. And if any of you listening today work in helping professions, you probably know exactly what I'm talking about. Just as you cannot make someone feel hated, you also cannot make someone feel loved. They have to learn how to generate this emotional feeling on their own.

And that's why people who are supporting others during hard times sometimes get really frustrated because they don't understand why they cannot make this other person feel loved, you know, why it feels like a dead-end street.

And I hear this in the therapy office often where parents or spouses or significant others or friends are like, I don't understand why I can't get through to her, or I don't understand why I can't get through to him. I do all

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these things, I say all these words, and it doesn't seem to matter. He just does not feel loved or she just does not believe she is lovable and I don't know what else to do about it.

Okay, so that's why I'm taking the time to talk about this so that we can have realistic expectations on how we can show up in the world without putting unrealistic expectations on ourselves that we can actually have the power to make someone feel anything. Like, we don't. We don't have the power to do that.

A person has to be able to generate that feeling of love on their own before other people can influence that emotion. And in my experience, most people who can't generate feeling loved tend to be wrestling with depression or anxiety or traumatic experience or some other kind of mental health disorder that might be protecting them from being hurt, or it might be blocking them from feeling this feeling of love, or for some of us that grew up in abusive households, we may not even have really a reference point for what love even really is because it was never really modeled for us. And so it might be something that we have to learn again as adults.

So it tends to take therapy and support to change your perspective, to change your emotional availability for a new experience to occur where people's actions can be interpreted as love and thus a person can then make meaning out of that and generate the feeling of, "I am loved." Do you guys see how this works?

Okay, so in no way shape or form am I saying that we shouldn't try to be loving or inspire love in others. We absolutely should 100% because every time we take a step out of love for another, we are inviting them into a new experience. And the brain learns and records experiences more than anything else.

So if you take loving action towards another, it does three things. One, it generates a feeling of love inside of you, which is a positive deposit in your own nervous system because any time we take an action like that, we're

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going to have to generate the emotional energy that goes with it, and thus we're going to experience it with the person for whom it's intended. Okay, so this is kind of like a double rainbow. We like this one.

Number two, it teaches people what love can look like. And this is helpful since many of us did not get the ideal safe love as kids, so when we model love to one another, it's a way to build each other up and inspire a different way of living because our brains are great learners and we're designed to be in connection and community with each other. So we actually want to copy behavior that inspires a feeling that we imagine might be good. And so this is why this is worth doing.

It models loving behavior and it inspires our mirror neurons to do the same. So it's a helpful experience to others to spread love and kindness around. Okay, so these are three things as to why taking loving action is worth doing. But I want you to notice, my key word in all of those three situations is inspire. Inspire does not mean responsible. Inspire does not mean create, generate, or force.

You still cannot make anyone feel anything. They still have a choice whether they want to experience that love and try something different or if they want to stay the same. We all have free will.

So you can inspire a thought process, but at the end of the day, it's up to that person how they want to feel about themselves. And if you have any kind of background in trauma, this can take some time, first working on yourself before you can feel differently about yourself or others, and so just be patient with yourself. Just honor the process and the experience and know the road to where you're going.

So in some ways, this knowledge that we can't make people feel any kind of way is relieving because it means you don't have the responsibility for how another person feels but additionally, if you are the person who feels like others are making them feel bad, it creates a huge opportunity for you to get your power back because if you realize you can't change people and

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you can't control what comes out of their mouths but you can absolutely control your response to it and how you think about the words that they say or the actions they take, that is how you get your power back because people can't affect you unless you agree with them.

So when people's comments get to us, it's actually a really good indicator to us that we might have some unresolved work in that area and we might need some help processing through that so we can get to the other side of it, so we don't stay stuck, so we don't stay in this rhythm of always feeling victimized by other people's comments or actions.

So again, in some ways, this is relieving because it means you have an incredible amount of power over how you feel with or without other people's influence, but other ways, this might feel a little confronting because if you're stuck in a habit loop of blaming others for your feelings, this is going to feel a little bit like, oh, I'm going to have to do some work to make some changes there because, the truth be known about blame, blaming others actually puts our emotions and our brains in a powerless place because if we need to blame someone else, we are actually admitting we don't have any control or power over ourselves or our circumstances. We're giving our power away, and some other, because we're blaming someone else for our own outcomes.

And you've probably seen this in different ways with people who blame and feel sorry for themselves versus people who get lit up and look for options and solutions. It's two completely mindsets that inspire different results. And so because I work with so many people that have had childhood abuse, I want to clarify how this applies to you.

If you have been victimized by another person through abuse then there is a period of time in the healing process where you grieve, blame, and you're pretty angry about your experiences. And this is a necessary part of the healing process. You have to be honest about your feelings and your experience in order to move through it.

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But for anyone who has healed from past childhood abuse, we know we don't want to stay there. We don't want to stay in a blaming mindset or we don't want to stay in this triggered state. We want to evolve and move forward and take our power back, okay.

So if you're in a place of blaming others because you're still discovering your story and your feelings around that, what I was saying previously doesn't really apply to you because you're really going through the process. As long as your goal is not to stay there, your goal is to keep going and to heal and to move through the process, then just have grace for yourself while you kind of get your head around your emotions.

Just don't make it a goal to stay there because hatred and blame does not hurt your past abuser. It hurts you because you're generating negative feelings, you're generating hateful feelings. And just as I was speaking earlier, when you generate love and you choose to spread that, you're going to experience it as well.

The same is true with hate. If you choose to stay in blame or powerlessness or hatred, you're also hurting yourself, right? And so again, please, please, please, don't hear this as non-empathetic. I fully empathize with the experience of childhood abuse. So I what I want you to hear from me is that you want to make it a goal to get to a place where you're not blaming anymore but it's absolutely okay to honor the experience and the healing state that you are in.

So, here are a few tools to get you going this week. I want you to start to notice your own stories. When people attempt to make you feel a certain way – and I say that in quotes because we know that that's not true after today's episode – when people make you feel a certain way, what emotional response are you having to the story you are telling yourself?

It's not necessarily what the person did or said that makes you feel bad. It's what you interpret that experience to mean that makes you feel bad. So

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take a step back and notice the story you are telling yourself and the emotional reaction.

Number two, notice what experience or memory your brain is instantly going back to every time it reacts to something someone else does or something someone else says that makes you feel bad about yourself. That's where the work is. That is your opportunity for growth. Traumatic memories are best worked through art therapy, EMDR, parts work, process therapy, just to name a few.

So if you're noticing memories are playing a big role in how you feel about yourself and others, find a therapist you connect well with, in your local state of residence, who has training in areas to support you.

Lastly, whenever possible, take the opportunity to reframe the story you are telling yourself. Not everything people do is about you. It's largely about them. So wherever you can, remind yourself that someone else's inconsiderate act does not define you. You are still valuable, lovable, and worthy of good things. Another person's action cannot and does not define that for you; you do.

Alright, my friends, I hope this was helpful today and I will see you next time.

Thanks for listening to this week's episode of Mental Health Remix. If you like what you've heard and want to learn more, go to nicolesymcox.com.