

Ep #28: Managing Expectations



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With Your Host

Nicole Symcox

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And I think that is where our power in relationships is. It's not having all this expectation on another person to perform or behave or be like you. It is learning how to compromise and see them for the person that they are. Because the problem is, when you only see people through a "Shoulds" lens or have all these expectations, you are cutting them short. You are not able to fully embrace who they are, and instead, you are in a relationship with frustration.

Welcome to *Mental Health Remix*, a show for ambitious humans who are ready to feel, think, and be different. If you want to stop struggling with perfectionism, build better relationships, and connect with yourself and your potential, this is the place for you...

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

Hey, hey, everyone. Welcome to episode 28. Today, we are talking about expectations. Believe it or not, expectations can create a hell of a lot of conflict inside of ourselves and in our relationships with others. And this is probably one of those things you don't necessarily consciously think about, but you probably get constantly frustrated by and don't totally understand why.

So, let's break down how to manage expectations so you can feel happy with yourself and with others. So, when it comes to expectations, we have them for ourselves. I think we can all agree on that. We have these ideas how we should or shouldn't be behaving and how far along we are in our careers, or what we should be spending our money on, how we should be as parents, friends, et cetera, right? Like how we should be showing up in our communities. We have all of these shoulds.

And sometimes we do this full-blown knowingly. And other times, we do it unconsciously. Like, we don't even realize that we've created all of these shoulds on ourselves until we unpack that and figure out, why are we so

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unhappy in our lives, or why do we feel so unhappy with ourselves? Or why do we feel so unhappy in many of our relationships?

And so, sometimes it takes pausing and taking a look at it and understanding why you're doing what you're doing? What do these shoulds or expectations represent and why are you in a chronic pattern of shoulding all over yourself?

Have you guys heard that term before? There's this funny little coaching term out in the world. It's called, "Don't should on yourself." And basically, it's because every time we set ourselves up with these expectations or these shoulds for ourselves or shoulds for others, it just leads to a heap of pain.

I've never met a person who's like, "Well it should be this way," who says that with a good tone and feeling good about themselves. Usually, when we are on a should rampage, it's never positive, either for ourselves or others, right? Like we have that birthday that comes up, we have that friend we're annoyed with. But most of the time, when we are launching a venting session on shoulds, it doesn't feel very good. So, let's knock that should off right now.

So, let's dive into this. For the most part, we see the world through our own lens. We can only see things from our own experiences, our own personality filters even, and our own logic. And so, for many of us, we default to this and it makes sense to us because it's how we see the world. And so that adds a whole other should onto our pile of shoulds.

So, we decide, well this makes logical sense. And if the world played out this way, things would all go smoothly. But, here's the thing; you are in a world full of different unique dynamic human beings. And so not everyone agrees with you. Not everyone shares your life experience. Not everyone has your personality type. Not everyone has your communication style. And there's a lot of differences.

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And so, some of the power in existing in this world is learning how to own your strengths and weaknesses, who you are as a human, but also allowing another human being to be who they are, okay; dropping the shoulds, dropping the expectations, and just seeing them for who they are and what strengths they have to offer in the world.

So, for this episode, I just want to be really clear; we are not talking about your abusive humans. We are not talking about manipulators. We are not talking about those kinds of categories because that is a whole next level of expectations and issues and problems and shoulds and all of that stuff. Like, literally, that is a separate topic, okay.

So, for this episode, we are really focusing on your normal neurotics, okay, those of us who are just doing life. We have really good intentions and we're just trying to live our best lives with ourselves and with other people and learning how to manage expectations around that so we can feel as good as possible, right?

Okay, so, I just want to call that out right away because abusers and manipulators, different story, different skillset, and different thought process. So, let's get back into this.

Assuming we're dealing with well-meaning humans, you want to think about this; we are all designed differently. Pretty much any personality test – there's the Enneagram, there's Myers Briggs and there's several others. And a lot of these personality tests have several different categories to them. And not even just several categories of who your personality traits are, but depending on your life experiences and other situations, that can impact how you show up in the world.

And so, a lot of these personality tests, they come back not just with basic information, but some of them can also come out with more specifics, meaning you could be an artistic person, but that might show up for you in this way, which might be different from another artistic person. So then

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we've just blown that out of the water, that not every artist is the same. Not every engineer is the same. Not every logical person is the same.

And so, we have to stop categorizing people as being like us. It's an unreasonable expectation. And many times, we have these expectations and we don't even communicate what our expectations are to other people, and then we just get pissed off at them.

We get mad at them, we hold resentment, or we have unresolved issues with them because we never say anything and we're holding onto all of these expectations of who they should be. And so, going back to what I said originally, when you think about seeing people and embracing people for who they are, you will do much better in relationships if you can utilize each other's strengths.

Because here is the funny thing – and many of you will probably resonate with or understand this – most of us are attracted to our opposites. This is friendships, this is romantic relationships. This is bosses, coworkers. It's very, very interesting to me how we tend to attract opposites in our lives.

So, many times, you have the super, super organized and you have the super, super chaotic person, right? A lot of times, those two energetic forces, like, join together, more often than not. You hear about this all the time in marriages. What you hear about less is that someone is perfectly matched and we have all the same strengths and weaknesses.

I mean, that exists, don't get me wrong. You just don't hear about it as much. Most of the time, what you hear about is, like, "Well he does life this way and I do life this way and it's just really hard for us to compromise sometimes." And I think that is where our power in relationships is.

It's not having all this expectation on another person to perform or behave or be like you. It is learning how to compromise and see them for the person that they are because the problem is, when you only see people through a should lens or have all these expectations, you are cutting them short.

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You are not able to fully embrace who they are, and instead, you are in a relationship with frustration. And that does not create healthy connection, healthy communication. Like, none of that feels good. In summary, none of that feels good.

So, we want to change that. So, that doesn't mean if someone is not behaving properly or they're being rude or disrespectful, there's nothing wrong with having a healthy communication, healthy conversation around that. In fact, I highly encourage that because that goes into compromise.

If there's no conversation around what hurts you or what's upsetting you or how you're feeling, do not expect the other person to know. So, I think a lot of times, we do this unconsciously. We just think people see the world and that people catch on. They don't. They really, really don't.

Unless they are just like you and see the world your way, the chances of them just automatically seeing things your way without a conversation are extremely low, okay. And so, we want to embrace a more balanced perspective.

People can actually work together in their differences and it can actually be amazing. When we start really seeing and embracing people for who they are, having healthy conversations, and having reasonable expectations, even on ourselves, it's so much more enjoyable to live with ourselves and to live with other people.

Alright, so now, let's talk about you. Let's talk about the expectations you have for yourself. And believe it or not, the skills you're going to use to have reasonable expectations for another human being is going to be very similar to how you have reasonable expectations for yourself.

So, if you've been hanging out for a while listening to the podcast, you will have learned from me by now that much of our own narrative, much of our own relationship with ourselves gets projected out into the world and lived out. And this is included in our relationships.

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So, the way we talk to ourselves, many times, is how we talk to others. And your first knee-jerk response to that is going to be like, “No, no, no I’m way nicer to people than I am to myself.” Are you?

You might outwardly be. But inwardly, are you? Or are you just as mean inwardly to other people as you are to yourself? That’s something to check-in. And I’m not saying it is or isn’t, but this is a good self-evaluation question. Do you notice your thoughts about yourself also match the thoughts and criticisms that you have for others?

Check in with that because it may not be as obvious as you might think. Sometimes, in our emotional world, one plus one doesn’t equal two obviously. It does, but not obviously. So, kind of check in with yourself. Do you have exceptionally high expectations for yourself? Are you very hard on yourself?

And because of that, does that frustration end up getting projected out into the world and spewing onto your relationships, in one way, shape, or form. Again, it may not be a direct one plus one where it’s like, “Well I’m critical about myself over being on time, so I’m critical of others when they’re late.” It may not be quite that simple, although that’s quite possible.

It might be you are a perfectionist and you have high expectations for yourself to perform well. And therefore, it translates in the world that you have high expectations that other people will always put forth their best effort. And when they don’t, you are disappointed.

And so, when I say that, that introduces a whole lot of grey because that’s open for interpretation. Perfectionism is a broad term, how that shows up for your own internal dialogue is also a broad term, and how you’re projecting that out onto other people is also a broad term.

But it’s important to do some self-evaluation around this, get a handle on this and understand how this is showing up for you because it might be a silent frustrater that is sabotaging you and your relationships. And we want to knock that shit off, right, because that’s not enjoyable.

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So, in the same way you would see other people for who they are, it's important for you to see you for who you are; embracing strengths and weaknesses, understanding where your growing edges are, having goals, being flexible, having a mindset that is open to growth and change. In other words, if you set a plan and that plan goes to shit, as it often does because, hello, this is life and that us just what happens, you're flexible about that, that there's a plan B or a plan C, or a plan Z for goodness sakes.

I mean, this is just some of the realities around life. Like, to have an expectation that you should perform perfectly all the time and that the world should show up and follow suit and be perfect all the time is an unrealistic expectation that is going to cause you a ton of misery.

You will do so, so much better in the "Good enough" area where you proceed with life with your best effort and with integrity. Additionally, having grace and compassion for ourselves allows us to have grace and compassion for others, okay.

So, when we put forth our best effort with integrity and things still kind of fall short – which happens. I mean, it happens. And it's not a big deal because likely you're learning. If that's the case, you're probably on a learning curve or you're trying something new or you need more information or you need more support.

There might be something else going on where you need to support yourself, and so understanding that and having a reasonable viewpoint on yourself is the key to feeling okay. It's the key to feeling good and enjoying life because if you are constantly stressed out or mad at a friend or mad at a family member because they are not doing things the way you think they should be done, that affects you.

It doesn't change them. It hurts you. And so, this is why, if you want to make changes in your relationship, it has to start with healthy communication. And then you can have a dialogue over what is reasonable and what is possible in your relationship.

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And if you don't know how to do that, there's tons of communication books, there's therapy, there's coaching. There's lots of different ways to learn how to do healthy communication, because as we talked about in a previous episode, most of us don't know how to communicate assertively until we learn how to do those things.

So, again, I call that out because let's have reasonable expectations on things. Life is not always going to be easy, smooth, perfect. But that doesn't mean that it's not enjoyable. You can still fully embrace and enjoy your life and your relationships with reasonable expectations. In fact, it will probably fuel it.

Alright, so, to recap today, here are some things, some tools, some thoughts that I have in recap that you can start pushing having reasonable expectations in motion.

So, first, if you are unaware of yourself or unaware of some of your personality traits or who you actually are, I really recommend you do a personality assessment, just for information. I'm actually not a huge fan of personality tests because sometimes people box themselves in and they're like – for example, the Enneagram, your number, they're like, "Well I'm a four, so I can't act any other way than a four..." which I think is bullshit.

I think we have the right to evolve and change over the course of a lifetime. But here's the deal; when you take these personality assessments, I think they give a lot of good information that you can use as a launching pad for yourself to get the juices flowing, to see, "Do I agree with that? Is that true about me?"

And start to formalize and internalize your own thoughts around it, not necessarily what the assessment says about you, but do you agree with that assessment and what do you want to do about it? Do you like some of these things? Are you surprised by some of these things? And is there anything you want to change? Is there anything that's eye-opening?

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I don't want you to see yourself as a fixed person who cannot change. The second you view yourself and you view life that way is when you stop changing. And let me tell you, my friends, life is ever-moving. I want you to move with it because that is how you're going to have the most enjoyable experience on this planet.

So, give yourself permission to evolve, sharpen, change. Be flexible with it. But it's a good starting point. It's a good conversation to start with yourself, to do Myers Briggs or the Enneagram I know are two of the most popular ones right now. But there's a hell of a lot more that are out there. So, do your research and kind of figure out, like, what assessment do I want to take?

Number two, create reasonable goals for yourself, okay. So, if you are a business owner, don't expect to hit a million dollars in revenue by the end of the year if you are not even on track for that. That goes into a dream. There is a big difference between a dream and a tangible goal. Goals have to be realistic. They have to be based in reality and they have to have tangible steps that you can actually take to obtain that goal.

So, the biggest easiest example of that, if you want to be able to run a mile, what are the tangible steps that you need to take in order to build up enough endurance, strength, to run that mile?

Three, I want you to practice having a flexible mindset, having grace and compassion for yourself. The more you talk to yourself with grace and compassion, the more you'll be able to extend that to other people.

Number four, have reasonable expectations for other people, especially if they are your opposite. You're robbing yourself of the opportunity to be in relationship with an amazing person by constantly putting them in a box and being angry at them for not being like you.

It's going to create so much frustration in yourself. It's going to create so much frustration for them. And so, part of healthy relationships is being seen, heard, and understood in healthy ways, even with your differences.

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So again, if there's a relationship issue, I want to encourage you to have a healthy conversation with that person.

Don't harbor resentment. Don't harbor anger. It's only going to hurt you and it's going to hurt the relationship. So, you have to remember, opposites attract for a reason. There's probably something in that person you can learn from, and there's something from you that person can learn from as well. There is huge potential to complement one another, but you have to give it a chance, which is you have to have reasonable expectations for another person and have a heart to heart conversation if something's not going right.

Empower yourself. Don't put all these expectations on yourself. Let's change all of that. Let's move to more of an empowerment mindset of what is, what can I do about it, and how do I move forward?

Alright, my friends, my hope is that this episode was helpful to you. And of course, if strong emotions come up for you at any point when you're listening to this podcast or any podcast, take it as information that something in your internal world needs support. And there is no shame or blame in getting mental health support in your local state of residence. It's probably the best thing that you can do for yourself.

And lastly, if you loved today's episode, feel free to get on my email list so you never miss an episode and you get to hear what it's on. Alright, my friends, I'll 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.

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