

## Ep #40: 3 Ways to Manage Stress



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With Your Host

**Nicole Symcox**

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Because, when our emotions are driving us, it's harder to really see something for what it is. We get too lost in our own stories. And we're all guilty of this. This is human nature. This isn't a you thing. This is, like, a human thing.

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

Hello, my friends. Welcome to episode 40. So, today I want to talk to you about three ways that you can manage stress, which is so crazy to even be talking about. At the time I'm recording this, it is, like, the beginning of July. And, you know, traditionally we're able to go out and go on vacation. This is usually our season for travel and de-stressing by doing some fun activities that we love to do.

But due to COVID-19, a lot of that's not happening. A lot of people are having to get really creative with what they are doing to de-stress and take a little bit of time off and enjoy the sun. And so, I want to just talk to you today about how you can manage your stress levels and move forward in just a better way.

So, let's dive into this. So, one of the things I think we love about travel and vacations is it takes us out of our responsibilities. And responsibility, especially the story we tell ourselves around responsibility is a high contributor to our stress levels. And so, when we go on vacation or we get to travel, we are being taken out of our environment, we're being taken out of our element, and moved into a new one where we have different expectations for ourselves.

So, I want you to think about that for a second because you really don't need a vacation, okay. Now, vacations are awesome. Vacations are great

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and there's a hell of a lot more to why travel is fucking awesome and amazing. So, I'm not even bashing it even little bit.

But what I am acknowledging is that we are in a season right now where some of that travel is deeply restricted. And so, we need to really take ownership of our own minds and almost recreate or take time and space to create mini-vacations in our brains where we give ourselves a break from feeling over-responsible and the stories that we're telling ourselves around that, and creating some positive self-talk on a daily basis.

So, we want to actually stay out of extreme highs and lows when it comes to stress. The ideal situation is that overall, we are managing our stress day to day, but it doesn't go extremely high or it doesn't go extremely low all the time, like a rollercoaster. That's what I'm trying to say.

Sometimes, we feel like we're on a stress rollercoaster where it's up, it's down, it's all around... right? What we really want is we want to mostly be able to fluctuate within the highs and lows, but we're not just overly consumed and overly stressed. And I can already hear your resistance popping up because you're like, "Stress does consume me and once that happens, there's no way out." Oh, my dear friend, there is, okay. So, let's unpack this a little bit.

So, much of our own stress is self-created in the stories we tell ourselves. So, when we think about it, we tell ourselves a story of, let's say, responsibility, "I am responsible for this. I am responsible for that. And there's no other solution other than me."

So, when you tell yourself a story like that, you are trapping yourself into a scenario. And that is going to cause an immediate stress response. Our brains and bodies don't like to be trapped. So, we need to keep options open and available at all times, right?

So, you might be the primary caregiver of your children and they might depend on you for a lot. But they are still human beings. And it totally

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depends on their age, so this is not a parenting thing. It's just an example. But can we delegate?

Can we get another adult human in the mix, helping you out if your children are young? Or if your kids are teenagers, can we delegate to them and get them to help out more? Like, taking some of the responsibility off of you and start sharing it with other people, okay.

This is also a boundary thing, but this isn't a boundaries episode. But for those of you who have worked with me on your boundaries, you probably know where I was going with that. You knew I was going to drop the B-word, boundaries. Owning what's yours and letting another person own what is theirs is actually a critically important stress management technique. And so, that's some of what I'm talking about here.

Like, we cannot be the savior to other people's lives. We have to have a reasonable idea of what our expectations are for ourselves and what they are for others. So, you want to be careful on the stories that you are telling yourselves, especially if it has a trapped theme.

So, that is why I'm using that example, okay. We don't want to get our brains trapped and stuck into thinking we have no options and no way out because it's just going to make stress all the more stressful, right? And we don't need that. We really, really don't.

And so, some of how we intervene on this is we have to first take a step back and notice, am I telling myself a story of over-responsibility? Am I telling myself a story of pressure and expectations? And if that is true, a great thing to do is just to start writing down, what is that story?

And then, in the second column, what you can do is reframe it that really meets reality a little bit more. And so, sometimes, when we see this stuff on paper, it helps us to separate from the emotions of the thing, because, when our emotions are driving us, it's harder to really see something for what it is. We get too lost in our own stories, right?

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And we're all guilty of this. This is human nature. This isn't a you thing. This is a human thing. And so, we have to call ourselves out. We have to put ourselves in check. We have to be like, is this actually reality or do I need to have a second look at this? do I need to reframe this a little bit differently?

And so, we want to pull out the story. Now, as you're pulling out the story in those columns, you also want to notice repetitive thoughts. So, perhaps some of your thoughts are pressure-filled and negative, you know. We need to take the time to reframe them and this, my dear lovely friends, is an active practice.

Your brain will not automatically think positive thoughts unless you've been engaging in this work for some time. Your brain can be taught and trained into anything. So, you want to really take the time. And that's why taking the time to write this down, or to put it on your mirror, put it in your phone – I even think it's cool when people set little alerts in their phone with just an affirmation – a neutral one, not a positive one – a neutral affirmation that shows up that is just factually based and just reminds you that you're okay, that you've got this.

And so, you can do little things like that for yourself to remind yourself, it's almost like self-coaching yourself in some ways, right? As long as it doesn't trigger you, okay. Keep your triggers in mind because a lot of times, you need help and support when triggers are involved. But if it's not a triggering thing, it's just a coaching and reminding thing, you can do little tricks and hacks like this.

So, for example, what do I mean? So, maybe you have a negative thought of, "I can't do this." Now, that doesn't sound negative right off the bat, but why don't you throw some emotions in there of feeling like a failure and feeling defeated? Then that sentence, all of a sudden, carries a lot of weight.

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And so, you would want to reframe that to something more neutral, which is, “I’ll do the best I can. I’ve got this.” And from there, you want to break it down into three tangible steps. What do I need to do to handle this? Do I need help? Do I need support? Do I need to learn something I don’t know? What are the next steps that I need to do to break this down?

Because let me tell you, my friends, things get big in our heads really, really fast. And once our emotion is attached to it, we have a huge stress response. We’re like sunk in negativity, and I don’t want that for you.

So, another example is, “Everything is going wrong.” Okay, so that statement, again, doesn’t sound terribly negative on the surface. But if you attach that with a failure wound or feeling emotions that are negative, it’s a demotivator. Like, if everything’s going wrong, you’re going to be stressed out and you’re going to feel powerless about things. There’s going to be a powerless emotional chain that follows and your action’s going to follow that.

Remember, we did this in an episode earlier, you know, thoughts, feelings, behaviors. It’s one big loop, okay. So, that’s why we’re taking the time to talk about this because it’s important to get your thoughts and your emotions in check so you can take appropriate action to lower your stress levels.

So, instead of everything is going wrong, you would really, it would be better to say something like, “I can handle this if I take one step at a time.” And so, as I talk about in other episodes, always take, like, these thoughts that show up for you that are negative, take them as information your internal world needs some kind of support. It’s getting overwhelmed and it needs you to pause and break it down. It needs you to pause and offer support.

So, another example – and this is going to be my last one – could be, like, an angry one that’s like, “I can’t believe I fucked this up again.” We’re really angry with ourselves when we do that and that takes us down a dark, dark

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pit. And so, we want to catch that thought before it has a chance to trigger all of your emotions and get the best of you.

And so, reframing that would be, “I’m human. We all make mistakes. I have the power to fix it.” And actually, I would take power out and I would just say, “I can fix it.” Which is true. You can fix it. You might need support. You may need to ask a question. You might need to read up on something before you can figure it out, but that is okay.

Mistakes are how we learn, we grow, we change. Mistakes are not a bad thing. Mistakes just mean that you’re missing information or you need some support. And who in the world doesn’t need help and support?

Again, these are human things. This is not a you thing. There’s no such thing as being perfect and good enough and having all of this shit together. We are constantly evolving and changing as humans and giving yourself permission to allow yourself to mentally and emotionally grow through mistakes is huge; huge, huge, huge.

So, don’t accuse yourself of being worthless because you make mistakes. We need to go, “Okay, not my best moment. I can fix this.” That’s how we need to start talking to ourselves. And then maybe we write it down or we talk to somebody that we trust and we get a game plan going.

We don’t want to just stew and sit in powerlessness for too long because it will just grow. So, we want to try to catch this early and try to do something different.

Now, the second part in all of this stress management stuff is you need to be able to find time and space to air out your emotions. So, we just talked about thoughts. Now we’re talking about emotions.

Because if you’ve been listening to me for a while, you know, I feel very strongly you do not deny your emotions. Emotions are information. Just like your thoughts are information, so are your emotions. And so, when we stuff

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our emotions or we bury them, they just come out later. And it's not cute. It's really not.

But the time all those emotions that you've been stuffing for the last 10 years comes out, it's not pretty. It usually comes out in outbursts or you have a breakdown at work or you scream at someone that didn't really deserve it. It's usually not cute. So, we want to stay ahead of that.

We want to make time and space and this is so important to stress management. You need to make time and space for your emotions. Things you can do is taking 10 minutes out to listen to soothing music. And everybody has a different idea of what is soothing to them.

Some people, it's listening to the cello. Some people, it's listening to ocean waves. Some people, it's listening to rain. Some people, it's listening to other kinds of music, you know what I mean. There's no rules on it, other than it needs to make your body calm the fuck down, right?

You need to feel chill when you're listening to it for 10 minutes. If it's amping you up, making you excited or, you know – that's not de-stressing. You have to remember, excitement triggers stress. Body doesn't know the difference, okay. And so, we need to take strategic time, like 10 minutes, to get your nervous system to calm down, right?

So, also, those emotions need somewhere to go. Exercise is so very much important. Extra bonus points if you can do it outside in the sun because the sun is very, very important for mental health. It's actually really, it's been recommended to get about 20 minutes of sunlight a day if you can, just because it helps you with vitamin D3 which is a precursor for serotonin levels. And that is why it's so good for mental health.

It's also nice to just be out in the fresh air and doing it that way. But if you can't, because I know every state has different laws and regulations right now, maybe you can do some workout videos in your home. Maybe you can do some different things with a friend.

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At this time I'm recording this, I think a lot of places have gyms that are closed, but I don't really know every state's regulations. So, anyways, take ownership of this for yourself. What can you do for physical activity to really channel out some of that stress, that anger, that angst, that anxiety and just kind of letting it out?

Another thing for channeling this out is you can do collage. So, art is really good, but collage, working with clay, painting, drawing, scribbling – and again, you don't have to be Picasso. It doesn't have to be, like, fucking straight-up gorgeous. It's just process art, you know. It's just channeling your emotions through color, through your senses, through feelings, through textures, right? Just letting that stuff out.

And lastly, another way to get emotional support is know who your safe people are. Who can you talk to when you are stressed out? Who can you vent to? Who can you get emotional support? Who can be there for you to offer help? Who feels safe?

Maybe even in this episode, kind of think and consider, like, who are those people? So, when you get in those stressed out moments, you know who you're calling, rather than calling the person who probably stresses you out, which is so interesting as humans.

A lot of times, we get stressed out and we make a phone call to a person who offers unsolicited advice that we don't really appreciate or like or feels aligned to us, and then we're even more stressed out, and so that just doesn't even work out. So, we want to think about things ahead of time.

Alright, my friends, I hope you found this episode helpful. You can definitely hit me up on Instagram if you want to share what your stress-reducing tactics have been for this week.

And always, if strong emotions came up for you in this episode such as overwhelm or you're just feeling like, "Oh my gosh, my stress is just too high," never feel shame or blame in reaching out for mental health support in your local state of residence.

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Most therapists are online right now, so it makes it really easy, which is so hilarious because I think the joke now is, like, car therapy is the thing. I can't tell you how many sessions I do when people are in their cars.

So, anyway, therapy can still be a reality for you, even if COVID is happening. So, don't use that as an excuse. Get the mental health support that you need.

And lastly, if you enjoyed today's episode, please leave a rating or a review on Apple Podcasts. It helps other people to find the podcast and get the support that they need. So, anyways, alright, my friends, 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](http://nicolesymcox.com).

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