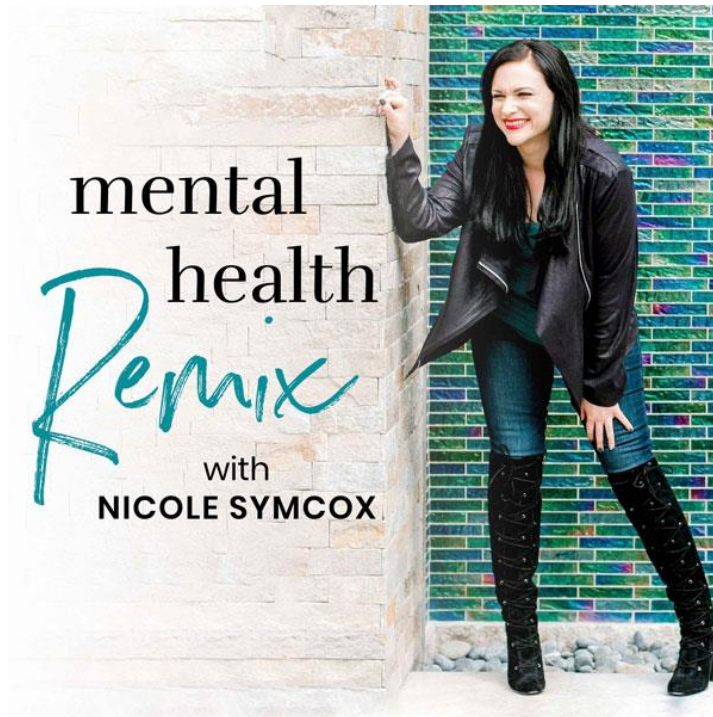


# Ep #45: How to Deal with Numbness



## Full Episode Transcript

With Your Host

**Nicole Symcox**

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## Ep #45: How to Deal with Numbness

Numbness is not a way of life, okay. I am fully, fully aware that my numbness is serving a purpose right now. It is serving a purpose, which means to keep myself and others safe from fire.

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.

Hello, my friends. Welcome to episode 45. So, 2020 has been a life. And we are in crisis, once again. So, many of you may have heard, in California right now, our entire state is on fire. And I don't mean that dramatically. I mean that quite fucking literally.

So, yeah, you know, California is known for wildfires. We have fire season, actually in the fall, where we're very used to, you know, horrific wildfires every single year. But let me tell you, friends, this one is on a whole new motherfucking level. Like, it is next level shit.

And it's just so overwhelming because in California, a lot of the crisis events, they really haven't let up. It's just been compounded and stacked on top of each other one after the other. And so, by the time these fires showed up, all of us were basically horrified at first because we're like, "Oh my god, our beautiful state is burning to the ground." All these beautiful places near the beach, Santa Cruz is one of the main places that is on fire.

There's fires everywhere. I'm not going to list them all, but they're on all sides. And so, we were just kind of like, "Oh my god, this is so horrific." So far, my experience has been waking up every morning to a blood-red sun, and I mean that literally, my friends. The sun has been blood-red every single morning and the sky has been this hazy dark smoke cloud.

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It honestly looks like we've been abducted and taken to Mars. It's somewhere between Mars and hell. There is some cross between the two. I saw some picture in San Francisco – and all this shit is near me – of a perfectly red sky and a double rainbow. But the rainbow was red.

It is weird. Like, the rainbow wasn't a rainbow. It was this red backdrop and just two, what looked like rainbows, but they were just different shades of red. It is weird. The air quality is horrific. Like, absolutely horrific.

And I think what makes this awful is because the fires are on all sides, there's nowhere for any of us to really go. We're all just kind of shuffling to different areas where the fire is not. So, we can't really get out of the poor air quality because there's nowhere really to go.

But a lot of people lost their houses this week and basically, if you're in imminent danger, you just move to a different city where the fire is not. It's not a full escape from it.

And so, it has felt like living in hell. I've never, in my life, experienced anything like this. And seeing how this got started is so bizarre. In California, we do get lightning, but not like that. Not like what we got.

We had an electrical storm that happened, and I think I read something like 12,000 lightning strikes hit the ground in Northern California and around California. And it's just unheard of.

Like, in one day, for us to have that level of lightning is just unheard of. And so, a lot of us don't even know what to make of that because, well, we're still in crisis. And so, that is what we're going to talk about today because I think it is a great illustration of what happens to us when we have to continuously survive life-threatening events and how we do that as humans.

Because even if you don't live in California and you're not struggling the way we are here, this is a great metaphor for what happens to us  
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emotionally throughout our lives. You know, if you grew up in a chaotic household, if you were in a toxic environment for a really long time where bad things were constantly happening.

You can use this metaphor for different places in your life. But I thought it was a great example to sort of illustrate for you how your emotions play out in the midst of constant crisis.

Because what I notice is sometimes, when people get into therapy, they are so hard on themselves. They're like, I can't believe I act this way, or I should have done better. And it's almost like we forget that we only have what we have to work with in the moment. We only know what we know in that moment.

And so, this is why therapists were always promoting grace and self-compassion. It's because you have to trust that when you are pushed up against the wire, when your life is threatened emotionally, physically, mentally, you are in survival. And when you are in survival, you are doing the best you know how to do to survive.

You're not thinking about all the existential shit. You're not really philosophical in those moments. When we are hit with life and death scenarios or what our bodies perceive to be life or death – and again, this can be mentally, emotionally, physically. Like, I think when I say life and death, you guys think about the situation I'm in, where your whole goddamn state's on fire.

Which is true. I mean, this is. But if you lived in a verbally abusive household, you're psyche felt threatened daily. If you lived in an emotionally abusive household or with an emotionally abusive spouse, partner, whoever, your emotions feel threatened daily.

So, this crosses over. So, it's not just physical. When we think life-threatening, we think literally body harm. And that is true. So, don't hear me

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wrong. That is true. But what I am adding to that is that this can play out for you emotionally and mentally as well.

And many people don't realize that and it's an important thing to realize because you can have severe PTSD from emotional abuse. You can have severe PTSD from verbal abuse. But it's so frustrating to heal from because you can't see the scars of that. Nobody can really see it.

And that is the biggest complaint I hear from clients and other people who have experienced that kind of abuse, you know, like I almost wish I had a bruise on my arm so people would believe how much this hurts.

And so, getting back to our example, you know, I want to validate for you that if you have lived through chronic life-threatening things, you have to have grace for yourself that you did the best you knew how to do at the time. And you need to also keep in mind that survival mechanisms are going to play a role in this. And defense mechanisms are going to show up too.

All of this, my friends, is designed to help you survive. So, let me use myself as an example right now talking about these fires. As I'm recording this, I feel incredibly numb. I am not in touch with my feelings right now.

I can't be in touch with my feelings right now because we have evacuation warnings. I have friends that have lost houses. I have people that need water. We are trying to accomplish some very tangible things just to make sure that we have safety. And so, my body went numb because there were way too many feelings happening at the same time and I couldn't process them in that moment.

But let me make something really, really clear. Numbness is not a way of life. I am fully, fully aware that my numbness is serving a purpose right now. It is serving a purpose which means to keep myself and others safe from fire, literal fire. And so, that is the role numbness is playing for me.

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So, I acknowledge that. But I'm also extremely aware, the second that the world feels semi-safe again or these fires are contained, I will have to deal with the horror, the anxiety, the overwhelm, the sadness, the great sadness of all we've lost in the last week and a half.

And so, that has to be dealt with. It is not a healthy way of life, to live in numbness, right? Numbness serves a purpose in that it's helping me survive right now.

And so, if you've been through life threatening events, kind of noticing, like, numbness shows up to help you when there's a lot of emotions happening and you don't have a safe space to really process them. It's there to be an aid, to be a support.

But the problem is, once you get into therapy, sometimes it becomes a block in processing your past emotions. And I notice that clients get really frustrated by this. They're like, "All I feel is numb. Every time I feel a feeling, I just go numb. I feel nothing at all." And so, that's all part of the trauma.

Sometimes, when we live in chronic states of trauma, like what I described earlier on in the episode, our defense mechanisms start to become a way of life because we need them all the time. And then, when we get out of the environment that is creating the need for all these defense mechanisms, we have to heal.

We have to heal all the pain, all of the overwhelm, all of the anxiety, all the sadness. But because numbness – I'm using numbness as an example, but it can be, there's a lot of defense mechanisms. It could be another one. We have to support the numbness piece that started to become a way of life.

Because numbness is a thing. While it's helpful in the moment, when you're dealing with overwhelming crisis like I am. But it's not a way of life because numbness gets in the way of emotional intimacy.

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The problem with defense mechanisms is that they are so effective at blocking out the bad, but they also block out the good. There is no discernment.

When you have your survival mechanisms kicked on, there is no discernment. It's not like, I want to have a deep emotionally connected conversation with my child, or I want to have a really good conversation with my husband. If you're numb, your numbness is marking everything as unsafe and it's not dealing with it.

And so, that's part of the therapy process. We want to have gratitude and compassion for that part that helped us survive. But we also want to invite supportive parts to help us heal from the overwhelming emotion.

So, think of numbness or whatever defense mechanism you created as a shield. It's a shield for you. And we're so grateful for that shield that helped us survive something because we're here today because we figured out a way to survive an impossible situation.

But in the healing process, you have to unpack all of this stuff. Like, numbness is not a good place to stay as a way of life because it robs you of happiness. But you need strategic support to do that. You can't just rip numbness off and then open up the floodgates of all these past traumatic events and trauma emotions. So, you want to do this with love and care with a mental health professional because it can get a little tricky, if you're going to revisit some of this stuff.

But in large part, I'm using numbness, but there's a lot of survival mechanisms. There's tons of them. And so, just kind of acknowledging in yourself when a shame story or a blame story starts coming up for you, try to meet it with a reality check of, you know what, I did the best I knew how to do in that moment, and now I'm committed to healing and growing and moving forward. And I'm going to embark on that journey because I am not trapped. I am not stuck.

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Even if it feels that way, those are feelings that have gone unprocessed. That's all that is. It's unprocessed emotions that are causing a lot of triggering symptoms. And so, it's a message to yourself that I need support in this area. And there is never shame or blame in that.

Like, if you've been listening to me for a while, when you really break down mental health, it's about hard experiences many times, you know. Sometimes, it's about our biology or our genes. But sometimes, it's about we have lived through horrific events. And of course, we need support processing that.

We need support getting to the other side of that. And so, as this is happening here in California, we're exhausted. We are so exhausted. And it's so scary to have your whole world, or what feels like your whole world when it's your entire state that's on fire. And so, providing help and support for yourself when you get out of the life-threatening event is where the healing can start.

Alright, my friends. I hope this episode was helpful for you in having compassion and grace for yourself. And also, take it as information. If you're living in chronic numbness or you feel like you're disassociating all the time – I know we didn't talk about the other defense mechanisms, but they all play a role – make sure you get mental health support. Because underneath that is a lot of unprocessed pain.

And there is never shame or blame in getting mental health support in your local state of residence. Processing pain is an okay thing to do when you have support. So, I highly encourage you to get support in your local state of residence if any part of this is triggering for you or maybe you're starting to notice that you're having too many feelings.

This can work on the other side where you're like, "Oh my gosh, my feelings are just out of control." That's also information that it's time for

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getting some mental health support in your local state of residence. It's probably the best thing you can do for yourself.

Alright, my friends. And if you enjoyed today's episode, please leave a rating and review on Apple Podcasts. It helps other people find the podcast and get this kind of information. 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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