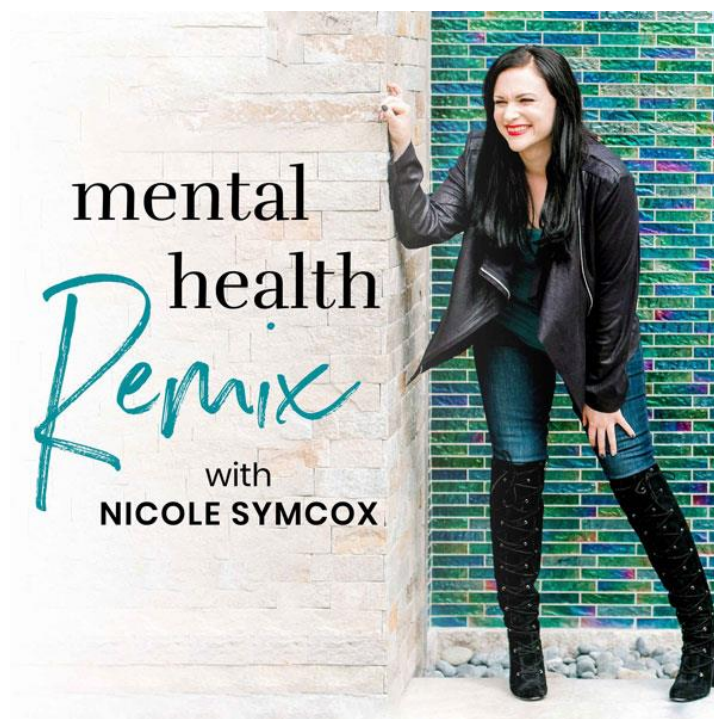


Ep #47: Dealing with Unresolved Trauma in a Crisis



Full Episode Transcript

With Your Host

Nicole Symcox

[Mental Health Remix](#) with Nicole Symcox

Ep #47: Dealing with Unresolved Trauma in a Crisis

You still have to unpack and process the deeper level of stuff if you have trauma. Because when symbolic events happen or actual events happen, they are going to trigger old memories. And once old memories are triggered, you start to feel a lot of negative symptoms because whatever is locked in that memory is going to start seeping out.

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 47. So, you may have heard, the fires are still raging here in California. And we were sort of thinking that, a couple of weeks ago, that was going to be the bottomed-out worst of it. We didn't even have the imagination for how much worse things could get.

And dear sweet mother nature says, "Oh, dear friend, wait. Let me show you what I can do." And the entire west coast is on fire. So, if you've looked at a fire map, you've probably seen the entire state of California is on fire and up through Oregon, and now my understanding is it's heading to Washington and it might already be in Washington. It depends on the timing of when you're listening to this.

I mean, there's actually not words for it. It's so beyond comprehension what's happening here. It's unlike anything we've ever experienced and like anything we've ever lived through.

There was a day last week where the sun didn't even come out. Like, you couldn't see it because we had just a thick sky that was brown and orange. And it had this weird nighttime effect on us. I don't know how to explain it.

[Mental Health Remix](#) with Nicole Symcox

Ep #47: Dealing with Unresolved Trauma in a Crisis

It's one of those things you have to live through and experience to fully get it.

But it wasn't like depression. It was like the sun didn't come out and, you know, every person I spoke to, we were all collaboratively like, we're having this weird feeling, like we should just be in bed sleeping. It was a very bizarre alternate reality vibe. And then, when you look outside and it looks like Mars, you feel like you're living in an alternate reality.

So, it's so wild to watch such a beautiful place that is normally filled with, you know, trees and blue skies and sun, to have all of that taken away over the last month and to basically be living in some, you know, sci-fi movie of orange, red, brown, black skies. The sky was black in some places, from what I understand. It's just beyond. It's absolutely beyond.

And so, what I noticed came up for people, and so I thought it would be helpful for this episode, because whether or not you're living in the hell-fire storm that we're living in, I want to always make sure I make these relatable for everyone.

So, one of the things that I noticed was, especially on the day where the sun didn't come out, kids, adults, very, very triggered on top of feeling like they wanted to sleep all day, it was beyond overwhelming. And it's a perfect example of how our human brains respond to something we don't know and we don't understand and we don't have a reference point for. So, those three things.

Because this happens to us, that kind of human response, that kind of human emotional response is not unique to living in your entire state being on fire. Like, that can translate into your life with any experience that feels new, scary, overwhelming, no reference point for it. The brain freaks out. And so, depending on your past experiences, will inform how much you freak out. So, what do I mean by that?

[Mental Health Remix](#) with Nicole Symcox

Ep #47: Dealing with Unresolved Trauma in a Crisis

As humans, we are made up of – we're just like one giant memory center. Our brains hold memories and our bodies hold memories. So, we are just one – we are made up of one collective experience. And as we go through life, our brain is always checking with past experiences to evaluate how safe we are in the present situation.

Now, if there's not a reference point for it, our go-to is to panic or have anxiety, if you're wired that way. Or you might have another kind of response. It might be more – you might freeze. It just depends on what your history is, your personality, your biology, your genes, all of that stuff.

But your brain is a giant processor. And we've talked about this before. And so, when it doesn't know how to categorize something, its immediate response is to have a stress response. And so, depending on your history and your mental health and your relationships and all the things you have going on, that will inform how far that stress response takes you.

And so, using the example of these fires, we didn't have a reference point for that. So, most of us freaked out. It was kind of like, "What in the actual fuck is this?" Little kids were freaking out. My practice is split between kids and adults and I had little kids that were just crying to me about the sky was really scary and I'm like, "I know, the sky is really scary." And kind of helping them and working through that.

But we're all having these responses. And I think there's a lot of things in 2020 that are happening that we haven't had reference points for, which is why our stress is so high and our anxiety is so high. Because we are learning how to navigate all these things as they continuously happen.

So, it's very, very important if you have trauma of any kind, that you are getting mental health support right now with a trauma-informed therapist. Not all therapists are created equal in terms of their education on trauma and PTSD. It's very important you work with someone who is skilled and equipped to help you when it comes to those two things. Because just

[Mental Health Remix](#) with Nicole Symcox

Ep #47: Dealing with Unresolved Trauma in a Crisis

sitting in a therapy office and just talking about your feelings does not resolve trauma.

Trauma lives in the body; trauma lives in memories. There's a lot of components to trauma that go beyond words. So, you have to work with someone who understands that and is trained in utilizing interventions and treatment protocols that actually support the healing process of trauma. And you all know, I'm EMDR certified, so, of course, I favor EMDR because that is my lived experience. And seeing clients get healthier and feel better, utilizing that modality. So, I am biased in that way because that's my training. That's my education. And that's my lived experience, working with clients with trauma and PTSD.

So, the reason I'm bringing this up so strongly is because what is happening for us in California, but it might be happening for you in a different way. So, take this as an example of what's happening in California and apply it in your own life because there might be something going on for you that feels like your whole world's on fire. It can be a giant metaphor.

But what this brought up for people is that it feels – there is a body sense of trapped. We are having a collective experience together of feeling like we are stuck in a place that is burning down. And that is a very frightening reality.

It's very frightening because it lights up all of your survival mechanisms because we are biologically wired, like, if there is fire, you need to get away from the fire. And so, it's very hard, when we're living in constant smoke, constant poor air quality. Like, the air quality on Friday this past week was like over 200. I mean, it's severely toxic to even feel like, you know, you can breathe.

And now we're hitting some of – we've talked about on other episodes Maslow's hierarchy of needs. So, all that existential shit of wanting to be my best self and all of that stuff, that's existential, like where we start really

[Mental Health Remix](#) with Nicole Symcox

Ep #47: Dealing with Unresolved Trauma in a Crisis

processing that. We've been bounced down on the pyramid to basic needs, which is we don't have clean air to breathe right now.

We don't feel safe living here because there are constant fire warnings. And so, this can translate – now, even though this is actual reality of what I'm living in right now, this translates over, you know, into other areas of life. There are times in our lives where it feels like we don't have options or we don't have even some of our basic needs being met. And so, it puts us in crisis mode and it freaks us out.

And so, what is happening right now is that collectively, we look at each other. I can't tell you how many conversations I have with people that are like, where do we go? What do we do? It feels like there's no way out.

And that is a perfect segue, like, if you've been listening to me for a while, trauma, PTSD, things that happen to you that make you feel like your life is threatened and there is no way out. And that can be translated, mentally, emotionally, physically. It doesn't have to be just this experience that I'm having where you feel physically threatened.

So, you can feel like your life is being threatened on many different levels as a human being and it can create PTSD. So, what I am noticing for people is, as the body is trying to process and the brain is trying to process, "Fuck, I feel trapped and there's no way out..." like, we can't go to Oregon. We can't go to Washington. There's really nowhere for us to go. Plus, we have COVID. So, anywhere we want to escape to, you still have to worry about all the COVID shit.

And so, it starts translating a negative story and a negative message. And for those of you who have traumatic memories that are unresolved or feelings of being trapped in your past, all of this is going to be lit up.

So, for my California friends especially, if you are with me in this and you are living through this, please make sure you are seeking out someone to

[Mental Health Remix](#) with Nicole Symcox

Ep #47: Dealing with Unresolved Trauma in a Crisis

work with to help you process through any of your past trauma. Because the body is going to look for a reference point. And if its last reference point is feeling trapped when you were a little kid because your dad was abusive or whatever, you're going to need to process all of that unresolved emotion to feel safer in your body again.

So, so many times, I think people are like, "I'm doing all my self-care. I'm doing all the things. I shouldn't have any negative feelings at all." But that's just not how it works. It's really important for us to do self-care activities because it keeps our stress levels manageable and it keeps our emotional reserves full.

So, self-care is incredibly important in that way. But that is what self-care does. You still have to unpack and process the deeper level of stuff if you have trauma. Because when symbolic events happen or actual events happen, they are going to trigger old memories. And once old memories are triggered, you start to feel a lot of negative symptoms because whatever's locked in that memory is going to start seeping out.

And you might notice you're more reactive or you're crying more or you're feeling unsafe or there might be a variety of reactions to you. And so, this is what I always tell people. You're not crazy.

Trauma just packs a wallop of emotions. And it's just a cry out from your nervous system to give it support and help. And that is why I'm being so strong in saying, now is the time to get mental health support if you need it. Because trauma does not resolve on its own. It just doesn't. Time doesn't work it out. It just needs strategic support to close that chapter of the story, so your brain stops referencing it as something that is scary.

I know that all sounds kind of funny, but for people that are in therapy or have done therapy, I know that that one made a little bit of sense. But if you haven't done therapy, that can sound really confusing. You're like, "I've lived with this my whole life. I can't even imagine the terror of that being

[Mental Health Remix](#) with Nicole Symcox

Ep #47: Dealing with Unresolved Trauma in a Crisis

closed.” But that’s kind of the power of EMDR and working with a skilled therapist. Now, it might take some time, but it’s worth it. Your mental health is worth it. You are worth it.

Anyways, I just want to call that out for people because I think I’m noticing, a lot of people went into crisis last week and felt very afraid and were very unclear as to why. Because they’re, like, “I don’t know why I feel so triggered over the sun not coming out.”

Like, sometimes, on the surface, it doesn’t make a lot of sense. We don’t really know why we’re reacting the way we’re reacting. But when you start to pull back the layers and you start to look at what’s underneath the hood, so to speak, it starts to make sense.

And so, I want you to start viewing this as, in some ways, a helpful thing. Like, when you get triggered, it is information. I don’t just say this shit at the end of every podcast for no reason. It’s really true. If you’re getting triggered or overwhelmed or having strong emotional responses, you need to take that as information that something in your internal world needs support. And there is not shame or blame in getting mental health support in your local state of residence to help you process and work through whatever is holding you back from feeling safe or being able to reach your goals or to lower your anxiety.

There’s nothing wrong with working on that stuff. It’s way worse to just sit on it and hope it gets better. Because a lot of the time, mental health issues don’t get better on their own. They need a new way of coping and dealing with life.

So, I want to call that out to you because I think, sometimes, when we get into crisis mode like this, we think, “I don’t have time to work on my mental health and do all that.” But you have to realize, when you’re working with the right person, giving you tools and skills and learning how to relate to yourself and others in healthy ways, that’s not going to get in your way.

[Mental Health Remix](#) with Nicole Symcox

Ep #47: Dealing with Unresolved Trauma in a Crisis

It's scary to you because you have an anxious brain. And I explained at the very beginning, like, anxiety brains are very resistant to anything new that they don't know how it's going to turn out. And that's just your anxiety speaking. And so, we acknowledge it, we hear it, and then we still make an educated decision that aligns with our goals and values.

So, at any rate, to my California people out there, I hope you're staying safe. I am sending nothing but good vibes your way. It's been a life here for sure. And again, if strong emotions came up for you in this and you're like, "Yeah, I'm feeling really overwhelmed..." because I want you to remember, even if you're not living in California, this is, again, a metaphor.

You might be in a relationship that feels like it's on fire. You might have a financial situation that feels like it's on fire. You might be feeling trapped and closed in by other aspects of your life and so this episode translates over to you too.

So, I just want to call that out, that I'm just using the fires as an example because I saw so many people get triggered and overwhelmed this week and if you're in that camp, I just want to call out that trauma is real and it shouldn't be taken lightly. And I want you to know you're not crazy. You're just not.

And so, there are ways to work with it. So, I'm sending you guys all, no matter where you are – I know California's literally on fire right now, but I know there's hard times everywhere. And so, I'm just sending you guys all out so much love and I am rooting for your success and I want you to do well.

So, if you enjoyed today's episode, make sure you give us a rating and review on Apple Podcasts. It helps other people find the podcast and makes this information more readily available for other humans out in the world who might be stressed and anxious, just like you. Alright, my friends, I will see you next time.

[Mental Health Remix](#) with Nicole Symcox

Ep #47: Dealing with Unresolved Trauma in a Crisis

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.

© 2020 Nicole Symcox, All rights reserved

[Mental Health Remix](https://nicolesymcox.com) with Nicole Symcox

© 2020 Nicole Symcox, All rights reserved