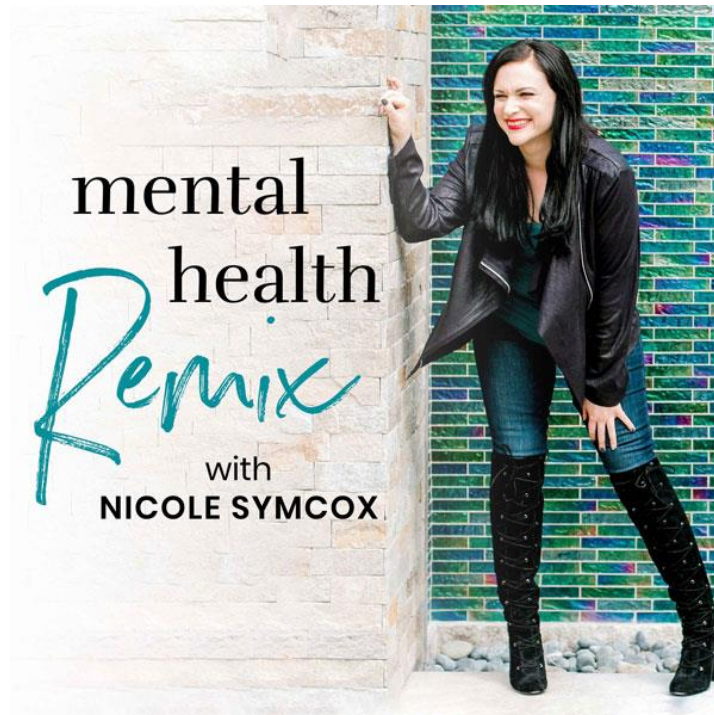


Ep #52: Why You Are Not Your Thoughts



Full Episode Transcript

With Your Host

Nicole Symcox

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Ep #52: Why You Are Not Your Thoughts

If you're hungry, if you have hormonal imbalances, all of these things are going to be impacting your thoughts. It's why you don't want to take your thoughts as fact. You want to take it as information that you need to offer yourself support in some way and you need to reframe something for yourself.

Just because the brain is going back in your past to pull up evidence of how things have never worked out for you, that doesn't actually mean that things will never work out for you.

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 52. So, today, I want to talk to you about how you are not your thoughts. I think this is something we so easily fall into. It's something we're all guilty of. We take our thoughts as facts when really, they're just passing by.

And so, I want to kind of break down for you how to look at thoughts, why they're just thoughts, and how to respond to them maybe differently than you have in the past.

So, I want you to think about the brain as this giant processor. It is a giant processing machine. It is taking in all of the present reality and it's fact-checking it with the past because the brain has reference points. And so, in these reference points, it's checking in on, like, what's currently happening and how did this turn out in the past.

And this gets really tricky. So, if you have PTSD or an anxiety disorder, every time your brain goes in the past, it may not find evidence that it really [Mental Health Remix](#) with Nicole Symcox

Ep #52: Why You Are Not Your Thoughts

likes. It could be negative. And so, it can be really easy and quick for a negative story to get started.

And then, all of a sudden, you feel like shit because, all of a sudden, today's present moment about your boss wanting to have a conversation with you isn't really emotionally any more about your boss wanting to talk to you. It's about how you used to be in trouble all the time as a little kid, so sometimes, we go into the present moment scenarios with a past mindset.

And so, even if you don't have PTSD, we're always processing all of the world. And your brain is scanning for safety at all times. Which is why it's jumping to the past. It wants to know, like, how did this turn out before? And that is why there's so much power in healing from your past because when you heal those painful reference points, your brain has nothing to freak out about anymore.

It kind of is able to mark the, quote unquote file of that in your brain as resolved, if you will. These are kind of metaphorical terms or whatnot, but I see this all the time with people that do EMDR. You know, once they go back in their history and heal from a painful story and they get the pain down to a zero, it's very transformative for them.

And they're kind of like, whoa, this thing that has been taking up all of this mental space is no longer there anymore taking up that space. So, that's a really simplified explanation on why there's so much power in healing from your past pain, especially with a modality like EMDR that has the ability to desensitize and reprocess the event for you.

So, at any rate, that's something you would have to seek out in your local state of residence. But I'm just letting you know because I don't think a lot of people even still know about EMDR. So, I think that's why I like to put it in as an option for people, so that they don't feel stuck or trapped in their thoughts and behaviors, especially if you have PTSD.

[Mental Health Remix](#) with Nicole Symcox

Ep #52: Why You Are Not Your Thoughts

But let's take a step beyond that. So, even if you don't have PTSD, let's say you're just doing life and sometimes you get caught up in the web of anxious thoughts. And so, you first need to acknowledge the anxiety. Thoughts are just thoughts.

So, going back to this idea of the brain is a giant processor. Your brain is processing so much that's happening. And sometimes, it rapid-fires thoughts. And sometimes they're not so great. We cannot take every single thought we have as fact because there are a lot of things that influence how and why we're thinking the way we are thinking.

Like, biologically for example, dopamine and serotonin directly impact our mood, directly impacts the quality of our thoughts. Hormonal imbalances directly impact our emotional responses to things and thus impacts our thoughts. Even being hungry. That can turn us into a really bad mood and, all of a sudden, we're having really negative thoughts about ourselves or negative thoughts about others or it can trigger rage or anger for no reason.

And you don't want to take these things as facts when something else might be going on. You might just need a cheese stick, you know. And a great way to illustrate this is, I work with parents all the time because my practice is split between seeing kids, teens, and adults. And a great way to illustrate this is so many moms tell me that their kids are really hard to handle when they're hungry.

And so, it's a great example because I think this happens for us as adults, but we don't pinpoint it as well. But it's easy for us to pinpoint it in kids. We're like, "Oh, well he or she was just super-hungry. I gave her a cheese stick and she was fine after that."

But it's a great example of how blood sugar, when our blood sugar drops, that creates a biological response. And sometimes anxiety is the result of that. Not always. But there are a fair amount of people in the world, when

[Mental Health Remix](#) with Nicole Symcox

Ep #52: Why You Are Not Your Thoughts

blood sugar drops, that you can kind of have an anxious or stress response in the body. Which is going to influence your thoughts.

So, going back to all these things, if you've got a bit of a chemical imbalance going on, that's going to impact your thoughts. If you've got PTSD, that's going to impact your thoughts. It's coming from your past experiences.

If you're hungry, if you have hormonal imbalances, all of these things are going to be impacting your thoughts. That's why you don't want to take your thoughts as fact. You want to take it as information that you need to offer yourself support in some way and you need to reframe something for yourself.

Just because the brain is going back in your past to pull of evidence of how things have never worked out for you, that doesn't actually mean that things will never work out for you. That's just the brain going back in time to a place that didn't feel good. So, that is where those thoughts are getting their information from.

And so, that's changeable because if you heal from the root issue, likely your thoughts will change with it. So, in other words, it ends up being kind of like this alert system. If our thoughts are constantly negative, we need to do something about that. We need to take active participation in our mental health and learn how to, either, A, support the root issue of what is going on inside of us that is creating all these negative thoughts.

And then B, on the surface level, we need to reframe things. We need to be active participants in choosing how we think of things. Because if we just fall into autopilot, if we just go into what our brain defaults to, that may not work in our favor.

So, if you've had a strong history of feeling like maybe things don't work out for you, if every time you jump into something new with the same

[Mental Health Remix](#) with Nicole Symcox

Ep #52: Why You Are Not Your Thoughts

expectation because of your history that, “Well, this isn’t going to work out for me,” it probably won’t because you are telling yourself a story that things don’t work out for me.

And your unconscious – and I know this is annoying to people that us therapists say this all the time, but your unconscious brain has an enormous amount of power over you. More than your conscious brain.

Our conscious brain, I think, is aware of 10% of what’s going on inside of us. There is this whole other layer of the unconscious. So, we need to be really, really careful in how we’re talking to ourselves and the stories that we are spinning in our mind and in our emotions.

So, this is why the first tip in this is you’ve got to acknowledge what’s coming up for you. And it might be the negative thought. It might be anxiety. It might be a physical response. Because if you’ve listened to me for a while, there is no separation between your mind, body, and emotions. Like, no separation between any of that because all of that impacts your relationship with yourself and it impacts your relationship with others.

This is why it’s important not to avoid yourself or to push or block emotions away. Because there is so much information on how to give yourself the right support so you can actually feel better. But it starts with acknowledgement.

So, you might notice, like, every time I try something new, I feel really depressed and I think I’m a failure before I’ve even begun. That is information for you that something needs support or something is unresolved and you want to figure that part out with your therapist or whatever and kind of get curious about that. Like, what is that all about?

The second thing is, of course, you want to reframe it. Like, if you’re having negative thoughts, it’s really important that you actively work through reframing negative thoughts into neutral ones. Do not reframe thoughts into

[Mental Health Remix](#) with Nicole Symcox

Ep #52: Why You Are Not Your Thoughts

positive ones. You will freak yourself out. This happens time and time again for the PTSD and the anxious brain.

And it seems counter-intuitive. We think that a negative and a positive equal good. Not always. Your brain needs neutral. So, we don't go from negative, meaning I have to do this perfectly – that's a negative thought because that's going to trigger an immense amount of pressure and anxiety in your body and your brain. Because being perfect is not something we, as humans, are capable of.

We try our best. We really, really strive for it. And it's a great thing to work towards. But one it starts negatively impacting your mental health, you need to take a step back and be like, "You know, this perfectionism thing is just not working for me anymore," right?

And so, instead of approaching life with this perfectionism mindset, you might reframe that to, "I do my best with integrity." That's kind of a neutral example. So, neutral thoughts really focus on your capabilities. They focus on what's true and what's factual.

So, you can't make some shit up about, like, I'm going to be queen someday and that's really true for me. You're probably not. So, don't do that kind of thing.

But we don't want to go from one extreme to the other. We want to strive for neutral at all times. And so, this is the power of constantly working on your thoughts. Because if you've listened to me for a while, your thoughts impact your emotions and your emotions impact your behavior and your behavior impacts your thoughts.

It does this triangle and it's the oldest concept in the CBT, cognitive behavioral therapy book. It's been around for decades. This is the oldest thing in the book and it's very true. It's very, very true. If you stop and really take a look at how all these things are intersecting with each other.

[Mental Health Remix](#) with Nicole Symcox

Ep #52: Why You Are Not Your Thoughts

But it usually starts with an emotion or a thought, right? And so, it's the meaning that we make behind that. So, we need to be really careful about the stories that we tell ourselves.

So, one way to work through this is, when you're feeling a lot of anxiety come up, in one of the previous episodes I did on grounding yourself through anxiety, I gave a technique called five, four, three, two, one.

So, when you're starting to feel anxious or you're starting to feel stressed, you have to address that first. Otherwise, it's going to be too hard to manage your thoughts. You're going to get stuck in an anxiety cycle. And so, trying to ground yourself back into the present moment and getting yourself grounded is the first step.

The second step is to acknowledge what is coming up for you. Is it an old thought? Is it an old story? Is it an old memory? And kind of think through, what do I need to do to support this part of myself that is upset or hurting?

And the third step is to be curious about that and do some trial and error on what might be supportive to yourself. There might be a part of you, if you're experiencing anxiety, that might be feeling scared. And so, one way to think about this is if a scared child came up to you, like a five-year-old came up to you scared about something, how would you respond to a five-year-old? Because we're usually nicer to children than we are to ourselves.

And sometimes, using that little trick can sometimes inform you on what do I need right now. Because a lot of times, as adults, what we do is we try to yell at ourselves or we're mean. And we're like, "Stop feeling that. Get going and pull yourself up by your bootstraps and move on. You're being annoying."

We talk to ourselves really negatively when really what we need is that nurturing supportive approach that we would give a child. We need to give that to ourselves.

[Mental Health Remix](#) with Nicole Symcox

Ep #52: Why You Are Not Your Thoughts

And then, of course, the last thing is taking action on what you need for that support. It might be as simple as reframing your thoughts. Or it might be as simple as making sure you create a better eating plan for yourself so that you are eating maybe five small meals a day so your blood sugar doesn't drop.

I don't know what it is because I don't know you specifically. But just think through, like, what is one supportive action you can take? Because stepping into condemnation, adding negative thought on top of negative thought is going to end up in a depressed mood, or it could. That's not a perfect science.

But likely, if you have negative thought after negative thought after negative thought, your anxiety is either going to increase or your depressive mood is going to increase. That doesn't lead to good places. So, you need to keep an eye on all of that stuff.

And journaling, of course, is a really great thing if you're really at a loss. Like, sometimes, our emotions are so big and they're informing our thoughts in ways that we don't understand that we need to take, like, 15 minutes of journaling and just process out that static feeling in our bodies, in our minds. And it doesn't have to make sense. It's not something you keep. It's just meant to get some of that energy out on paper and out of your body and away from you. So, you can throw it away afterwards if you want to.

So, anyways, my friends, I have developed the Mental Health Remix Club for this very reason, to help people work on their thoughts, their emotions, and their relationships. And I would highly encourage you, if this is an area that you want to get more tools in, you want to join a community and you really want to learn more on how to do this for yourself as an active practice every day, I would highly encourage you to check it out.

[Mental Health Remix](#) with Nicole Symcox

Ep #52: Why You Are Not Your Thoughts

It's at mentalhealthremix.com/club and right now, I'm doing introductory pricing because it is brand new. So, if you want to be a founding member, I highly recommend you check that out and you join us.

Alright, my friends. Lastly, if strong emotions came up for you while listening to this podcast, or any of the episodes, take it as information that something in your internal world needs support. There is never shame or blame in getting mental health support in your local state of residence. It is probably the best thing that you can do for yourself.

Alright, 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.

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