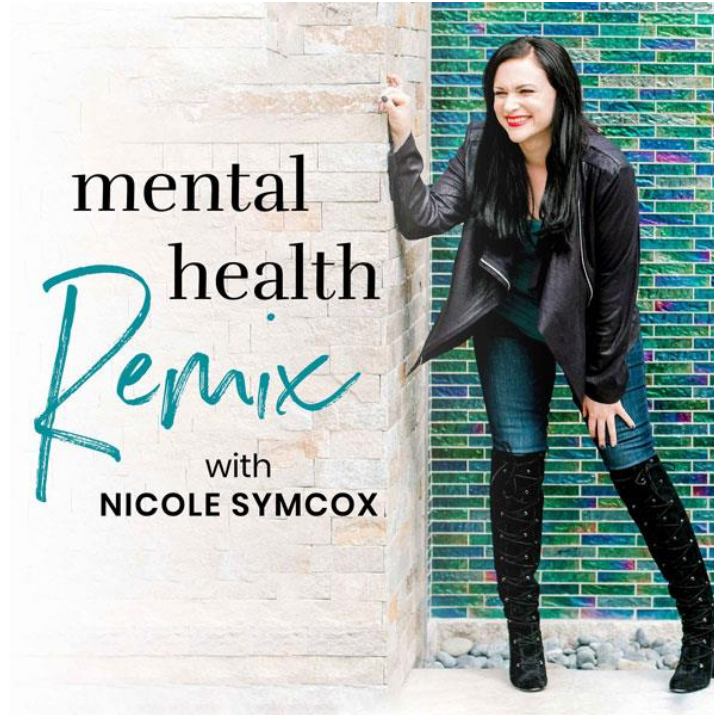


Ep #54: Protecting Your Mental and Emotional Energy This Holiday Season



Full Episode Transcript

With Your Host

Nicole Symcox

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So, crying is not bad. Crying makes you human. Crying is real and crying can sometimes give an opportunity to feel better.

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 54. So, the holidays are in full swing. So, I thought it would be good just to take a second to talk about grief. I think it's a sneaky emotion, it's a sneaky process that shows up for us at the holidays.

And the holidays are notorious for this. So, grief shows up at the holidays because there is so much symbolism around family, around togetherness. And with all of that positive messaging, it can trigger negative memories within ourselves that we may or may not be aware of.

And so, sometimes, grief can really catch us off guard and we're like, "Whoa, where did that come from?" You know. I was just watching a movie or I was just Christmas shopping or I just saw a commercial and it just triggered a sense of emotion in me, or anxiety, or sadness, or whatever that emotion may be. And I want to normalize that for you.

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Because I think, at the holidays, it happens anyways. And now, we're in 2020 and we're doing basically a pandemic version of the holidays and it adds an added layer of grief.

So, at the time I'm recording this, Thanksgiving has already passed, and we are headed straight into Christmas. And I know for a lot of us, Thanksgiving didn't look quite like it did last year. Or if you're someone that has family all over the country and nobody is just in one state, you may have experienced a virtual Thanksgiving.

And I think what is interesting about this virtual life that we are living is that you can feel really engaged in talking with people and being with people online, and then leave those interactions feeling really lonely. And this is something that I have heard all week from people who had to do some version of virtual is that there was a strong sense of grief and loneliness that followed those interactions.

Which I think for a lot of us is confusing because you're like, "Well, I was talking to people all day. It's not like I was forgotten. But at the same time, it doesn't feel the same." And I think there's a lot of truth to that because when we are together in each other's presence, it creates a sense of connection in a way that virtual cannot.

And so, if that happened for you, I just want to normalize it. I just really want to normalize some of the strong emotions that are coming up for people right now into this holiday season. And I know a lot of this greatly depends on the state that you're in and how severe the COVID cases are and how severe lockdown is for you where you currently are.

Of course, I'm in California where we tend to be more strict. So, I know for a lot of people in California, Thanksgiving definitely looked different this year. And I think a lot of people were sad about that.

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And so, just to break down for you, even beyond the pandemic, even beyond the fuckery of 2020, the holidays have an ability to bring up grief. And I want to normalize this for you because I think grief is an emotion humans are terrified of.

And the reason we're terrified of it is because it can sometimes feel like a never-ending pool of sadness or a never-ending pool of anxiety. We almost are afraid of it because we're afraid, if we touch it, we're going to get lost in it forever. And you won't get lost in it forever.

You have to remember that emotions are just part of the human experience that come up because they want support, guidance, and a new way of doing life. They don't show up just to torment you. And a lot of times, we have that viewpoint of, like, "This again?" or, "I have to sit with this feeling again?"

And I totally get that because if you've been engaging in the healing process for a long time, it can really feel like, "Oh fuck, this again?" Like, I totally get that. And again, that's normal. But also, when we address grief, when we address the root issues, we get an opportunity for a total change up.

We get an opportunity to heal, to grow, to learn, to change, to not have to revisit these emotions in the same intensity over and over and over again. So, that is part of the healing process. And if you've had trauma, that is the power of working with an EMDR clinician because we watch, in those sessions, we rate memories on a scale of one to 10 and we watch, in those sessions, the suds come down.

What that means is we watch the intensity of the emotion, of the memories come down in the session itself. So, that's why EMDR is a really powerful modality to work with someone in your local state of residence if you have any trauma. Because there can be traumatic grief.

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Because one of the biggest things around the holidays is around family. And so, if you have a background of any kind of relational trauma, the holidays can be hard, especially if you are still in relationship with any of those people that have wounded or hurt you. And a lot of us are.

And so, if you're still in relationship with them and you're seeing them at the holidays, it can bring up a lot of stuff. And so, one of the first things you're going to want to learn, of course, is boundaries. I feel like every holiday season that we go into, boundaries are the number one thing people become very aware of.

Because when you have a family member that's a manipulator or someone who is really critical or someone who disregards your needs or your voice, you have to learn how to utilize boundaries to protect your emotional and mental energy.

And so, I think a lot of people think boundaries are about changing other people, and it's really not. Any time we're trying to change another person, that puts us in an out of control position. The only thing we have full control over is ourselves.

So, boundaries are about taking back our own power and implementing what will protect our mental and emotional energy. So, I would invite you to try to implement and strategize how you want to use boundaries this holiday season so that you don't leave every family interaction wrecked.

And this is a really important learned skill, so please have grace for yourself in this process of implementing and creating boundaries. And, of course, if you want extra support, I teach an entire course on the what, why, and how of boundaries, like how to do this, how to stick to them.

And anybody who has ever learned how to do boundaries has always felt that a course like this to give you some tools and strategies is incredibly

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valuable. So, if that's something that feels supportive and good to you, I invite you to check it out at mentalhealthremix.com/boundaries. And you can get all the information there.

But beyond that, the other piece to surviving the grief around the holidays is you're going to have to acknowledge and make space for your emotional experience. And so, some of the grief that can come up is not having the parents that you wanted. Or maybe they're not emotionally available. Or no matter how many conversations you have with them, they still don't change.

And for us, in the healing process, it becomes very hard to kind of reconcile those two things; who we want our parents to be or who we want our siblings to be, or who we want our uncles or aunts, whoever the family member is, your primary caregiver, whatever that is, checking that out for you.

Because sometimes, that is a grief process, when you notice inside of yourself, "Wow, as a child, I had all of these needs. As an adult, I have all of these needs that my primary caregiver is unable to fulfill due to emotional limitations."

That is painful. It's really, really painful. And so, that triggers a grief response and we want to make space for that. And so, pouring that grief energy into something that feels healthy to you – so, sometimes we can do this through exercising. We can exercise while we think about how angry we are that we didn't get the parents that we needed or we don't have the parents that we needed or the siblings or the family life that we wanted.

I mean, this is kind of a broad but specific thing. But the holidays tend to bring up a lot of family grief. So, maybe it's not your extended family, but maybe it's even your immediate family. Maybe you're not in the marriage that you want to be in or maybe your kids aren't the way you were hoping

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they would be and you see these images of family dinners and people talking and you wish so badly you could have that, it's going to trigger a grief response.

And so, we want to meet ourselves with grace and compassion in those places and allow us to have emotion around it. When we bottle grief, it actually intensifies, and it morphs into other types of emotions that feel quite a bit more intense. And you're probably like, "What the fuck? Grief already feels intense. How could it get more intense?"

Oh, my dear friend, we are complicated humans and believe me, we find a way. So, it is better to deal with the root issue when the root issue comes up. And if COVID is particularly complicating this for you, it's good to verbalize that to a trusted support system. It is good to talk with someone. It's good to journal out those feelings.

You need to make space for your emotions to breathe and feel heard and validated and supported. So, you want to create this for yourself. So, you want to either find a supportive person that you can talk to, work on it in therapy.

I mean, my hope is that if you have trauma, that you are already working with a trauma informed therapist in your local state of residence, especially right now with just so much grief and triggers. My hope for you is you are getting the support you need. And if you're not, that you're taking some action steps to get the support you need.

And so, I want to go back to this idea though of things you can do if grief is coming up for you. So, you have to remember, we have to give space for it. So, of course, allowing yourself to cry. And surprisingly, so many people are resistant to crying. And I think it's because sometimes we have memories as kids where crying didn't really get us anywhere, so it feels kind of hopeless and useless.

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But when you're crying in a way that is designed to help you process grief, it's quite a bit different. And we need tears to sometimes just release stress. And I've talked about this before. There are some tears that are just stress related that our body needs to get out of our system. And the only way it knows how to do that is to cry. So, crying is not bad. Crying makes you human. Crying is real and crying can sometimes give an opportunity to feel better. So, there's that piece of it.

There's also, if you're artistic, if you're a creative brain, find a creative modality to pour some of that grief into, like pottery or painting or collage or drawing. It just really depends. I feel like the creative process is incredibly broad. And this was one of my specialties in grad school, was expressive arts therapy.

And I think when I did all of that training, I was blown away at how vast and wide the creative process is. Some of the things that I did was I trained in dance therapy. We did poetry. Basically using your creative brain, the sky is the limit. And that is so freeing if you're able to embrace that idea and just really channel that energy into something that feels good and supportive to you.

So, this can be movement. It can be words on paper, like with poetry. Or it can be creating something beautiful with paint. It's up to you. But we want to support our internal world and give space for our feelings to vent, to process through.

And, of course, journaling for 15 minutes a day is great, even if it's just venting, even if it's just non-coherent. It doesn't have to make sense. When it comes to therapy, to journaling, it doesn't have to make sense. It just has to be words and feelings on paper to get it out of your system and onto paper. You can throw it away afterwards. You can keep it if it feels insightful and important to you. But you get to decide.

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Now, my hope is that you're seeing a theme here. This is about you – regardless of what's going on around you – about you taking control of what's happening for you internally and channeling that energy into supportive measures so that you can feel better at a time where we're walking into lots and lots of grief.

Alright, my friends. I hope that all of these tips were helpful. And if you notice that strong emotions are coming up for you during this episode or any of the episodes you listen to, please take it as information that something in your internal world needs support. And 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.

And if you enjoyed today's episode and you never want to miss one, make sure you subscribe to my email list. It's on my website at nicolesymcox.com and we'll let you know every week when a new episode drops and what it's going to be on. 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.

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