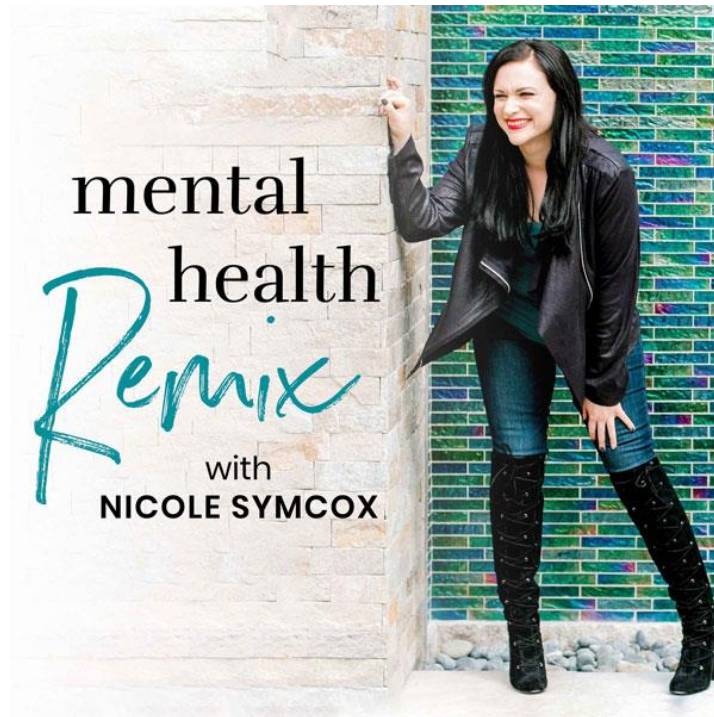


Ep #58: How to Support Others Through Anxiety



Full Episode Transcript

With Your Host

Nicole Symcox

[Mental Health Remix](#) with Nicole Symcox

Ep #58: How to Support Others Through Anxiety

We want to learn to just relate to people in healthy ways rather than pushing our opinion on them or making them see things the way we see things, okay. So sometimes I think when we offer support to someone, we can only offer it from our own vantage point. We can only offer it from our own little box, our own little box and brain that we operate in.

So our first go to as humans is to always offer the advice to someone of something that's worked for us. Like it seems to be human nature to do this. It's like when someone's like, "Oh, I'm just like really stressed out." Our inclination is to offer something that works for us. Well intentioned, but sometimes that can make the other person who's suffering feel like you maybe don't care about them or you're not hearing them. So they can feel maybe a little defensive around your advice.

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 58. So one of the top questions I get asked on the gram and pretty much anywhere is how do I support a friend or how do I support my kid who has anxiety? So I thought it would be cool to just do an episode on it and just talk about the different ways that you can support someone in your life if they have anxiety. Because I think when we have people in our lives that have anxiety, we get really worried about them. We want to help, and sometimes in the midst of our best intentions, sometimes we don't have the best impact.

So today's episode we want to kind of just clear the way so that you can have a better impact on someone who's really going through it. Because when it comes to anxiety, a person's body and brain is incredibly stressed out. They're on high alert for sometimes it seems like it's for no reason, and then other times it seems like it's for exaggerated reasons.

[Mental Health Remix](#) with Nicole Symcox

Ep #58: How to Support Others Through Anxiety

The thing you need to know about someone who's dealing with anxiety is they don't want to be this way. Like they don't want to feel all this anxiety. They don't want to feel this tension. They don't want to be this stressed out. Okay. So if they could calm down, they absolutely would. But it becomes really difficult especially if they have an anxiety disorder of some kind.

So I've mentioned this in other episodes that anxiety disorders, it's a very broad umbrella because we have generalized anxiety disorder and then it breaks off into there's just other disorders. Like OCD is an anxiety disorder. There's panic disorder. There's all kinds of them. So if someone's wrestling with a specific disorder, it can become even harder to feel like you can reach them or break through to them or really support them, right. It almost can feel like no matter what kind of support you offer for them, it's not good enough, or it's not working.

So that's really just a story, right? That disorder just feels so big. It probably feels big to the person, and it can feel big to you. You probably both in your relationship together are like, "Whoa, we're dealing with something that is way bigger than us, and we both feel helpless."

The person with anxiety is probably like I don't know how to help myself. The person who's trying to support is like I don't know how to support you because I'm giving you my best advice, and you're not taking it. So it can create tension in relationships, right.

So we want to be really kind and empathetic to people that are really going through it. Because even if you don't have an anxiety disorder necessarily, you might just be wrestling with anxiety on a daily basis, or you just might be more anxious and stressed out. Maybe you haven't gotten help yet. So you're not sure what's going on with you, right.

So it doesn't have to necessarily be a disorder, but we want to learn to just relate to people in healthy ways rather than pushing our opinion on them or making them see things the way we see things, okay. So sometimes I think when we offer support to someone, we can only offer it from our own

[Mental Health Remix](#) with Nicole Symcox

Ep #58: How to Support Others Through Anxiety

vantage point. We can only offer it from our own little box, our own little box and brain that we operate in.

So our first go to as humans is to always offer the advice to someone of something that's worked for us. Like it seems to be human nature to do this. It's like when someone's like, "Oh, I'm just like really stressed out." Our inclination is to offer something that works for us. Well intentioned, but sometimes that can make the other person who's suffering feel like you maybe don't care about them or you're not hearing them. So they can feel maybe a little defensive around your advice.

Some of this has to do with that anxiety is unique to each person. So what might work for one human may not work for the next human. Like treating anxiety has many, many different avenues, many, many, many different treatment options. This is why. It's because what works for one person may not work for another person.

This is why when you work with an individual therapist, your support is so unique and individualized because you can choose a therapist who works a certain way with anxiety to get the specific help you need, but then they also tailor it to who you are as a person and your life experiences and the way your brain works. Okay? So this is the value of finding a good therapist and finding good, individualized help. Because then you can find what works for you.

Because you might get annoyed. Or if you are the person wrestling with anxiety right now, you might get annoyed with the fact that like, "I don't know. My mom gives me like great advice. I just can't follow any of it. My brain just doesn't like it." So that makes sense. What works for your mom may not work for you, and that's okay. Doesn't mean either of you are wrong. Nobody's wrong. There's no right or wrong. It's just discovery.

It's just information we're just finding out. Like, "Okay, I notice my mom offers me some great advice. I really appreciate her intentions. However, it's not really helpful to me because my anxiety doesn't work that way. Or

[Mental Health Remix](#) with Nicole Symcox

Ep #58: How to Support Others Through Anxiety

that particular advice doesn't really land for me.” Those are ways that you can communicate to people who are offering your support, and it doesn't really feel good is you can like totally steal those scripts that I just said, and just use that.

Because that's really a way to communicate with someone like thanks so much for trying to help me out. It's just not landing for me right now. So I think I need to look for something else that might be supportive, but I really appreciate you taking the time to talk with me. We can communicate with people in ways that don't have to be combative, right.

So one of the things to keep in mind when you know someone is dealing with anxiety is they can, a lot of times, feel like they are just drowning in feelings. Because anxiety is a mind body situation. Most people with anxiety have some kind of tension or some kind of body sensations that are driving this feeling of anxiety or panic, right? It's very common to feel those things in your shoulders, your stomach, your chest. Those are very common areas that people with anxiety feel. It's very common for people to have digestive issues when they're having anxiety and things like that.

So one of the best things you can do when you're supporting someone with anxiety is just to lead with empathy. It's so interesting because you're gonna be like, “Well, okay Nicole. That's boring. I thought you're gonna give us a mind blowing advice here.”

Empathy is mind blowing advice, okay, because people suck at it. People suck at empathy. So it is mind blowing advice because if everybody did this well, I wouldn't have to do a podcast episode on it. Right? Like if people did this well in their daily lives, I wouldn't have to talk about it. But I do have to talk about it because people don't do it well.

So what ends up happening is like we say we have a problem, and then people want to fix it or they want to tell you their experience with it. Now, again, sometimes that can be helpful. But I think when you're really, really hurting, and in the moment, you're feeling pressure in your chest. Maybe

[Mental Health Remix](#) with Nicole Symcox

Ep #58: How to Support Others Through Anxiety

your palms are sweating. I forgot to mention that. Like sweating is a thing that can come up when you have a lot of anxiety. Or feeling really cold, that can be something that comes up and you have anxiety.

So let's just picture this anxious brain, super overwhelmed in the moment. It's looking for a way to turn off its anxiety. It's looking for a way to calm down or to feel differently, right? It's looking for a new way to feel, but it doesn't know how to do that. So it gets louder and louder and louder before the person just explodes. Right? We're in panic attack or we're angry or whatever the situation might be.

But usually anxiety builds. Like it can anyways. Again, I'm speaking very broad about anxiety because this is the podcast episode. It's not like I'm talking about someone specific. So very, very broad. But if you picture this brain that is drowning in emotion, and now there's negative thoughts and negative feelings. Like, "Oh, like, why can't I calm down? Oh my God, I'm so weak. Like, what is wrong with me?" All these negative thoughts are going on in this brain. Like they are drowning.

Now, if you picture a drowning person, you want to help them get out. You don't want to help them with a story. So we want to kind of approach people in their pain and meet them where they are first. Which is leading with empathy. I see you are really hurting. Thank you for sharing with me how you feel. I'm here with you. I'm with you. Tell me more about what's going on. Just letting them talk. Leading with empathy, okay?

Because chances are the reason you want to give such great advice is because you were already feeling empathetic towards them. So what I'm saying is empathy is key, okay? When people are struggling with anxiety, telling them to calm down or just to breathe can feel really dismissive. Like I said before, if an anxious person could calm down, they totally would. No one likes to feel flooded with anxiety. It is an absolute terrible feeling.

So instead of going into fix it mode, you want to go into empathetic mode. I see you're struggling with anxiety, and I want you to know I'm here with you

[Mental Health Remix](#) with Nicole Symcox

Ep #58: How to Support Others Through Anxiety

until this feeling comes down. Or you can say something like, I just want you to know I'm here with you. You don't even have to say the last part, okay? Or you can say something like, I'm sorry anxiety's telling you a scary story. I'm here if you need me if the person is being more dismissive.

So when you lead with empathy, it communicates love and support. Just being a loving presence. Just being a calming energy around this person can be really, really helpful. Because it helps guide them to calming themselves down. You can't take away their anxiety, as much as so many of us sometimes wish we could just like take someone's struggle from them so they don't have that struggle anymore. Bless your heart for thinking that way, but it just doesn't work that way.

So we want to help someone be able to get in touch with their own internal resources, right. If you know skills or tools that they're using that do work, I think you can ask them with empathy. Can I offer a suggestion? If they say yes, then maybe you can offer a suggestion that you know works for them. Maybe there's a coping tool or strategy that they've told you works for them when they're feeling anxious or whatever. That's when you can offer some kind of support. Or maybe they want advice from you.

So when you say, can I offer a suggestion? You know it's a very gentle way to invite a conversation with somebody. Then you can offer feedback or a story or like, well you know what really works for me when I'm feeling anxious is this. But you've gotten that person's permission.

So that way it feels less like you're telling them what to do, and it feels more relational. It feels more like a conversation because they might say no. They're like no, I can't handle advice right now. Which often happens with anxious brains. They're like no, no, no. I'm on overload. Like, I can't hear a story right now. Okay.

So that way the person with anxiety doesn't feel pressure to not feel anxious, right? Which is impossible. Like the worst thing ever is when

[Mental Health Remix](#) with Nicole Symcox

Ep #58: How to Support Others Through Anxiety

you're anxious and to just be told not to feel anxious. Like it just doesn't work.

So you've got to think of anxiety as like a tidal wave, right? It's coming. It's going to happen, and it builds and builds and crashes until it waves over. So we have to train ourselves to ride anxiety waves. Not to fight them, not to fix them. It makes it so much worse when we fight anxiety. If you fight anxiety, it will fight back. When it fights back, it's usually fighting back in bigger symptoms. We have to learn to ride the wave of anxiety and get to the other side to the shore. I know that's cheesy, but it's true.

So it goes into this bigger idea that feelings can't be fixed. Like feelings just are. We learn to emotionally attune to our own feelings. We become better at knowing how to offer ourselves support. Like what do I need in this moment? What is triggering my anxiety? What is happening for me? Is anxiety telling me a scary story? Does that story have evidence to support itself? Or can I offer myself a new story? Like this is kind of how we learn to talk to ourselves differently when we're managing anxiety.

Another thing to keep in mind is to listen with love and concern. People with anxiety tend to feel misunderstood. When you step in and offer a listening ear without judgment, it does so much for an anxious brain, okay? It feels like you as the person are doing nothing, but many times anxious brains just need to talk it out and feel heard and validated. So this is where we step in. We're not fighting it. We're not fixing it. We're stepping in with love, empathy, and concern. Okay.

If you've tried this, you've probably noticed like people's defenses come down, and they end up being more receptive to you, right. But if you've tried this, and they feel worse, it's probably a sign that they need to see their therapist or they might need to see a doctor about medication or something like that.

Not because they can't hear you, but because it might be that they're feeling like their anxiety is just so big and out of control that it's just feeling

[Mental Health Remix](#) with Nicole Symcox

Ep #58: How to Support Others Through Anxiety

too big for them. So when people start to communicate my anxiety just feels too big for me, that's where we want to step in and seek out therapy or talk to a doctor or something like that.

So lastly, don't assume that you know what's happening for them. Even if you struggle with anxiety and you think you have insight into helping them feel better based on your own experience, you could be wrong. So don't push solutions that work for you on to another person. Anxiety is unique to each person in how it manifests and what's needed to support to feel better. It's not a one size fits all approach. What works for you may not work for another person. So I want you to keep an open mind that another person's anxiety journey is very different.

That's a supportive step to even acknowledging that. You can even communicate it that way. Like hey I don't know if this hits for you, but like this is what I do for my anxiety when I'm getting stressed out. But if that doesn't work for you, that's totally fine. I just wanted to offer a suggestion. Okay. But we don't want to push suggestions of like, "Oh shit. You're like out of control right now. Do what I do." Like, we don't want to take that approach. I think sometimes we take that approach without realizing it. So we want to just be really careful.

So I also just want to like really bring it home. Don't underestimate the power of empathy. Especially if you're actually a parent of teenagers. Empathy is your number one resource for supporting a teen. Like the number one thing teens say is like, "I don't feel like my parents listen to me. I don't feel like they empathize with what I'm going through." Right? Because as a parent, we want to go into fix it mode. That makes so much sense. We've been fixing things for them their whole life. So why wouldn't we want to fix this?

So taking a little bit of a step back with your teenager and just hearing them out and listening to them with empathy can be a really big step in creating love and trust in your relationship, right? That they feel like that they can tell you things without you getting overwhelmed or having a big response to it.

[Mental Health Remix](#) with Nicole Symcox

Ep #58: How to Support Others Through Anxiety

That you're just going to meet them and empathy. Sometimes that can really help to build a bridge of communication between you guys.

Lastly, if all of this resonated with you today, and you're like, "Dude, my anxiety is out of control." Or if you know someone who's anxiety is feeling out of control, I wrote a workbook. It's called Anxiety Remix. It is 75 pages of coping skills and strategies on how to think and how to adjust your emotions and just coping skills that you can use right in the moment.

So if you're feeling like you just need a starting place or you just want a workbook that has available tools that you can use in the moment. Like oh my gosh, I'm having anxiety. What is one of the tools that I can use? You can just open your workbook and like find one. So anyways, super valuable. I want to offer that to you. It's on the front page of my website at nicolesymcox.com. I look forward to seeing you guys 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.

© 2012 Nicole Symcox, All rights reserved.