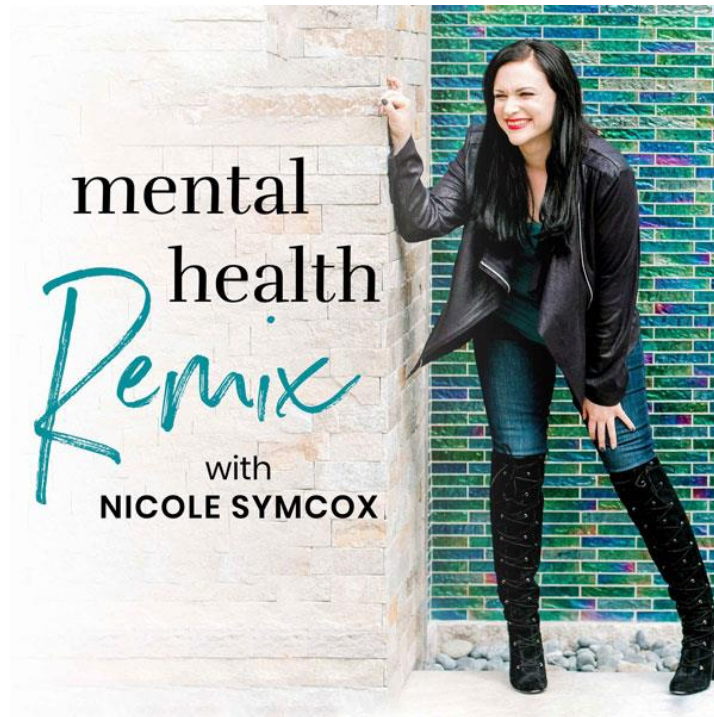


Ep #64: Understanding and Healing Trauma



Full Episode Transcript

With Your Host

Nicole Symcox

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I think it's one of the harder disorders. It's very, very painful to recover from because you have a part of you that knows that the event is over. That it's no longer happening. But you have another part of you that does not believe that. So reconciling those two parts can be really, really painful in therapy.

You absolutely, you've heard me say it a million times, you need to see a trauma informed therapist if you have any kind of trauma, PTSD. You need to see someone who knows how to work with that because there's only certain therapies that are really proven to be effective for that. So my bias and my favorites are, of course, EMDR, brain spotting, IFS, art therapy. Those kinds of therapies are usually very effective for people with trauma. So you want to seek out a therapist that knows what they're doing with one of those modalities.

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 64. So I have to tell you this week was super interesting because a lot of kids and teens are getting out of school this week. For the first time ever, there was like no excitement for summer, which I thought was fascinating. In 10 years of working with kids and teens did I ever think we would hit a summer where they did not feel excited about it. It's just so interesting. It's like here we go. The pandemic trauma keeps on giving.

So I know things are different in different parts of the country. But for us in the Bay Area, we were very, very shut down for like 18 months. So it's very interesting to see the repercussions of that. The reason kids and teens aren't excited about getting out of school is they're afraid they're not going to go back or that something's gonna happen or they're gonna get trapped at home again for a long period of time.

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So I found that to be really, really fascinating that even though that things are completely opened up, we have no indicators, right now anyways. I mean that can always change. But we have no indicators right now of being locked down or schools not being open for the fall. But yet there's this huge fear response coming up of like what if I have to go back to online learning and I can't go to school and see my friends and get a break from my family? There's just this huge fear response.

So I just think it's interesting because we all know the pandemic has created a huge mental health crisis. Even though it's really not talked about as much as it should be because it is quite a thing. So I just think that this is just another example of how the pandemic has really impacted our kids and how they feel and how they see the world right now.

So I thought it might be interesting just to talk a little bit about trauma in general. About how it works and how it shows up just because I was just kind of like okay. This is where we're at. Very interesting. So, trauma is very interesting like that. So even if your present day has no indicators of being unsafe, you could still feel unsafe or uncertain about your future, about the present, whatnot. So I want to normalize this for you.

Like if you have PTSD or you're recovering from traumatic events, it can be really hard to feel safe and secure in your body. Like it can be really, really difficult to just feel like a healthy, happy person when you have all of these triggers that are going off inside of your brain and body all the time telling you like I'm afraid or I'm not safe or reminding you with flashbacks of memories and telling you past stories of when you weren't safe. So your body and brain feels unresolved.

So it keeps coming up because it wants to be healthy and it wants to resolve. But in the in between of that it can feel really, really overwhelming. So we're taking a huge sidestep from like talking about the pandemic, and we're just talking about trauma and PTSD in general.

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So I think it's one of the harder disorders. It's very, very painful to recover from because you have a part of you that knows that the event is over. That it's no longer happening. But you have another part of you that does not believe that. So reconciling those two parts can be really, really painful in therapy.

You absolutely, you've heard me say it a million times, you need to see a trauma informed therapist if you have any kind of trauma, PTSD. You need to see someone who knows how to work with that because there's only certain therapies that are really proven to be effective for that. So my bias and my favorites are, of course, EMDR, brain spotting, IFS, art therapy. Those kinds of therapies are usually very effective for people with trauma. So you want to seek out a therapist that knows what they're doing with one of those modalities.

So I want to encourage you today. If you are in the healing process of trauma, keep going. Just keep going. What you're doing is hard. It's not easy. I want to validate that for you. Like it's not easy. It's very hard to live in two realities. One that is in the past, and one that is in the present.

So your self-talk when you're dealing with trauma or you're dealing with PTSD is really, really important. It's important that when you notice you're getting triggered, you learn how to ground yourself. That you learn how to show up for yourself in a way that helps you to feel safe in the moment until you're in therapy, doing things that help regulate your nervous system like yoga, walking, doing physical activity, or doing art projects, things like that. Things that give you an outlet for all of these emotions that are coming out.

But it is a very complicated process. So if you're in it, it's important that you have grace for yourself. That your body's trying to heal, your nervous system is trying to heal from a story where it felt stuck and afraid like it had no way out. So we want to support ourselves in the best way possible. So a lot of that looks like catching ourselves, noticing when we're in an old story or in an old narrative, and trying to reframe it, and being in the present moment, right.

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So the other painful thing I think about trauma is that a lot of people don't understand it. So you tend to be surrounded by people that can be unhelpful with their advice, or maybe they don't give a lot of empathy. They're like oh, my gosh. Just get over it. It was 100 years ago. That's probably the most invalidating thing you can say to a person with trauma or PTSD. Like that's not the issue. Like if a person could not feel those feelings, they would, right?

So dealing with other people, you have to just kind of keep yourself safe from people that are unsafe or are not going to offer you the kind of support that you need. So there are safe people and there are unsafe people, right. Unsafe people are not going to be validating your experience or being empathetic. They're not going to be someone that you can confide in and feel like you have confidence in that without them telling a bunch of people. Like stuff like that it's not cool, right. It's not a safe friend to be telling your deepest, darkest trauma to.

So one of the things for trauma survivors is like to find your safe people. Don't just assume everybody's going to get it and everyone's going to be kind to you because they won't, right. Like not everybody has that capacity.

So it becomes really important that you become protective of yourself and who you share your stories with and who you share your pain with. Because not everyone's able to empathize with it. So picking out maybe like one or two friends that you have that are available for deep conversations or available for safe conversations outside of your therapist are really, really important.

But a lot of times with trauma, we end up telling everybody and we're not protective of ourselves. Then we get bad advice that ends up either hurting us or maybe we feel re-traumatized by it. There's a big spectrum on like the emotions of that, right. So the name of the game is not to trust everybody with your trauma, but to trust a select few. Have an inner circle, have a support team of people supporting you, loving you, rooting for you, wanting

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you to succeed, and keep them close to you while you're healing or share things that are going on with you with them.

But not everybody is entitled to know what's going on with your healing process. I think the world sometimes puts expectations like they want to know, but then like what are they doing with that information to help you, right? So you want to tell people that are going to be supportive. You want to reach out for help, for people that can help you because you don't want to heal from trauma alone.

Healing from trauma alone usually only exacerbates the pain. So you want to have a community of some kind or a support group. If you don't have friends that feel safe, there's plenty of support groups out there. You can ask your therapist about it if they have any referrals to that, but that can be really, really helpful. But we don't want to heal in shame and isolation. Like you want to do it with people when you feel ready.

Now there's different ebbs and flows to trauma healing. Like sometimes there is a part where you feel like you kind of have to do it alone until you get to the next step where you can deal with other people's feelings and emotions. That's totally normal and totally fine. But what I'm saying is let's be careful on who we share our stories with. That's kind of the bottom line of I'm saying. Pick and choose who you want in your life while you're healing from traumatic events.

So it's also very normal with trauma for your sleep to be super disrupted. So I think that can create a vicious cycle, right? Like we have a really hard time sleeping then we have a hard time throughout the day. We're more irritable, and we don't have all of our bandwidth together.

So when it comes to healing from trauma, it's like self-care becomes so much more important. We have to nourish ourselves as much as possible, doing things that feel good for ourselves. So a lot of times finding things that really nourish you is super, super important. So you've heard me say it on other podcasts, but if you're healing from trauma it becomes really

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important. Because learning to regulate your nervous system is really important.

Because when you have trauma, you tend to get stuck in fight, flight, freeze fawn, right? You get stuck in in some of them, and your body is so on edge. That kicks up cortisol. It kicks on your survival mechanisms, and it's exhausting. So when we're not in those states, we want to be trying to do things that are good for ourselves that turn on our parasympathetic nervous system, which is the part of ourselves that goes into a relaxed mode, if we can, which is really, really hard. It's very, very hard for trauma survivors to relax because they have hyper vigilance.

So hyper vigilance is basically like a helicopter. It's always circling for danger. It very rarely lets you rest or sleep. That can be one of the most frustrating, difficult parts of healing from trauma is this hyper vigilance kind of doesn't let you rest. You crave rest, but you're not able to because you're constantly circling for the next dangerous thing.

So this is why I want to encourage you that when you are capable, and I know that it's difficult because you're not capable. You probably feel like you're not capable of calming down or doing nice things for yourself very often. So when you take small windows of time to nourish yourself, you can expand on those windows and make them bigger.

So the other thing I want to say about trauma that I find interesting is that I think we need to drop the stigma that trauma was only for war vets and big things. There is a huge spectrum on trauma. Trauma is defined by the person. If it was traumatic to you then it was traumatic to you. You don't have to have like some qualifying event to make it trauma. A lot of people know if I felt like my life was threatened or I had no way out or I felt trapped. It's your perception that makes it traumatic or not. So you get to like own your own story around that.

So you can have trauma. There's big T and there's little T's. I've talked about this before in other episodes. Big T traumas are considered like big

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life events. So you think about like car accidents, those kinds of things. Little T's tend to be like being constantly criticized at a low level, but it's happening every single day. So what happens is those little T's end up building up over time, and they become a big T. So now we have to heal from this huge chronic event.

Chronic trauma is very complicated and very, very painful. So if that's something you've experienced, I want to validate that for you. That you deserve healing. I hear this all the time that people are like, "Oh, it wasn't that bad. It was just whatever." They're like dismissing it. They're like, "It's not like I was raped, or it's not like I was in a car accident." Or whatever. They dismiss their feelings.

You know what? Healing is available to all. There's no qualifier. Like someone who has been in a car accident and was traumatized by that should get help. But someone who was criticized every single day should also get help. We don't need to compare ourselves and decide like oh well, they were so much worse than me. Or I was so much better than them. Whatever. It doesn't matter. It doesn't matter.

Like your life experience is what matters. You need to take ownership of that and get the healing that you need for your story. It doesn't matter what someone else's story is, right. Like we're all individually needing to heal from our own stuff. So there's no comparison. Right? Like that's not a good mindset.

So sometimes we hear that a lot. They're like well, it wasn't as bad as somebody else. Comparing ourselves to others, it doesn't help that person heal, and it doesn't help us heal. Like it does nothing. It does absolutely nothing. So owning your own experience means you know what? I was criticized every day, and that fucking sucked. Now I have a hard time in relationships or whatever it might be, right. Whatever the implication in your life, however that's showing up for you.

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So you want to consider you know what? I don't want to feel like this anymore. I don't want to relive the same damn story all the time. I want healing. So I'm going to take ownership of that, and I'm going to get therapy. I'm going to work on it and try to heal and feel better. That should be more of the narrative. Not like oh, I'm not as bad as other people. Okay.

Comparing to other people, good or bad, never helpful. It makes us feel like shit and puts two people in powerless positions. Okay? So owning your own story means like, this is what happened to me. This is what I'm doing to feel better. Okay.

So really, really thinking about that. So, again, going back on the self-care track, because with PTSD and trauma like you can feel triggered all the time. You could feel triggered out of the blue. You can feel triggered when it totally makes sense. You can get triggered when it doesn't make sense, right? Like your body is like trying to reconcile an old story.

So sometimes it comes up at the worst times, right? Like who's ever really had like a panic attack or been triggered in an opportune moment? Right? It usually happens when we're like why is this happening right now? This is annoying.

So I want you to prepare yourself. Have coping skills and strategies. Make sure you're talking to your therapist about like what should you be doing for yourself when you are feeling triggered? What are your options so that when it happens, you don't feel trapped and overwhelmed and flooded so that you have constant options?

So a lot of the times the same skills and tools that you use for anxiety and anxiety things are similar to what you might use with trauma because it really depends on what's coming up for you. That's why working with your therapist individually is going to be probably the most insightful thing for you as far as tools and things that you need to do. Because it depends on your unique story.

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Like what is your little girl need in this moment to feel safe? Or what is your teenager need to feel safe in this moment, right? What are these inner parts that are wrestling with a hard story who are so traumatized, what do they need to feel safe, right? That's something to talk about with your therapist to figure that out. Because a lot of times that ends up being a lot of your coping tools and strategies of how to ground yourself and giving those parts what they need and the containment and support that they need in those hard moments.

All right, my friends, I'm hopeful. This is a little bit of a dense topic, and I will definitely do another episode on it. But this is a dense topic. It's something I have a lot of passion, compassion, and empathy for. I'm seeing it a lot. I just want you to know I see you, I'm with you, and I want the best for you. So I'm hoping this episode was a little bit helpful in giving you that.

If you're feeling like a lot of your symptoms are anxiety, like you need anxiety copings tools, I would definitely start with my workbook Anxiety Remix. It's on the front page of my website, nicolesymcox.com, and you can download that. That can kind of be your in the moment helper. Like you can just download it. You have it available to you at all times.

It's a downloadable PDF. You can have it on your phone. You can bookmark it. You can decide like which skills work for me, which skills don't work for me because not all skills work for everybody. So picking and choosing. That might be a good first step if you're looking for a way to kind of cope with some big anxiety symptoms that you're having. All right, my friends and wishing you the best of luck to 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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