

255: Emotional Resilience



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With Your Host

Jen Riday

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You're listening to the Vibrant Happy Women podcast, episode number 255. We're talking about emotional resilience. How do you bounce back emotionally when all of life's stressors feel like they're just too much? Stay tuned.

Hi, I'm Jen Riday. This podcast is for women who want to feel more vibrant, happy, aligned, and alive. You'll gain the emotional, physical, and spiritual tools you need to get your sparkle back and ensure that depression, anxiety, and struggle don't rule your life. Welcome to the Vibrant Happy Women Podcast.

Hey my friends welcome back to Vibrant Happy Women. I'm Dr. Jen Riday, your host. And I'm here to help you get off that hamster wheel and find balance in your life so you can be your best self and love your life again. Welcome back. Today we're talking about emotional resilience. We all know the importance of IQ. We want that high IQ. We want our kids to have it so they can do well and go to college and become a doctor or a PhD of something. This is our social ideal. We don't talk enough yet about emotional quotient, the EQ, emotional resilience.

I want to talk about that today because more likely than not you have spent the past year experiencing a level of emotion, a level of stress, a level of cortisol and everything else, a level higher than you may have ever experienced before. I have asked myself many times this past year wow, how did people do it when they lived in war times? Can you imagine cooking something in your kitchen, hanging out with your baby and hearing the sirens go off that you need to go to a bomb shelter day, after day, after day such as happened in England during World War 2?

Or people living in modern times in Syria and other war torn countries, it has awakened me to the utter and complete privilege I live in and a sense of awe and wonderment for the ability of humans to persevere through extended stress. So I'm going to talk about some ideas that can help us feel more emotionally resilient even when things feel hard. I'm going to use

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some real life practical examples. We all know we've lived through a pandemic, and through various types of riots, and through politics here in the US, we've had a year.

Well, what about the stressors on top of that, maybe you're having financial stressors. You are struggling with virtual schooling. You're struggling with a child's mental health. My hand is totally raised for more than one child. You're struggling with your marriage; divorces seem to be at an all time high this year. It's a fascinating fact. The stress is real and I want to pause for a moment and give you my love and my empathy. These feelings are strong that can go through you. You can feel like sometimes you don't want to live or that life is too hard or you can feel like you can't take anymore.

Certainly we don't want to numb out against all our feelings. But there are moments in the past year when I have needed my Netflix so much to distract myself. Sometimes the emotions are so much that we need a break, and that's okay. So we're going to talk in this episode about why we might feel emotionally exhausted, what to do about it. And yes, sometimes it is okay to numb a little bit, not all the time of course.

So let's say – well, actually let's start this way. I want all of you to think of your most recent strong emotional experience. You might think of the Capital riots/insurrection in the US. You might think about a conflict you had with your spouse. You might think about a struggle someone is having that causes you such deep sadness. Think about that most recent but strongest emotion you've had. Alright, imagine it. I know it can be uncomfortable. Usually most of us, if we're thinking about a strong emotion are going to go to the negative side. Let's go ahead and do that.

These uncomfortable emotions sometimes can be harder to recover from, why is that? Let's talk about the neural anatomy for a minute. Alright, when a stressful event occurs or when your brain perceives that an event might be a threat, your amygdala fires off the initial emotional response, sends a signal to your hypothalamus, which is the command center of your brain.

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Your hypothalamus connects to the autonomic nervous system and tells your body to get your heart to pump faster, your certain blood vessels to constrict and dilate. Blood pressure to go up, breathing to accelerate, this is your fight or flight response. We all know that this is necessary for survival, if a tiger came out of the brush or the woods near your home you want this fight or flight response, it makes you run faster. It focuses your body on survival.

What it also does is it tells your prefrontal cortex to stop thinking so much. We need all the blood and energy to go into your muscles and to help you survive. Well, this fight or flight response can be unhelpful when you face a chronic stressor like a pandemic and riots and politics. So I am daring to say most of us have experienced some level of chronic stress, even if it has been lower grade. I know many of you have said you feel like your stress is lower because you aren't just rushing, rushing and doing so much. But even underneath all of that, your amygdala has been firing.

Well, studies show that when the amygdala is facing a long term and chronic stressful situation it gets quicker and quicker to respond, kind of trigger happy. So if any of you feel like you get stressed out really fast, you're overreacting to almost anything, your partner is overreacting, you're like, "What is going on?" This is the symptom of an overactive amygdala, our experience of the past year, it's normal. So I want you to know, not all is lost, it's not forever.

I share this information about the brain so you can know whatever you're feeling is okay. Whatever you're feeling is okay, worry, stress, defensiveness, anxiety, whatever it is, it's just a byproduct of your brain. Now, sometimes our brain can keep us in fight or flight too long. Sometimes our brain might get stuck in a depressed or anxious state, what do we do?

I want to remind you of the feel it to heal it method, especially the first two steps. If you are feeling something uncomfortable rather than yelling at your

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spouse or kids, or numbing out with wine and Netflix, or curling up in a ball for days, try this.

Number one, discover what you are feeling and give it a name. I'm going to share a story with this. I unfortunately was frustrated with my husband because I was thinking a thought that he should not be on his computer but he should be helping someone with their online schooling. Never mind that he had just made an apple pie and done so many other things, I didn't see all of that. I saw what he was not doing, this tendency of the brain to find the flaw. And I said some words that were a bit negative.

My husband, because he – well, I believe because of some of his experiences growing up, when he feels criticized his brain is very, very quick to go into fight or flight. It was a survival response to a very, very emotionally aggressive mother. She doesn't listen so we're safe. And it took me years to understand it wasn't just him being mean, it was him trying to survive, his brain had wired this in there, not to do well with criticism of any sort because it was so intense for him as a child. So he got flooded. What does that mean?

His brain went into full on level eight fight or flight because of a few words I said. So what does my husband do? He reminds me of a dog, a mad dog in an alley kind of trapped by a fence, just barking, barking. You can tell he's defensive, in a state of some kind of a threat, feeling threatened and also in a state of trying to survive. It's intense, it's become interesting over the years to watch this response and step back from it, the more I've learned about emotions, to be able to say, "Okay, he's clearly triggered, he's flooded." What does that mean?

The chemicals of his brain have turned off his prefrontal cortex, his thinking brain, all his blood, all his energy is going to survival. His lungs are breathing faster, his heart is racing. The blood vessels on his brain, you can see them constricting. Everything is different. Well, there's no communicating when that prefrontal cortex goes offline, there's no point.

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He's in his lizard brain, his reptilian brain. So luckily I have gotten smart and I know to leave the situation pretty quick.

Well, the last time this happened, it's becoming more and more rare, the smarter I get and the better he gets at his emotions as well. He stayed a little too long and he said words, words I know he doesn't even mean, but he likes to fight a little bit mean when he's in fight or flight. So I had an emotional response and it hurt and I felt the tears coming to my eyes. And I wanted to scream and throw a tantrum. I just cried and then I eventually left.

But the situation's over, we both know it's over but the emotion is still there, strong emotion for both of us. Patterns we both probably learned in our childhoods, those of you who didn't grow up with anything like this, bless you, count your blessings, you are blessed, hashtag, blessed. Anyway, what did I do? Step one, like I said, I had to lie down in my safe space. You know where it is, my bed. It's always where I go to process emotion. And I just started to breathe and I felt my emotions. I quickly gave it a label. I am furious and I am sad.

I rested there for a while feeling it, feeling it, feeling it, where it was in my body, all over my abdomen just constricted with a combination of sadness and anger. Now, it's fun to think about this, fun, relatively speaking that all of this happened in my body in response to just almost this automatic process triggered by my amygdala. It just kind of reacted to a perceived threat, just like my husband did to my perceived threat by saying certain words. Well, here's what I did and this is a big tip I want you to think about.

I was resting on my bed, feeling my feelings, I could label it anger and sadness, felt it in my stomach. And then I asked myself an interesting question, and you should write this down. What is true in this situation? What is true? This is where it gets interesting. A lot of those emotional responses our bodies have are coming from thoughts about the situation in our brains. What thought did I have that triggered this entire autonomic

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nervous system response, this fight or flight response? He should not say those words.

Interestingly, his body did the same thing when I said my words to him that weren't – my critical words, she should not say those words. She should not think this about me. Okay, get where this is going? This brings us back to the thought table. Our thoughts about a situation usually, almost always cause our emotional response, or at least our extended emotional response to someone's words. He should not say those words. She should not say those words, sadness, anger, threat, fight or flight.

So we come to that question, what is true? Now, you can apply this to your most recent emotional response, your uncomfortable negative emotional responses. What is true? Maybe it's true that you don't want to live in a divided and polarized world. Ouch, that one feels painful already. Maybe it's true that your kids are behind at math. Ouch. Maybe it's true that your two year old is not currently capable of potty training. You've tried so hard, it's not coming along. Maybe instead of fighting the facts, we accept them.

Maybe it's true that your spouse fights nasty or gets defensive. Maybe it's true that your spouse doesn't care how you feel in those moments. A lot of our pain can happen when we're wishing things were different than they really are. And Maya Angelou by the way, I'll insert this quote, "When people show you who they really are, believe them, at least in that moment. We all have different emotional states and different states of being because of it." Well, when politicians show you who they really are, believe it. When the world shows you what it really is, believe it, we're in a state of pandemic.

When your two year old shows you that they can't really potty train right now, believe it. When your fifth grader shows you that they're really behind at math and they really can't make it to class and they've tried the experiment for three months, stop beating your head against the wall and believe it. So the steps, figure out what you're feeling, label it, figure out

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where you're feeling it in your body and then ask this interesting question, what is really true versus what do you want to be true?

This enables us to figure out the facts of a situation. The fact is what is happening is true. What you're experiencing is true to some extent. And then stop resisting those facts and accept them. Recognize that it's really true that your spouse was defensive and in fight or flight. It's really true that there's poop from your two year old on the carpet of the family room or from your pet. Recognize that it's true we really are in a divided country, instead of slipping into a state of sadness about what is, just accepting it.

Suddenly all of the pain, all of the frustration, all of the resentment starts to dissolve because when the world or when people show you who they really are, when the situation, when you see it for what it really is, believe it. Suddenly you can feel a sense of release and freedom. You're no longer resisting what is.

Okay, so that state of seeing the truth for what it really is, in a relationship, in the world, during a pandemic, politically, with your kids, with virtual schooling, it is what it is. This is the truth, these are the facts. This is the new normal. It is what it is, what do you do then? Well, that alone starts to eliminate some of that brain response to a situation. You're no longer thinking how things should be different, they are what they are. Then your amygdala can slow down its emotional message to your hypothalamus.

Your hypothalamus can bring you back slowly if you're thinking different thoughts into a state of calm, activating your parasympathetic nervous system to rest, relax and restore, we are safe. Really if you think about it, all our negative emotions seem to happen in that gap between what we want and what really is. That's why that question, what is true is so, so important. What is really true when the world shows you what's really happening, when your spouse or your kids show you who they really are or what they can really do, believe them.

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Stop wishing, and hoping, and creating so much emotional pain and stress, thinking it must be something different. Then you start to come down, the cortisol releases and metabolizes, you come back into that parasympathetic rest, relax, restore and you can breathe. Okay, it's really true; my spouse doesn't care how I feel when he's fired up. He fights kind of nasty when he's fired up, that's true. But what else is true? He's a really good dad. He made a sweet apple pie today. He is helping the kids do their virtual schooling all afternoon etc.

What's really true about your toddler? She has the cutest giggle, even if she hasn't potty trained yet, she's so sweet, you love her eyelashes. What's really true? There's so many good people in the world and there's so much connection and closeness even in the middle of a pandemic, what's really true. Then keep nurturing, calming your nervous system with beautiful quality self-care activities like exercise, napping, petting your dog or cat, drinking less caffeine, laughing, music, getting social support, crying releases cortisol.

Supplements like Rhodiola, Ashwagandha, B vitamins, hugs, music, dancing, all of these beautiful quality self-care items bring our reactivity down, sooth out, re-stabilize our nervous system. Our poor amygdala, poor hypothalamus, they've been just working overdrive, just simplifying things with this language, but we owe it to our poor brains and our poor nervous system to do those calming, soothing activities that help us feel safe, that release dopamine and serotonin, quality, quality self-care.

Our goal is to train our brain to know that we're not in a state of threat, remove negative news and eliminate toxic social media so that your poor amygdala can rest, and not perceive every little thing as a trigger. When your kids or your spouse are out of sorts and enter into that fight or flight, leave. Their prefrontal cortex is not online, don't expose yourself. When you're around family, don't even dare bring up politics, I broke this rule a while back. Sorry, cousin, if she's listening. Don't do that, it's immediate fight or flight.

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Your poor amygdala has fully been trained to perceive everything as a threat this year. Let's get our brains back online by nurturing them through that quality self-care. So let me ask you and I'll end with this, what are you going to do this week to bring that threshold of stress down? So that you'll be less reactive, meditation is good, maybe a long bath, a quality nap.

Another really juicy option is the Vibrant Happy Women online retreat that's coming up. We're going to be doing meditation and yoga, making mandalas, a soul collage art class, presentations from me and Dr. Laura Froyen and Shazia Imam and Janna Denton Howes, a high vibe home decorating class. I'm so excited because I haven't spent three consecutive days away from my kids I think since the pandemic began. What have I been thinking? What have we been thinking? We need this.

So I'm going to invite you to join us. You can sign up at jenriday.com/online-retreat. It's happening the first weekend of February and I can't even wait. Three days of blessed quiet and adult voices only, bonus, if you get yourself a hotel, if not, lock yourself in the bedroom; tell your family you're taking three days off. You deserve this. I want to thank you for listening and again, don't forget to honor your feelings, label them, discover where you feel them and accept the truth of things as it really is.

Remember the Maya Angelou quote. "When people show you who they really are, believe them." When the world shows you what's really happening, believe it.

You've got this my friends, take care of you and I will see you again next time. Until then, take care.

If you enjoy this podcast, you have to check out the Vibrant Happy Women Club. It's my monthly group coaching program where we take all this material to the next level and to get you the results that will blow your mind. Join me in the Vibrant Happy Women Club at jenriday.com/join.

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