

277: Post Pandemic Adjustment



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With Your Host

Jen Riday

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Hey there it's Jen and this is the Vibrant Happy Women podcast. Today I'll be talking about my experience with post pandemic adjustment. And I want to validate whatever experience you're having. 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.

Hi, it's Jen. And I am super excited to talk about an important topic today, life after the pandemic. Now, you might be in a country where things are getting back to normal, you might not. You may have experienced significant trauma throughout the pandemic, perhaps in the loss of a loved one, or a health problem that's ongoing. Whatever your experience was of the pandemic, whatever your thoughts about it now, I want to validate all of them, every thought, every belief about what the past year and a half has been, what it should have been, what it should be now, is valid.

And I want to start with that. Let me define what I think this past year and a half was. I would like to define it as a traumatic event. Now, you might say, "Jen, that's silly. We just need to bounce back and get on with life. Life is all traumatic if you define it that way." Well, let me tell you what I think a traumatic event is, a traumatic event is losing a former version of yourself.

Death can be traumatic because we have lost a version of ourself in which another person we loved existed. Divorce can be traumatic because we have lost a former version of ourself that included another person in our life that might have included two incomes, a certain house. We lose a former version of ourselves and suddenly it can be a time to grieve this big shift. All of these things can be traumatic.

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A serious illness, cancer can be traumatic. Having a premature infant can be traumatic. I have a friend who had a little girl way too early and she was not thriving in utero. And she was so small, and all of the visits to the NICU, all of the problems, and the surgeries, and the doctors, she had experienced a trauma, and it was something she needed to heal from. People who go to combat, of course we know, storms, tornados can leave trauma in their wake. In fact, after natural disasters at least 60% of people in some cases have been shown to show symptoms of PTSD, post-traumatic stress disorder.

I want you to consider the fact that the pandemic may have been a collective world trauma because we all lost a former version of ourselves. We lost the life we had before. No matter how we view the pandemic or the validity of the pandemic, or whether we wanted to wear masks or not wear masks, or be vaccinated or not be vaccinated, that's irrelevant. We all experienced a collective change that resulted in some loss of our former versions of ourselves. So I'm calling this a traumatic event.

Why am I talking about this? Well, as you may know I experienced a number of other traumas throughout the pandemic like when I got the call that my son had been in a terrible accident and his car was a pile of metal. Thankfully, he walked away from the hospital a few hours later with just a bandage, blew my mind, a miracle. And then when my son fell out of a tree and needed a major surgery. And then we had another surgery. And then we had some problems with suicidal ideation which is significantly traumatic for a parent.

My point here is sometimes we discount all of the things that happen in our lives and think we should just be able to bounce back. And then when we don't, we panic and think something is wrong with us, which has been my experience. So I'm going to tell you about that in a minute. While all of this stuff was going on with my kids in September, October, November, December, most of the fall and winter, I remember thinking to myself, wow,

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I am handling this so well. I cannot comprehend how I'm being so strong. I don't get it. I'll take it, but I don't get it."

And so it went, all winter my son would call severely depressed again. And yes, it was stressful, but somehow it wasn't knocking me down. I continued to function. But funny thing happened, when my kids went back to school on April 13th, I thought oh yes, now I'm going to be highly productive. I'm going to rock all of the things I couldn't get done during the pandemic. And guess what happened? The opposite, my body, it's almost like my brain knew, okay, Jen, you're safe. You're alone, now we need to deal with this.

And to help me do that, I felt, my brain I guess, put me into a state of complete and utter exhaustion. Suddenly all the things that just two weeks prior would have felt easy were hard, random things in my planner or in my calendar I would suddenly deem as optional. I lost all motivation and essentially felt like I was in a severe state of depression. When we're depressed we can often feel unmotivated, lack of focus. All of those things that can happen in regular life too but when they happen to the extent where you're not functioning as a member of the family, or with a job then you know something bigger is going on.

So, for me my trauma response seemed very similar to depression, complete lack of motivation, physical exhaustion to the point where I felt alarmed. In my mind I have mostly dealt with depression. It's not something I struggle with anymore. So I was very surprised to be having these struggles especially when I've done so much work. And I shamed myself a little bit for that thinking, gosh, wow, is this what it's going to be like for me the rest of my life?

It took a few days for me to recognize, hey, this is trauma. This is a trauma response. That means it's going to pass if I give myself the space and use the tools that will help me to do that.

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So, what other responses to trauma can occur besides exhaustion or depression? Maybe you've experienced some of these. You might have had sleep issues, a lack of focus, headaches, memory issues, feelings of helplessness, inability to function at your work. Struggling in your relationships, feelings of sadness, guilt, shame, anger, fear, perhaps a numbness, or a sense of shock, or denial. These are signs that you are having a bit of a trauma response.

Does this mean the world is over, your life is over, you're never going to get back to anything that resembles the normal you would like it to be?

Definitely not. Here's what I did and what might help you. I decided to seek support. In addition to giving myself space to rest and not be always doing things. I used four very powerful tools that I teach about in the Vibrant Happy Women Club and which I also teach in depth in the Vibrant Happy Life Coach certification.

And those tools are the Feel it to Heal it method, thought tables, the Be Her morning ritual and creating healthy boundaries. Now, I'm not going to go in depth on each of these. But suffice it to say when you give yourself space to uncover what you're thinking, and by extension what you're feeling, though journaling or talking with a coach, or your spouse, or another loved one, or a friend, you can really do a lot of healing.

Talking, noticing what we're thinking and feeling, even writing in a journal allows our brains to reprocess and move things from the limbic centre, the emotion centre of the brain, more to the prefrontal cortex.

When something traumatic happens like when I fell off the school bus and split my head open on a cement stair step. It was really traumatic at the time, and I would have talked about it and thought about it with lots of emotional response. But now it's just a fact that I split my head open. I have dealt with that trauma over the years. I have dealt with that pain over the years. So, talking, journaling, thinking, allowing ourselves to know what

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we're thinking and feeling, holding space for ourselves is huge in helping ourselves to heal from trauma and other struggles.

Now, the Be Her morning ritual, you know what it is, breathe, exercise, hydrate, embody your best self, and read something inspiring. Of course that's going to help, even if you can only just do five minutes, or one minute of each a day, how much better you'll feel if you have oxygenated your body through breathing, if you have exercised to get your blood pumping, if you have hydrated properly. If you have embodied or tried to hold the posture and think the thoughts of the person you want to be, and of course reading something inspiring.

All of that just gives you some of that dopamine that makes you feel more emotionally juicy instead of emotionally brittle and numb. Now, I'm going to talk a little bit more about boundaries. Boundaries, remember my definition is taking 100% responsibility for your thoughts, your feelings, your actions, or your lack of actions, and your results. And not taking responsibility for the thoughts, actions, feelings and results of other people.

So a boundary, in this case, if you've experienced a traumatic event, which we all have through this pandemic, whether you define it that way or not, also other events happening over the past year and a half of course. Well, we sometimes need to be responsible for how we feel and if we're feeling exhausted that's a signal that we need a boundary.

Just like I said to my spouse, "I'm exhausted. I require more sleep right now. I will not be coming to dinner. I will not be driving the kids. I need to take care of myself now. If you need extra support to help the kids with things, here are some options for you, but otherwise I'm taking care of me right now", a boundary.

I didn't tell my husband how he had to handle it. But I did tell him what I would and would not be doing, being responsible for my thoughts, feelings,

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actions, and results. Doing what it takes to get back to the result I wanted of feeling vibrant, and happy, and energized and alive again.

So those powerful tools were very, very helpful. Additionally I talked to a friend who happens to be a therapist. And I found this fascinating and I wanted to share this with you. She said, Nicole said that a lot of people in her practice, and she has seen patients eight times a day for the entire pandemic. And she said what it helped her with was to recognize that her response to the pandemic was the same response all of her clients were happening. She had uncertainty, and she had anxiety at the beginning.

And now in the US as the pandemic begins to wrap up. She said the response of her clients is also fascinating. She said most of her clients, a large, large majority are coming in, and saying that they want to do all of these amazing things. All of the things you would want to do when your life's getting back to 'normal'. She said, "However, they're all saying that they have zero motivation."

Well, because she's an amazing therapist and people who work with clients, coaches would also recognize this. Because she's amazing she knows that a lack of motivation is often a symptom of trauma, or a symptom of depression or anxiety, a signal that those people need to take it easy and to rest. So Nicole spent a lot of time helping her clients recognize that maybe it's okay to ease back into things.

Maybe this summer can be the summer of fun, and ease and, slow moving, rather than trying to get back to some version of pre pandemic life, which for many of us was way too fast, and way too stressful. Do we really want to go back to that?

So, I hope this has kind of helped you think about how you're feeling and what you're thinking. Maybe you had an entirely different experience of the pandemic. It often can depend on the state you were in, the city, the county

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you were in, the response that happened there. You might be feeling angry that masks were even happening at all. You might be feeling angry that people ask you about whether you're vaccinated. You might be feeling angry that people aren't still wearing their masks.

Whatever it is, I want you to give yourself grace and give other people grace. And recognize we're all having a collective trauma response to a traumatic event that ended life as we knew it before. And that is shifting us into a post pandemic life, a life that we haven't known before. Our brain is on high alert. When you first learn to drive, you have to think about every little thing, like I'm putting my foot on the brake. My hands are at ten and two. Oh my gosh, I need to scan the ditches, I might hit a deer, and you remember everything with vivid detail.

As opposed to after you've been driving for 10 years. You can drive an hour and not remember any bit of the experience, and you arrive at your destination thinking, wow, where did the time go? Well, we're stepping into something that is new to us, just like it was when we all learned to drive. And our brain is on hyper alert. Taking off the masks for the first time, when I went to Target the other day was interesting. My brain kept screaming, where's your mask? Where's your mask? Where's your mask?

All of these changes take energy. And rather than shame yourself for not being able to bounce back, or get back to normal, or for feeling anxious, what if we all just held space for ourselves like a scientist who observes, or a therapist who cares and we said, "What are we feeling today?" Interesting, that was an interesting experience in Target without your mask. Good job, Jen, just like you would want your mom to talk to you when you were a child, you can do that for yourself.

I'm so mad that they asked me about my vaccine, or that they looked at me because I didn't have on a mask. That's so interesting, I'm feeling angry. I wonder what's there for me. I'm so exhausted. I'm so tired. I can't get

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anything done. Yeah, right, Jen said this can be a trauma response. How about I give myself space to just sit, or to take a slow walk, or to hug my spouse and say that I need some help? Maybe this is a great time to hire a housekeeper or to get some extra help with your kids for the summer. It's all okay.

And here's what I know as I wrap up, oftentimes when we experience a traumatic event it will churn up past traumas. And that has been my experience. As I was resting, allowing myself to heal when I felt so low and so de-energized I had many thoughts about my childhood that just kept popping into my brain. Well, our brains are smart. They think 60 thousand thoughts a day. And when they see that we have space, they'll present things that we need to heal.

Your brain will say, "Hey, you never dealt with this. This is still kind of giving you too much of an emotional response. It's affecting your outcomes. Hey, let's bring this to her attention, to her conscious mind. She can deal with this while she's lying in bed anyway." So, while I rested my body, I journaled, and I processed, not only the pandemic experience but things I needed to heal from my childhood, just little memories.

And here is an interesting technique, which I talked about last week with Wendy De Rosa. It's called inner child work, and you might try this. You do this by remembering something from your childhood. Maybe you think of your five year old self. And you just cozy up to her and say, "Hey there little Jen." I know this sounds funny, but try it. "Hey there little Jen, I see you, I hear you, I'm here. What do you need in this moment?" And then just listening, it's so funny, your brain will give you a thought right back.

Maybe you ask, "What do you need to hear right now? What do you need right now? What can I say or help you with right now?" Maybe she'll say, "I just wish someone would say, it's okay, this is hard. You did such a good job. You're amazing." Your child self wanted to hear things and most likely

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your adult self still wants to hear those things. Inner child and re-parenting work, a great tool that I love is saying those things to yourself now. Allowing your adult self to re-parent and give your child self what she needs.

In the end, all of this is simply compassion, being present for your feelings with love and kindness and total attention and awareness. “Sweetheart, you’re so tired, oh honey, you’re exhausted. You need to rest. You’ve got this, you don’t need to do all of those things. You don’t need to help everyone right now.”

You’re modeling for your kids that it’s okay to rest. It’s okay just to have fun and not try to bounce back. It’s okay to take time off from that job, or even to resign. It’s okay to be scared to go back into the world without a mask. It’s okay to worry that you might become your pre pandemic self again. All of these thoughts, and feelings, and actions, and inactions are valid, just step back, take a breath, hold space and speak to yourself with compassion. Let your body heal. Let your brain reprocess and you’ll have a way better future ahead of you as you do so.

Now, a few thoughts on what not to do, please do not ignore your feelings. Please do not try to do everything you did before and be normal because we’re in a new version of normal. Please do not numb with substances like alcohol or THC gummies. Please do not make any big life changes while your brain is trying to process all of this. Because there’s help, there’s space, talk to other people. Give yourself time and support, have more alone time, have solid routines that give you structure if that helps you.

And if needed, get professional help, find someone to talk to, find someone to help you with your relationships and with your work if those things are suffering. And of course you are always welcome to join us in the Vibrant Happy Women Club where we are always working on Feel It to Hear It, and thought tables, and the Be Her morning ritual. And healthy boundaries that allow us to take care of ourselves, to meet our emotional, and physical, and

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mental needs. So we can be the most sparkly, vibrant, happy and alive version of ourselves, our most whole and healed version of ourselves.

Well, I want to thank you all for listening. And if you've struggled, you're not alone. If it's been easy, I'm sure you're not alone. Everything's valid, hold space for yourself, hold space for others and allow everyone to feel and experience what they're feeling and experiencing.

Thank you so much for listening. I will see you again next time. Until then, make it a vibrant and happy week. 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.