

99. How to use Mindful Listening to improve your relationships

Vanessa 00:00

Welcome to the Empowered brain, the only podcast using science, psychology and coaching to help you rewire your brain and create a life you love with your host, Dr. Vanessa Calderon, a Harvard grad physician, master coach, and mother of two.

Hello, sweet friends. Welcome back to the podcast. We are talking today about mindful listening. So let me just start off the episode by sharing a story with all of you. So next month, I am celebrating my 10-year wedding anniversary with my husband, which is super exciting. And I feel like a huge accomplishment. Because we are really, you know, we've really created this really beautiful, connected relationship. And I'll tell you that our conversations now are so different than they were 10 years ago. For one, I'll say 10 years ago, when we used to have a conversation, it would go something like this, my husband would start to tell me something. And I would immediately start thinking about all of the things I was going to say to respond, I would immediately start thinking about how I was going to prove my point, how I was going to get him to agree how I was going to persuade him how my way was the right way. And I'll tell you that did not lend for very productive conversations.

Instead, what it would do is it would create really defensive conversations. And you know, we've come a long way in the last 10 years. And our conversations are very different now. And they're not always perfect by any means. But I have started to practice mindful listening in our conversations, and it has really evolved the level of our connection. I think one of the reasons why our marriage is so strong is because we're both so committed to our marriage. But also because we both practice or do our best to practice whenever we can the act of mindful listening. So what is mindful listening? So at its core, mindful listening is the act of listening to others without an agenda. So what we're going to do today is we're going to talk about why it's important to practice mindful listening, what makes it really hard to do, what are the things that make it really hard to do, and how to overcome those things, how to overcome those three or four things that make it really hard to practice mindful listening. Alright, so in my coaching program, the journey this last week, we talked about mindful listening, and it brought up so many good points.

And the students in there were talking about how they started to use mindful listening with people that they loved, how they started strengthening their connections with these people, and how it transformed their relationships, which is why I thought it would be a good idea to bring to all of you today. So just a quick plug for the journey, in case you haven't heard. But the journey is my all-inclusive coaching program where I work with high-achieving men and women. And we work super close together to help you be more effective without burning out. We learn how to rewire your brain using contemporary neuroscience, but also coaching and psychology to help you become more effective to stop thinking that things that aren't serving you and start doing the things that do serve you. So at the end of the

program, my students are able to get more done in less time, and they're able to be fully present with the people they love without thinking about all of those other things like all the work stuff that they normally think about that nags at their brain and causes stress and anxiety.

They're no longer thinking about those things. They're able to stop procrastinating and be way more efficient, and they have so much more mental clarity. One of the other biggest outcomes that I've seen is this imposter syndrome. So many people start the program, holding on to so much self-doubt and insecurity. And at the end, they have transformed into really confident, beautiful human beings that no longer experience impostor syndrome. So if you are interested in becoming more effective, getting more done, and really transforming your life, the journey isn't just some coaching online program that you've probably done before. This is a transformative process in a community that is safe and compassionate. That is backed by neuroscience which really makes a difference. So again, check us out at vanessacalderonmd.com/join. And if you have questions, please feel free to reach out to me. You can DM me directly on Instagram or on Facebook, and I'm pretty quick to respond.

Okay, so let's come back and talk about mindful listening. So again, mindful listening at its core, is the act of listening to others without an agenda. Now, the way I think about like why it's important, so I want you to sort of think about it why it's important to you. Why is it important? So put yourself in a conversation where you felt judged, I want you to think back to a conversation where you felt like you were being judged, where somebody was not being very kind to you and you felt like you were being judged. And I want you to think about how it felt when you felt like they were judging you, you can see sort of their facial expressions change, you can see them pressured, ready to respond to prove their point, you can see how they're not really listening to you, you really feel unheard.

How does that make you feel? You probably feel restricted and tightened right now probably a little aggressive or angry, or sad maybe. So instead, what I want you to do is I want you to think about how you feel when you're in the presence of someone who is compassionately listening to you, who was listening to you without an agenda. Now I want you to put yourself in that space. Put yourself in that space, where you're talking to someone who's that person that always listens to you, just thoughtfully. They're not trying to change you. They're not trying to fix you, they're not trying to fix the problem. They're just listening to you.

My sister, my younger sister does an incredible job of this, she just is such a thoughtful and compassionate listener, she just sits and listens. So who does that for you? When that person is doing that for you? How does that make you feel? You might feel loved, you might feel listened to. Maybe you feel cared for? Maybe you feel valued. Maybe you now feel safe, to share more, and you're able to be more vulnerable. And guess what happens when you feel psychologically safe to do all that? When you feel psychologically safe to do all that you deepen your human connection to that person. And that is so incredibly important for so many reasons. For one human connection mitigates trauma. So whenever you're feeling sad, upset, hurt, and you're able to connect with somebody, you sort of solve for that traumatic response that you had. And also because human connection is sort of the point of our experience of our human experience, we deepen our human experience when we can deepen our connection with other people.

That's what's possible for you when you experience mindful listening. Now, I want you to imagine you being on the other side of the conversation, where you're the listener, and you are now able to create that same feeling of love of safety for someone else. That's the power of mindful listening. To think about it another way, I sort of like to think of mindful listening as compassionate listening, or as an act of love. This is you just being super loving and kind to someone that matters to someone that matters to you. Now, there's this author, who I really appreciate his name is Mark Nepo. And this is what he says. He says, mindful listening, is listening with the willingness to be changed by what we hear and the willingness to be changed by what we hear.

Okay, so mindful listening. Sounds awesome, right? We all want to practice it. But there are a few things that will consistently get in the way of us practicing them. So let's talk about these things. And then I'm going to share with you how to overcome them. Alright, so number one, number one is the time when we enter into a conversation, and we already have the subconscious thought of, I don't have time. Now many of us, especially those of you that are listening, I know this might resonate with you because we are rushing through life all of the time trying to get as much done as possible. And we are coming from that thought we are functioning from the south, I don't have enough time. And so what happens when you show up to a conversation that way, when you show up to a conversation, and your underlying thought is I don't have time, you're trying to rush through the conversation, you're trying to get that other person to get to the point, you're not really listening, because you're sort of thinking about what's next, or how to respond to speed things along. And then you mistake that other person and everything that they're saying to you as sort of an interruption in your day or an object that's getting in your way. And when you're thinking like that, you are not going to be very compassionate to what they are saying.

So that's number one, when we have this underlying thought, I don't have time. The second is showing up with an agenda. So when we show up for an agenda, there are a few different things we could be trying to get across. Number one, you might be trying to persuade the other person instead of trying to get them to understand, instead of trying to listen, you're trying to get them to understand your point of view. That's showing up with an agenda. That sort of is at its basic form. What happens when you show up with an agenda is you're trying to persuade them to agree to your point of view. What's the other way? And the other way is if you're trying to fix the A person, or you're trying to accomplish something, or you're trying to fix the problem, maybe they just showed up to share something with you, because they just want to be heard. And you immediately go into problem-solving mode, how can you fix this problem?

Third is, are you trying to come across a certain way? Like, are you trying to make an impression is your agenda to sound more intelligent, or to sound very, you know, like very patient, or very thoughtful is that your agenda? Here's the third thing that will get in the way. So the first is time, and the second is showing up with an agenda. And not just the agenda to persuade, are trying to get your point across, but also an agenda of trying to come across a certain way. And the third is when you feel psychologically unsafe. So if you're feeling judged, or hurt by that other person in the conversation, it's going to make it really difficult for you to listen mindfully.

Because you're going to tense up, you're going to tighten up, you're going to be restrictive, your defenses are going to come up. And when you're feeling psychologically unsafe, it could also be because you sense that that other person isn't being their authentic self. When you sense that another person isn't being their authentic self, then your brain will get distracted into thinking about what are their ulterior motives. Why are they showing up this way? Do I need to be careful? Do I need to be defensive? And you know, the interesting thing about feeling psychologically unsafe is this, the human brain scans the world around us every five to seven seconds for threats, the brain has been built to keep us alive and to do that as efficiently as possible. And so it will look for threats wherever it can. And one of the ways that we'll look for threats is when you're having a conversation with somebody else.

So if they are starting to show up, and you're sensing that they may be inauthentic, you might think it's time for you to get defensive. All right, and what's the last time the last way so this last one here is a little bit more subtle. So the last thing that will get in the way of us showing up to be mindful when we're listening is thinking that we need to control the conversation, having the sense of control. Again, this one is a bit more subtle. And the reason why it gets in the way is that if we let go of the idea of having an agenda if we let go of the idea that we don't have time, all of a sudden, it feels a little bit uncomfortable for us because now we're just present. And there are all these fears that will show up when we're not in control. What if I'm not prepared to respond? What if I run late to the next thing? What if you know, I can't solve the problem for them, whatever it is that you think you need to control in that moment? You know, this other thing that's also a little subtle, when it comes to sense of control, is you wanting to assert your presence, and not assert your presence in a combative way, like, I need to be present.

But more assert your presence in a way of you just wanting the other person to know that you're there. And sometimes we do that when we're listening by just saying, or you want to be ready to respond right away because we want them to know that you're there. It is. So this last part here is so fascinating. Because how many times have you been listening to someone and you feel like hey, like, I'm here to like, why are you talking so much like you're not even you don't even care about me, as opposed to being like, wow, this person really has a lot to get off their chest right now, let me just listen thoughtfully to them. It's so interesting, it's almost like we're afraid that we're losing our identity if we're not in control. Okay, so let's talk a little bit about this, what we can do to sort of overcome these things that get in the way so that we can be better able to provide mindful listening, compassionate listening, as again as an act of love. So I kind of think about mindful listening as the sacred Art of Letting Go. The Sacred Art of Letting Go. And for me, that resonates because I sort of identify as someone who used to be a controller, and I call myself an a, an OT, so someone who's overcome controlling or used to be like a perfectionist, someone who's overcome perfectionism, although I will never overcome them, they'll always be there.

But it's an act of It's a sacred art Art of Letting Go, letting go of control. And what I mean by that is in the middle of a conversation, your things are going to come up, agendas are going to come up, fears are going to come up. And what you want to do is not chase those things around. You don't want to pursue your fears. You don't want to pursue your agenda. You don't want to try to control the other person. Instead, what you want to do is recognize that all of that showing up for you, and you stay present in

the conversation. Alright, so how do you do that? Now there are three ways for you to do that. Three things you need to do.

Number one, you have to just be super clear that what you want to do is listen mindfully. So set your intention. So when I go into a conversation with my husband, for example, sometimes ahead of time, I know we're going to talk about something and I'll just say, Okay, I'm gonna listen mindfully. But sometimes we're in the middle of a conversation that we didn't have planned. And all of a sudden, I feel my defenses come up, or, you know, I start thinking about what I want to say. And when I catch that, I'll be like, that's when I set my agenda. I'm sorry, that's when I set my intention. And I'll say, Okay, I'm gonna listen mindfully right now. And then I just, you know, relax my body, relax my shoulders, because that's usually nice and high and tight when I'm when I have an agenda. And instead of just relaxing my body, and telling myself, I'm just gonna listen intentionally right now. I'm just gonna listen mindfully right now.

Alright, so number one, set your intention, set it ahead of time, or set it in the middle of the conversation when you realize that your stuff is coming up for you. And number two, really notices, notice what comes up for you in the middle of these conversations? Is it judgment? Is it fear? Is it control? You know, are you judging what the other person is saying? Do you think that they're automatically wrong? Do you want to jump in and correct them? Are you afraid of something? Do you feel attacked? Are you feeling defensive? What else can be coming up? Do you feel like you have the solution to their problem as they're talking? All of those things are things you want to notice when they're coming up. And here's one thing that you can do, just note it and let it go. Noted is the act of noticing that it's coming up, for example, I will say, Oh, wow, my shoulders got really tight. And then I let it go. And sometimes I don't even say that thought in my brain, I just feel what's happening to my body. And a note that that's happening, I'll say, okay, my shoulders just got tight, and then it just relaxes. Or my brain is going to I don't have time. And I'll just come back to the moment. And here's the third thing, which is all about time.

Because having this mantra or this thought or running on the fuel of you don't have enough time that will always get in the way of human connection. And again, the whole purpose of life is expanding the way we connect with other people which expands our human experience. So when that thought comes up for you do not have enough time, I'm going to offer you a way to self-coach yourself out of that. And here's a really easy one to do. When you think you don't have time, say to yourself, or remind yourself that there's always time to connect. That's the one that I use for me because human connection matters so much to me. But maybe there's another thought that serves you better.

For example, I always have enough time, or I create time, or I always have time to speak to this one person, or this person matters so much to me that I'll make time, whatever, whatever thought serves you at that moment. Use that to self-coach yourself out of that mantra, not enough time, and come back to the present moment. All right, again. So you set your intention that you're going to listen mindfully, you notice when your judgment agenda, your fears are coming up for you note them, let them go and just ground yourself back on your intention. And if you are someone that struggles with this not enough time you coach yourself out of that by creating a new thought or a new mantra. So instead of not having

enough time, you can use what I use, which is there's always time to connect, there's always time to connect.

Okay, so when I talked about this inside of the journey, and I'm sure you guys are thinking about some of these things, too. You know, one of the things that came up is like, Well hold on a second, this sounds awesome in theory. But what about when we're in a conversation with this really angry person or someone who's definitely always wrong? Or someone who doesn't listen to me mindfully, why should I listen to them mindfully? So what I want to say to all of that is, listen, all of those things are true. There's gonna be times when somebody else doesn't know how to listen mindfully, someone else who just talks a lot of turn or talks about themselves other time, or I'm sure you have somebody in your life that whenever you talk to them, it's always about them. So the one thing I will say is, when you have a person like that in your life, just know that it's usually because they have never been given the gift of mindful listening.

So they don't even know what it's like to listen to other people mindfully. If that supports you and gives them compassion or shows up with compassion, you can use that. I use that sometimes with the people in my life who talk all about them. I just remember how the man they were never given the gift of mindful listening. And if you are someone that you're like, Oh, hold on a second, I'm not really good at this. A really great place to start is by giving yourself the gift of mindful listening, where you can just sit down and you know, ask and ask a question to yourself. I use this as a journaling prompt. I will ask a question. I'll just sit there quietly and wait to see what comes up for me But the other thing I want to just invite you to do is I want to invite you to choose this one person in your life, who really matters to you and who you really want to connect with. For me, when I started doing this intentionally, I chose my husband. And then I went to my daughter, and then to my son. And I started practicing mindful listening with all of them.

Choose that one person in your life who you really want to improve that relationship with, and practice mindful listening with them. And once you start realizing how it deepens your connection with them, you're going to be able to extend that to other people in your life. And you know, the thing about mindful listening, it works the way all other acts of empathy work. Because empathy works with something called mirror neurons or brain, which means that somebody else will see will experience, and feel what is happening. So you're giving, you're giving them the gift of mindful listening, and they are going to start to learn how to mindfully listen back to you. I really think that that's how our my husband's marriage became so strong, we both would notice how the other person was being so thoughtful and caring and conversations. And we would just get better at practicing it ourselves to give the other person that same gift. And again, we're not perfect, we don't do it all the time. We still get angry and upset with each other sometimes.

But we use mindfulness anymore than all that other negative stuff. And again, I want to caution you against going to, you know, the extremes and saying, but what if this person is super abusive, I don't mean any of that. I don't, I'm not using it here as a reference. You know, the extremes or the outliers, which our brain likes to go to the outliers to disprove a point. Instead, I want to bring you back into your day-to-day. And I want you again to focus on that one person who you want to improve your connection with and really deepen your connection. practice mindful listening with them. And remember, mindful

listening is really an act of love. It's an act of compassion, and you can, you're able to do that and create that sense of love and compassion for another person, simply by listening mindfully. Okay, so you friends, go out and practice this for yourself and let me know how it goes. Come on to my Instagram at Vanessa Calderon, MD, if you're not already following me at Vanessa Calderon, MD, and let me know how it goes. When you start practicing mindful listening, send me a DM. And if you're not already on our listserv, I want to recommend that you go on there and get on my listserv. I send you weekly love letters, where you get some really high-yield teaching and a few tips that you can start using to start changing the way you do things every day and start improving your life. And you can go on my listserv by vanessacalderonmd.com. You can find a link there that says Join the listserv at the very bottom of the homepage. Alright, we're friends until next week.

Hey, sweet friends, if you love what you're learning, then you've got to join us on the journey. It's my all-inclusive program and the best community out there giving you the education you never knew you needed to help you create a life you love. Join us at vanessacalderonmd.com/join. I'll see you there.