

# 114. Apathy: Why you feel "Blah" and another way fear shows up

**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.

Hey, sweet friends, welcome back to the podcast. So if you recall, we are talking about all the different ways fear shows up for us. So if you haven't yet had a chance to listen to episode 112, I recommend you go back and listen to it. It's the episode right before this one where we talk about the origin story, the origination of where fear comes from for you. It's a really powerful episode, I really recommend you go back and listen. So you understand that there's nothing wrong with you that this is woven into a lot of our genetics, and a lot of how we were not just raised but how our ancestors were raised on what they experienced. So again, I recommend you go back there and listen to that.

Today, what I'm going to talk about is apathy and the relationship between apathy and fear, and why you sometimes kind of feel just like blah. Now, before I go on, I just want to note that when I talk about apathy here, I talk about the majority of us who experience apathy when we feel kind of unmotivated, for example, what I'm not talking about is if you have a diagnosis of depression, for example, and you feel apathy, or if you had a recent traumatic event in your life, like you lost a loved one, and you're feeling apathy. That is something different. The pathophysiology behind that is different. And I'm not talking about that today. And maybe for another episode way in the future, but not today. Okay, so let's come back and talk about apathy. So what is apathy, apathy is this feeling that we experienced that's usually associated with a thought, like, who cares, or that doesn't even matter? Who cares, I don't care. It won't make a difference.

Thoughts like that. And when you have those thoughts, you might feel things like unmotivated. Or you might feel kind of like just blah, you might have had those days where you wake up, and you just don't want to get out of bed, or you don't want to get dressed, you just kind of feel like blah. So, we're going to talk a little bit about why we experienced that. But let's talk about what we do when we're feeling kind of unmotivated, or blah what happens, we end up taking actions that we otherwise wouldn't take. So for example, you might have created an entire to-do list. But when you're feeling unmotivated or blocked, you avoid your entire to-do list. Or instead of stopping Netflix, when you're supposed to stop it, you watch more episodes of Netflix. And instead of getting out of bed, when your alarm goes off, you stay in bed longer than you want it to. After dinner, instead of having one dessert, you have two or three, and you procrastinate on taking actions that you said you were going to take.

Those are the things that we do when we're filming the scene. And I want you to notice what happens here. When you have those thoughts, who cares, or that doesn't even matter and you feel unmotivated, or blah, and you take all those actions, what you are essentially doing with your actions is you're proving that nothing matters, you are proving that thought and that feeling of apathy. For example, your health goals don't matter because you ate that extra dessert, or your to-do list doesn't matter, because you're not doing it anyway, because you're avoiding it, or your mental health doesn't matter because instead of sleeping, you're staying up late or to watch more Netflix.

And this, my friends, is what I call the apathy cycle. And it is brought to you by Dun Dun to Don none less than fear. Now, when I talk about fear, I will refer to the part of you that's afraid as your ego. And I'd like to differentiate that from your highest self or your true self. So let's talk about some examples of how fear is behind the apathy that we experience. Now I'm gonna give you some real examples of some of my clients and my students. So one of my clients who's a very successful department chair and medical director of a very busy department, was creating a new scheduling matrix to help schedule the physicians. And it was new, it was a little complex, and she presented it to her group and there was a lot of pushback. And she felt really frustrated. And immediately after feeling frustrated, she went into apathy. And her apathy was a little sneaky.

Her apathy was telling her who cares about this, let's just keep it the way it is. And she came to me that way. She came to me during one of our sessions and said, Who cares? We can just keep the schedule as it is. And I was like, Wait a second, I know who cares? You care. That's the entire reason you started working on this. It's because you care. And I had her tell me all the reasons why it mattered and all the reasons why she cared. And the reasons were really valid to her. She wanted an equitable way to create the schedule, what they were doing before wasn't sustainable. They had to find a new way where everybody felt it was safe, I'm sorry, fair. And that's the reason why she wanted to create a new schedule. So notice how she initially felt frustrated, and then immediately went to apathy. So what was happening?

What was happening here is that her ego was trying to protect her from feeling the stress and the frustration, by instead having her go directly to apathy. Now she is someone that she really values having sort of this equanimity in her life, where she's not super upset, or, like, super excited, she's living this like, even keel life. So but she was experiencing that stress and frustration that totally goes against her values. So instead, her ego immediately took her towards apathy. Because in her mind, she thought that if she told herself, it didn't really matter, and she wouldn't have to keep working, and she wouldn't have to keep working on it on the schedule, then she can avoid all the feelings of frustration. Notice how that happens.

Another one of my students would have apathy come up for her when she would avoid the feeling of disappointment, or when she would experience disappointment. Now, this one is huge. For high achievers, this is huge. So my sense is a lot of you that are listening, have experienced this before. When something comes up for you, and you feel disappointed, instead of allowing yourself to feel disappointed, you immediately go to Who cares? It doesn't even matter. I'm better than that. Anyway, that was so dumb, that was stupid. So I want you to notice that. So for her, this was so fascinating. So for her, she was another big leader in a department and she had created this comprehensive business

plan for a new and innovative program that she wanted to launch. So she had her initial meetings to talk through the specifics and the funding. And during that meeting, she didn't get the enthusiastic response.

She was hoping for him. She was hoping that everybody was going to be like, Oh, this is fantastic. Yeah, let's do it. And instead, they were asking her, okay, hold on, what about this? What about this? Can you come back with more data, she felt so disappointed. So in our coaching session, she comes to me and says, I guess it doesn't really matter. The program doesn't matter. The way we're doing things right now is fine. We can just keep doing things the way they are. And again, I was like, Wait, hold on a second. They didn't even say No, all they said is come back to us with more come back to us with more details. And notice that had we not caught that thought error, she would have maybe gone down that route and said it doesn't matter. Let's keep things the way they are. But instead, we noticed, hey, nobody said no, you're feeling that because you're afraid you're feeling disappointed. Or maybe you're even afraid that they may say no in the future. So instead, what you're doing is protecting yourself by telling you, it doesn't even matter.

How many times have you all done that? Have you all told yourself, that's dumb, that doesn't matter? That's so stupid. That's silly. I don't need to do that. That's apathy. When really what you're doing is you're protecting yourself from feeling something else, like disappointment, or rejection, or frustration. Apathy is so interesting. So what I want you to do now that you know all of this, is I want you to be onto yourself next time you experience apathy. Because notice, I'm going to take a step back here, I want you to notice that when you feel apathy, you don't just feel it for what's happening in that moment. You start taking all those actions as I mentioned at the beginning, where suddenly you start taking all these actions where nothing matters anymore. Like that one student that was presenting that big, comprehensive business plan. When she started feeling apathetic. They didn't just affect that business plan. She now stopped following her diet plan. She stopped going to bed on time, she stopped doing the other things that mattered to her because she had this thought that nothing mattered doesn't matter anyway. And so apathy doesn't just affect that one area of your life. It'll start trickling down to other areas awesome.

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So I want you to notice that and to be honest to yourself, next time you're feeling blah. Next time you're feeling unmotivated, next time you Thinking about like, this doesn't matter. This is stupid, who cares? I want you to notice what that is, I want you to have the awareness that that is fear, trying to show up as apathy and keep you from taking action. That's exactly what it is. It's fear showing up as apathy, trying to keep you from taking action. This one was huge for me. This one of apathy was huge for me, my ego would show up and try to make me believe that I was better than whatever that was, it would tell me things like, who cares? That's so stupid, you're so much better than that, go do this instead. Or That's so dumb, who cares?

Anytime I would perceive a failure, my reflex thought was, who cares? That doesn't really matter, or That's so stupid. Those are the two things I would tell myself. So I want you to notice, how does apathy show up for you? What are you telling yourself? How does it make you feel? What is that feeling associated with those thoughts for you, who cares if that doesn't really matter? Now I'm sure you can

come up with your own examples. And I want you to just be onto yourself now, so that next time you catch yourself reflexing to apathy again, you pause and you notice what's coming up for you. And you don't even have to do anything different, you can still avoid the action, you don't even have to take action. Just notice that I just want you to notice how apathy is showing up for you, how it makes you feel, and the actions that you take because of it. Again, you don't even have to do anything different. You get to choose what you do once you notice. My invitation to you is just notice. Okay, sweet friends, I will talk to you next week sending all of you so much love today

Vanessa 11:52

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](http://VanessaCalderonmd.com/join). I'll see you there.