



Conscious Life presents

ANXIETY SUPER CONFERENCE

Accessing core emotions beyond anxiety

Guest: Hilary Jacobs Hendel

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[00:00:10] Meagen Gibson

Welcome to this interview. I'm Meagen Gibson, co-host of the Anxiety Super Conference. Today I'm speaking with Hilary Jacobs Hendel, a trauma psychotherapist, educator and author of the award winning book *It's Not Always Depression: Working the Change Triangle to Listen to the Body, Discover Core Emotions, and Connect to Your Authentic Self*.

Hilary is a certified psychoanalyst and an AEDP psychotherapist and supervisor. She's published articles in the *New York Times*, *Time*, *Oprah*, and her blog is read worldwide.

Hilary Jacobs Hendel, thank you so much for being with us today.

Hilary Jacobs Hendel

Meagen, thank you for having me back to talk about my favorite subject, emotions and anxiety.

Meagen Gibson

Well, I'd love it if you could just start by telling me your understanding of anxiety.

Hilary Jacobs Hendel

Yes. And I will make this brief, and then I guess we will back up from there.

A very helpful way to understand anxiety is as an important signal. And the signal is that we're having underlying core emotions. Core emotions are these inborn, innate, not in conscious control, core survival emotions that we've evolved to have really to help us fare better in life, to protect us from what's dangerous and to encourage us to move forward to what is interesting.

And when these come up and we don't welcome them, and of course, none of us do because we live in this emotion phobic, very dysfunctional society that teaches us to shove our emotions down, when we do that, we feel anxiety.

And so it's a wonderful, hopeful way to research back to understand anxiety because it gives us a tool to heal ourselves and ameliorate and lessen anxiety at the root cause. So it's not just constantly using tools and techniques to curb anxiety in the moment, but we can do these practices that I'm sure we'll talk about that will actually lessen our anxiety over time as we move on in life.

[00:02:17] Meagen Gibson

So if I hear you right, there are tools and techniques to cope with anxiety as the signal, as you were saying, but what you're saying is in order to alleviate anxiety longer term, there's some deeper work that needs to happen to work with it and get to those core emotions that it's inhibiting?

Hilary Jacobs Hendel

Yes. And I would say on a daily basis I can recognize my anxiety and I can do some self-talk and I can repeat that every time I get anxious and say, oh, it's going to be okay, or this is temporary. There's all these mantras in the moment.

But when I'm really on top of my game and I can find a moment to myself, I'm going to do a sequence of events that include slowing down, going into my body where emotions live, particularly core emotions, and trying to identify, am I sad? Am I angry? Am I fearful? Am I disgusted? Am I excited and happy?

Because believe it or not, people shove down those emotions all the time and they make us anxious. So by identifying the underlying emotions I'm going to go here in my body where the emotions that are coming up I can work with those to release those and my anxiety will go down, not only in the moment, but if I keep that cycle going. And then I can eventually skip the anxious part in a way and go right to what am I feeling?

This is a tool, this change triangle that is really a tool to use as a practice over a lifetime to increase our emotional health and well being through the process of identifying where we are, whether we're in anxiety or whether we're in core emotions.

Meagen Gibson

I want to get back to the change triangle in just a second, but I do want to go back to one thing that you said, because I really liked how you separated out that there are the techniques that you can do to calm yourself when you're in an overwhelmed state of anxiety. And then going back once you're in what feels like a safer place, a more capable place of looking at those underneath core emotions.

Because especially anxiety is so tricky in that it can feel so different for so many people. There's such a variety of symptomology and signals that come with anxiety. And so for one person, it might feel like chest pains and panic attacks. And for another person, it might feel like complete and total shutdown where they can't think or complete work or have thoughts. For another person that might be intrusive thoughts and things like that.

Meagen Gibson

So anxiety has such a variety of symptomatology that just getting beyond that activated state is step one, as you just said.

Hilary Jacobs Hendel

Yes. And you're absolutely right that part of what I teach when I teach emotions education and what I wrote about in the book is, one, learning about anxiety. So just as you said, you can have cognitive anxiety, which is anxiety that manifests in difficulty thinking, dizziness, ear ringing, blurry vision. We

can have anxiety in the striated muscles of our body where we feel a pressure and tension in the chest, you can't take a deep breath, we might feel tightness in different areas, tingling in different areas.

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And then in the smooth muscle where people get stomach pains. They have irritable bowel syndrome, they have diarrhea, and the frequency of urination.

So anxiety presents in many ways both in the mind and the body, and we have to build our own relationship with our own anxiety through a process of curiosity and trial and error and really being courageous to lean in so that we can identify anxiety when it comes up and then have a variety of tools. You cannot have too many tools to help ourselves in this day and age.

Meagen Gibson

I love that. Sorry, go ahead.

Hilary Jacobs Hendel

I was going to say whether it's things to work on in the moment or long-term healing, it's all good. It's all important. And there's much to learn.

Meagen Gibson

Absolutely. And the earlier we can learn it, the better.

Hilary Jacobs Hendel

Yes. And we should be getting this information early on in our schooling, it's just our society is not there yet. And I'm hoping that the change triangle and other tools that I didn't invent, that I extracted from the academic and scientific literature that helped me so much when I foresaw these things when I was training that I was like, where was this information when I was 18?

I would have been a better parent, I would have been a better partner, and I would have understood that the way that I blocked my anxiety was with these behaviors that we all do to avoid emotions that were overworking or dieting or things that we do to escape the emotional discomfort in our bodies.

One, because it's painful, but also because without the emotion education, these weird feelings and sensations in our body where emotions live, are frightening. They're uncomfortable because we haven't been taught that it's normal to experience this and this and this. And that's normal, you're fine but this is what needs to be done to feel better.

Meagen Gibson

I'm so glad that you named that. I'm reminded, a couple of weeks ago I went on a field trip, an all day field trip on a charter bus with a hundred 4th graders. And before we left, one of the boys, who was a friend of my child's, came up and he said, I've got this strange feeling in my stomach. And I was like, do you want to tell me more about it? And he said, yeah, I feel sick to my stomach. And I was like, say more. I just kept saying, say more.

[00:08:30]

And he was like, well, I'm nervous and I'm excited. And I was like, yes, both of those things can be true at the same time. Thank you so much for sharing that with me. And that seems totally normal. But I only bring that up because so many of us don't even have that 9 year old understanding or that 9 year old validation of where things live in our bodies, how we feel them, why we feel them, and that multiple feelings can be true at the same time.

Hilary Jacobs Hendel

Absolutely. Meagen, that is so touching, it's such a beautiful, I want to say, intervention. It's very therapeutic.

And this little boy, I think if we're not taught to keep our feelings secret because they're not responded too well, I think we are wired naturally to share and to look to adults for comfort.

And so it seems to me just his inner natural, authentic self and wisdom that allowed him to notice, because if we're not cutting ourselves off from emotions in our head and in these various brilliant ways that we block emotional discomfort with these things that are called defenses. But defenses aren't bad. We need defenses at times. Not being cut off from them he could feel the butterflies in his stomach. It's extraordinary. He's excited and he's nervous. And each one we have to hold them separately.

Meagen Gibson

And that's why I love your work so much and why it's so important to me that we share it because it takes villages, they say, of people to support people, even as adults. But the principle applies to children, especially as long as someone has one trusted adult.

And I can imagine a scenario where if it wasn't another parent or a teacher, or somebody else in that moment had said something like, well, you better not get sick on the bus. Instead of saying... I'm not trying to applaud myself for my reaction. I'm just saying it's a very normal... People react in different ways to information.

So had someone said something like, you better not get sick on the bus, then he's got warned but he hasn't been validated in that emotion and those feelings and now feels like sharing those feelings, something bad will happen. So I want more adults to be informed in this way so that they can not only hold space for the kids in their lives, but also for the adults in their lives.

Hilary Jacobs Hendel

I could not have said it better myself. All those things that were going on in that moment when you responded with curiosity and compassion and you didn't shut him down, is so huge.

And I agree with you so much about this is really teaching parents, because when kids don't feel well, parents naturally get anxious because they don't have an emotion education. When you said that about the kid on the bus, the first thing that came to me was, oh my God, I wonder if she's nervous that he's going to throw up right there and then.

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And the fact that you didn't go there and that you, again, remained curious in what was going on for him emotionally is very touching and exactly what we all need to be learning to respond to our loved ones, no matter how old they are. With that sense of tell me more, what's going on? What are you feeling? Not having to fix anything because often there's nothing to fix. And if we do want to feel that impulse to fix something, we really have to ask for permission. I hear you're feeling anxious, do you want me to give you some tips that have helped me?

Other than that, I think just allowing someone to say, I'm so sorry, what do you think is going on? Some of the emotions that you're experiencing right now are based on what's happening in your immediate environment and in the world, and of course, there's so much going on in the world that leads to anxiety.

Because underneath it we're frightened for our own safety, we're disgusted by war and the killing for no reason. We're angry about it. We're sad about it. It's all those emotions. And hopefully you'll show up a graphic that shows how emotions, when they bunch together in the body, are like a blob of anxiety. But when we can, even something simply as just naming, I feel sad and I feel angry and I feel disgusted. And imagining them separate with a lot of air and space in between is very helpful.

The mind likes to understand what's going on, and when we can name the feelings underneath the anxiety, there's a dropping down or a settling. And then, of course, the next step is each of those emotions need to be tended to because core emotions, which we're not talking about today but are really the crossroads of what we do next, whether we move through them and then get to a calmer, more regulated, balanced place, or whether we block them and move up that triangle up into our head and bouncing back between anxiety and avoidance. Like drinking and doing drugs and overworking and overeating and all those things.

Meagen Gibson

I would love it if you touched on that just a little bit more because that is such a huge byproduct of anxiety and the coping mechanisms that are easily available to us is avoidance. Whether that be numbing behaviors or alcohol and drug abuse or just even use, for that matter. Talk to me about some of those avoidance tactics and what that does and doesn't get you.

Hilary Jacobs Hendel

So the way that I talk about defenses is that they are these brilliant, creative mechanisms that the mind and body creates at the time that we need them. So when we are usually starting from very early on as children, emotions are always being triggered in us because emotions are there to teach us how the environment has affected us.

And when we are overwhelmed by emotions, which young people are because they're more emotional, their emotions are bigger and they're less tempered by thoughts and executive function, the cognitions.

Meagen Gibson

It's all feel. There's no rationalization. It's just, I'm hungry therefore the world is going to end.

[00:15:20] Hilary Jacobs Hendel

Exactly. So we're having these.

And emotions affect the body before we even know we're having them. The vagus nerve gets triggered and it changes all the organs in the body because the purpose of a core emotion is to ready the body for an adaptive action. That's such a profound thing. We should all know that. It's really my pet peeve that turns into a moral outrage that you learn about math and reading in school and that's great, but if you learn about trigonometry, you never use it but emotions are affecting us all the time.

So back to being a kid and having emotions. If we are overwhelmed by stressful situations and there's not enough support, because as I said before, especially when we're younger, we are wired to be soothed by adults. We can't yet soothe ourselves.

So if you come from a household where there was lots of wounding going on, where there was emotional neglect or absentee or alcoholism or anything trauma related, likely we're going to be left alone as children with overwhelming emotions. And so on our own the best we can do is squeeze it down using breath holding and muscular contraction.

And so you've got this awful feeling cocktail of core emotions coming up that are perfectly natural and designed to help us and for our parents to make sense of them. The squeezing down of emotions with anxiety or shame or guilt. These are other inhibitory emotions. And that whole mix of emotions feels so awful, literally like we could explode or implode or disappear. It's just so painful that we develop defenses. These ways of avoiding emotions.

And these defenses when we use them a little bit, like if you have a good enough family and you use defenses in small amounts when you need it. Like right now if I have a really tough day at work, I'm going to be aware that I'm going to enlist a defense like playing Solitaire on my phone and maybe even having a drink to calm everything down.

But if I am habitually blocking access to emotions, I'm going to develop chronic anxiety, chronic depression, chronic aggression, and up into different personality disorders that are commensurate with how much trauma, how much aloneness we have with our traumas and our disposition of how we work and the defenses that we have a propensity for. So if there's like a genetic disposition towards eating disorders, then we might go there and so on and so on.

So defenses alone aren't bad, the problem is if we only use defenses that they become entrenched in part of our armor so that we are spending, this is unconscious, of course, that the mind and body has to spend a lot of time keeping emotions at bay and energy is diverted to maintaining defenses. And we don't have energy for engagement in life with other people and with things that stimulate our mind like endeavors.

So we think of children that are a failure to launch, that are home with anxiety, they need healing and help and support so their nervous system calms down and their engagement and energy comes online for the vitality of living and not just to throw a pill at somebody.

So defenses, again, are bad, they're harmful when they're used all the time. And they're also commensurate with how much trauma so that we can think of just a light defense of distracting ourself with a good Netflix comedy versus unconscious dissociation. Because we've had traumas

where we literally could not be in our bodies and could not be in our heads because it's too painful so we are on some other planet in that moment trying to survive and go through the motions of life.

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And the trick is to work back down that triangle. The reason I keep referencing the triangle is because it's a simple looking tool that takes very complex concepts of emotions for regular human beings. I teach this to the public, not to therapists. And it gives a guide to what has to be done to feel better that makes sense.

So when we're in defenses all the time, we know we need to reacquaint ourselves, reconnect to our emotions and get used to feeling them again in a safe way so that we can now move through emotions instead of perpetually blocking them.

Meagen Gibson

And get better at identifying them before we want to go to a defense. First and foremost start getting clear about what your underlying emotions might be and then recognizing the moment when they get overwhelming and you might want to default to a defense.

Hilary Jacobs Hendel

Yes, so that's to do with the conscious way, but also when we can be with our emotions and manage them and connect to them and feel them, even though they may be painful, and move through them, the defenses naturally melt away because they're there for a reason, they're there for protection.

But if you put up a picture of that triangle now and you see that when we move through emotions, we end up in what's called the open hearted state of the authentic self, which is when we are calmest, most confident. When we have curiosity and we feel connected to the world. You'll see all those c words as I talk about it.

From there we can deal directly with problems in life and conflicts. We can assert our needs and set limits and boundaries and feel okay enough saying no to things that aren't good for us and learn how to speak a common language with other people about our emotional well being.

When we are living in defenses, we're just escaping, and largely we're alone and in a place that doesn't feel so good. We feel disconnected from ourselves and disconnected from others.

Now the change triangle will predict that, as we try to move over defenses, so if I'm in a therapy session with you and I see you looking for your watch and checking the time and asking when the session is over, I might say I'm wondering if there's some feelings coming up that are making you want to get out of here. And I'm wondering if we really slow down, if you stayed and we tried to validate what's happening, can we slow way down together. Maybe take a couple of deep breaths together, feel our connection and have you scan your body, what do you notice?

Now if I ask you not to use a defense on purpose, I'm going to predict that you're probably going to feel anxious because it's the anxiety we're escaping from. So if you just think logically, you're working backwards. If we don't escape, there's going to be some anxiety and then I'm going to help you slow down, which calms anxiety. We're going to learn how to belly breathe together and feel our feet on

the floor and maybe look at the different colors in the room to come into the here and now with you feeling my presence.

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And I'm going to say, okay, as the anxiety calms down, if you feel it in your body and you focus on it and you breathe. And then I'm going to ask you, what do you notice? Is the anxiety getting worse or getting better? And likely you'll say, getting better. And I'll say, I'm wondering if we can name what emotions are coming up now, that you're aware of now that the anxiety is a little bit lower. And I'll say, do you notice any sadness? And you might say yes. And I'll say, do you notice any anger? And you might say, yes, that's there too.

So I'll let you know. You can have lots of emotions at the same time, and they can be opposite in nature. And we don't need to qualify why we're having emotions. We just are. So we're accepting them and naming them, and that's probably going to feel a lot more organizing for you.

And then the second to last step would be which one of the emotions feels most front and center more important? And we'll begin to process each of the core emotions. And as we do, you'll feel better and better.

And then the idea is as you practice that you're able to take that into your life and say, oh, I'm moving towards a defense, like you said, if I don't go there, what am I feeling? Anxiety. Can I calm my anxiety, recognize my emotions, validate them? And it becomes not only a tool to use in trauma psychotherapy and regular psychotherapy, but as a self-help tool to make use of out in the world.

And I use it myself every day. I validate my anxiety. I feel it in my body. I slow it down, and I try to name the emotions that I'm feeling and then be with those and listen to those because they're wisdom, they're important communications and signals that are there to help us. And if we reframe it and think of it like that, it's a whole different ball game than going, oh my God I feel terrible. What's wrong with me? Am I okay?

So it's a game changer.

Meagen Gibson

And I'm so glad that you just named the slowing down part of it because so often we associate anxiety with running away from it or getting away from it or managing it. And just slow down and just listen and say, all right, what are you trying to tell me? What do I need to pay attention to in a way that's open and nonjudgmental? And be patient enough to sit through it.

And often, I don't know if you want to put a time on it, but often it feels like it takes an eternity for that process to happen. But when we give it the time and the space, I found in my own life that it doesn't take that long at all. That just giving it the actual space and time, I mean, we're talking less than 5 minutes a lot of times, depending on how big the emotion is, for me to get through the anxious reactivity of it.

Hilary Jacobs Hendel

Yes, that's exactly right. That it doesn't take much time, but it's scary to do at first.

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I remember my very first training in AEDP, which is the type of therapy that I now do after becoming more of a traditional psychoanalyst. And we broke up into small groups to practice. And the prompt was that a student who was playing the therapist was supposed to ask, what am I feeling? And I said, anxious. And the next prompt was, how do you know? What are you experiencing? And I said, I feel like a fluttering in my chest. And then the scariest prompt was, can you notice the feeling in your chest?

So can I, instead of going up into my head and avoiding it with thoughts, can I actually lean right in and connect to the anxiety by noticing it the way you might notice if I was pinching, you notice physical sensation, you notice the tightness in your chest.

And I remember thinking, I'm not sure how this is going to go. I feel like I might go out of control, but I trusted and I listened. So I tuned into my anxiety in my chest. She said, just notice it with love and compassion and just breathe. And much to my dismay, and I was blown away, I started to calm down.

And it was so counterintuitive because I had always gone up into my head. I lived in my head, analyzing myself and judging myself, that I never forgot it. And it really changed the course of my life, that one moment. Because I was like, wow, if I can calm myself down by focusing inward, what else can I do by focusing inward? And it turns out quite a lot, but I don't think I would have had the courage to do that had I not had the education to know what to expect.

We would watch videos of therapists working this way. And so when you know what to expect, I don't know if everyone is this way, but for me, when I know what to expect, when I know why I'm doing something and someone explains what's likely to happen, I'm much more courageous to do it. And really, that's why I became so passionate about teaching basic emotion education. And the feedback is it really does help.

The other interesting thing about emotions, really the bummer, is that we can't think our way through an emotion because that would be so great if we could just escape in your head and say, oh, there's no reason to be sad or just get over it.

And if 'get over it' worked, we'd be in a different world where everybody would be calm and peaceful. But 'get over it' doesn't work and so we need to learn tips and techniques in modern life where we have much more free time to think about ourselves and therefore to feel anxious and depressed.

Back hundreds of years ago, when it was all day, every day foraging for food and building shelter to stay alive, there wasn't really time to dwell on our emotional awareness. But it's a whole different ball game in modern times.

And so we do need these tools, I think, to survive and to progress as a world even that's peaceful. Because, say, war is caused by anger gone unchecked, that we're not mindful of our being angry and can use tools. People just fight.

Anxiety does speed us up. That's another important thing to know about anxiety. It's like an engine. It will rev us up. So in that anxiety, we will say stupid things, we will say impulsive things, we will do impulsive things.

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And unless we have some active wherewithal to say, I have to slow myself down. I know I'm anxious. I know nothing good comes with speeding up. Or as I say to my husband, just sit back on it, because he gets very anxious. I'm like, just lean back, don't lean forward, don't go over your skis. Sit back. Let's come into the present moment, just see what's happening. And it's very helpful. And everybody can learn to do these tips and tools and techniques. There are not that many moves.

Meagen Gibson

I'm glad you said so much of that because that's one of the appealing properties of anxiety. And some of the ways that it manifests is that high functioning anxiety can be very helpful for high functioning people. Especially perfectionistic type A, high achieving people. It feels like the best shot of caffeine when you need it the most, to just function on the panic and just roll through all of that, the energy and focus your thoughts.

But on the other side of that is the things that you can't control with conscious thought, as you were just saying, if you could think your way out of a feeling.

And so I was reviewing your book yesterday before we talked, and I really love this part where you were talking about what anxiety costs us if we don't pay attention to it. And not to put you on a spot, but do you remember what you were talking about?

Hilary Jacobs Hendel

There's so many things if we don't pay attention to anxiety, but what are you thinking of?

Meagen Gibson

So basically what you were saying is that, especially in the unconscious part of what it costs us, so energy and elevated stress hormones and actual brain power. I was just alluding to that higher functioning anxiety engine but there's no room for wondering or creativity or play in your brain power when you're functioning on anxiety.

Hilary Jacobs Hendel

Exactly. And I find I do not think as well as when I am in commerce. So there really is, there may be the perception. I've worked with so many patients or clients, whatever you like to call them, that were afraid of getting rid of their anxiety because they thought that they wouldn't be as successful, or that if I had no anxiety, I would do nothing.

And that's so sad because, one, it's not true, but you can understand how if anxiety has been motivating you, if your parents were like slave drivers, you've got to get straight As, you've got to be productive, you've got to be good in athletics, you've got to be good in sports, and you've got to be good in this. And every time the kid wanted to just sleep in, that's lazy, you've got to move, you're constantly anxious because, unless for very few people that would be like a natural state, because you're constantly being driven. Then we internalize that and we drive ourselves. It's all we've ever known.

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So you can understand how someone would feel like I won't do anything because there's an unconscious maybe or out of awareness wish not to do anything. I'm tired. I'm tired, I just want to do nothing. And if I didn't have that anxiety, I would do nothing.

But the truth is that when we're in that state of core self, of the authentic self, when the nervous system is calm and balanced, we're like a well oiled machine and there is natural drive.

Just think of what humans have accomplished since we've been on Earth. We wouldn't have accomplished it if there isn't a natural drive. And so when we're feeling our best, we want novelty, we want to create, like you said, we have a natural drive to accomplish and to go big and expansive.

And so sometimes people have to learn that about themselves and take that leap of faith that if they learn how to calm down and work with their emotions, maybe for a while they'll need to rest. But it's maybe similar to when people say I'm afraid to feel my sadness, for example, because if I start crying, I'll never stop. And I say I know how it feels. I do know that's how it feels, but I promise you that's not what's going to happen.

And usually when you feel an emotion, and I write about this in the story of Fran in my book, who had never grieved her parents death, that there was so much anxiety about feeling it because the memory as a kid of this being so overwhelming, brought into adulthood is that I won't be able to handle this. But in fact, it's like most core motions, last about 2 minutes. They're like waves and you just ride the wave similar to when you stub your toe and there's no pain at first, and then the pain gets bigger and bigger and you're like, when is this going to stop? And then it stops.

And so that's what usually happens. There is an ending with an emotion. And it's the same way that if we allow ourselves to rest, we will eventually get bored and want to do something, unless we're depressed or there's again, another block, but if you're in your core authentic self.

It's just like the older I get, in a way, it's like I've learned to trust myself more. So let's say I have a deadline for an article that I'm writing and I'm not in the mood for a particular on this day, I've now learned to trust myself that if I just let it be, rest, do something I need to do or want to do that I'm in the mood for, sleep on it. It's never been the fact that the mood hasn't shifted because our moods are always changing. Everything is always temporary.

Like Melissa Ethridge says, who I love, "The only thing that stays the same is change".

Meagen Gibson

Exactly.

Hilary Jacobs Hendel

You're always changing, and you just have to have faith that how you feel in one minute is not how you're going to feel.

So for people that are worried that their anxiety is all that is driving them, you may not be as productive. It's true. There may be some things that will change, but it's going to be worth it in the better feeling that you have.

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And for people out there that have no choice, that have young kids and work full time or work more than one job, it's exhausting. And there is so much anxiety and there really is no place to rest. And then it's just getting through. But if you have the luxury to be able to work with your emotions and work on feeling less anxious, I think it's only a win win. I've never seen anyone say, oh, I regret the therapy that I did.

Meagen Gibson

And I'm so glad you named that too, because there are definitely seasons of life in which it's just not in your best interest to try it. I mean, it is actually in your best interest, ironically, but there are seasons in your life where it's more accessible, that you try to slow down and do this work.

And you're right. When there's multiple children clawing at you and needing your attention and you have way less sleep than you need and you're not eating as well, you're eating crusts of bread discarded by your children in between moments, that's not the point to be like, I wonder how I feel right now, because there's just no space for it.

And those seasons come as life progresses as well. Once you get older and your children are grown, you might have an ill parent that you need to take care of or an adult child that's demanding a lot of time for whatever reason. So these seasons come and go, but when we're able to, when we have the space and the accessibility to, to really slow down.

Hilary Jacobs Hendel

It's really important.

And so many people also struggle with giving themselves permission. They feel guilty, particularly women, I find, who are taking care of kids and giving to their parents and working jobs. But as I share with my patients and myself that, if you're running on fumes, what I said to someone just yesterday is, if you go down, if you stress yourself so much, you will get depressed, you will develop symptoms.

In fact, I went through two major depressions in my life and I didn't understand why, because I thought I could just heap on the work and do more and do more and do more. And what those depressions taught me is that I'm not a machine, is that I have to take care of myself and listen to myself.

As the head of the household, if you go down, you're not going to be good for anyone. So it's much better to say no and I have to take an hour for myself to rest. I have to take a vacation. Even though it's very hard, people feel very guilty about taking care of themselves. But when you think that okay, if you think it through, what's the point of not taking care of myself and then I become immobilized and depressed, then I'm not good for anyone. That's some good self talk to give you the courage to say, okay, I've got to respect my feelings and my anxiety.

And anxiety will be the first sign, if you have anxiety, day in, day out and it's getting worse, you have to pay attention to it because of all the aforementioned stress on the body, the hormones, and you'll eventually stop making serotonin. And that's the neurochemical you need to not develop symptoms of depression when you can't make all the neurotransmitters you need, will start to get symptomatic. And the only way through that, if you don't want to just take a pill, is to slow down and be with what's

happening, know what's happening from an emotional standpoint, process those emotions and try to make changes in the outside world, your environment, if there's just too much on your plate.

[00:40:53] Meagen Gibson

And I think the old saying goes, if you don't make time for it, your body will demand time for you to make for it.

Hilary Jacobs Hendel

Exactly. You'll get sick.

Meagen Gibson

And I think so many people overestimate or underestimate, I mean, the effects of stress and the avoidance tactics on their system. Just literally on your actual organs, your heart muscles, and your ability to just cope with your digestion. All the things that become minor inconveniences but then add up to be major health issues if we aren't careful. Your autoimmune system, all of those things can be affected and impacted by this.

Hilary Jacobs Hendel

Exactly. So people out there listening, it's important to take good care of yourself. You matter. You deserve it.

Meagen Gibson

And just like you said earlier and we were discussing that it really only takes a few minutes sometimes to really calm down, slow down enough to identify an emotion. Sometimes that recharge and the break that you need, whatever you can negotiate to get is enough.

If you say, I need 5 whole and uninterrupted minutes to literally just lay on my back and breathe and then I promise I will return to all of my demands, then you should ask for that. Everybody can negotiate something with themselves, their families, their partners, their work.

Hilary Jacobs Hendel

That's true. And someone who is so overworked, just to go back to emotions for a second, is likely going to be angry. And to really validate that anger can be very helpful. But to really validate it, this sucks. I'm so furious that my husband needs so much help and doesn't pull his weight around the house. And my kids are pawing at me.

And certainly for men, and we should be talking about every gender in between, one thing we didn't talk about is that anger can be a defensive emotion also that's a link to underlying tender emotions like sadness.

Meagen Gibson

Anything vulnerable.

[00:43:08] Hilary Jacobs Hendel

Exactly. And that men and women get such a raw deal with emotions in our society for different reasons. And certain emotions we know are culturally sanctioned. Like for men it's okay for them to be angry and quite sexual, but they're taught to feel ashamed if they feel sad or frightened. And so if things like losses come up for me, they'll often get anxious instead of feeling sad because the mind learns it's not okay to feel sad, I'm going to bury that sadness. And instead it's just going to happen where there's an anxious energy that's going to come up instead.

And same with women, they're taught it's not okay to be angry and it's not okay to be sexual, but it's okay to be sad and fragile and scared.

Meagen Gibson

Demure.

Hilary Jacobs Hendel

Exactly. And so we learn what emotions are okay and what are not. We learn this out of awareness. It's not conscious. And then these emotions can then bind with anxiety or bind with shame so that when they come up in life, I used to be terrible with any type of sadness because we didn't do sadness in my family. It was all like, let's figure out what's making you sad and make you happy.

Meagen Gibson

Snap out of it.

Hilary Jacobs Hendel

It was not like a 'snap out of it' because I had a really sweet and loving mom, and they were psychologically aware. But it was like, I see now as she's gotten older that she doesn't do sadness in such a profound way that when you get older and there's all these losses, she's anxious. She's so anxious.

And I'm like, mom, you've got to work that change triangle. It's okay to feel sad that you can't move like you used to. That's a loss and losses, were wired when we lose something to feel sadness. And if we block the sadness because we're scared of it or we feel that there's some stigma around being sad or it's not who we identify as being, then we're going to feel anxious instead.

So they understand how emotions work in the mind and body. And the reason I keep talking about this change triangle is because I haven't found really an emotional health tool that is as concise and pippy and comprehensive as that. I just love it. It's just a good guide to know what's going on, and then you have a choice of whether you want to do something about it or not. We can work with our emotions on various levels depending on what we feel comfortable with. But educating is the first step, and it is really a help.

Meagen Gibson

Just that base step of seeing the actual diagram and knowing the process that you can go through given any emotion, but especially ones like anxiety and all of the underlying things that you've named

already, shame and guilt and all those things. Understanding that process, how it happens in your system and in your brain and in your body is such a great tool.

[00:46:08] Hilary Jacobs Hendel

It is. And the way that, because now we're just talking, we're not really showing anything, but it's really through stories. That's why I write lots of stories, so that another person can get some sense of what do I actually do with this anxiety? And what happens when I actually identify anger? And what does it look like to actually move anger through the body?

And that's why so much of what I write is really trying to show it not just lecture like we're doing. We're both relating left brain to left brain, but because again, you have to experience an emotion and how do you teach and experience? It's through story and that's where the stories are so helpful. And really being a fly on the wall and intuiting how this would look like for each and every one of us.

Meagen Gibson

And on that note, a very good time to tell everybody that they should definitely pick up your book, It's *Not Always Depression*, which you and I know have joked could be called *It's Not Always Anxiety* or a variety of other things.

Hilary Jacobs Hendel

Or just *Basic Emotions Education*. The title was based on an article. A lot of people have said that title just doesn't fit the book. It's a basic emotions education that's practical, that everybody needs to know, and that hopefully will be taught in high school within the next 20 years. And then I can stop doing all this. My work will be done, and I can die.

Meagen Gibson

Your legacy will continue. I'm not going to talk about your death but your legacy will go on.

Hilary Jacobs Hendel

I'm just the messenger. All these great researchers, science researchers, effective neuroscience is the topic.

But yes, I would love people to read, I always say I wrote it to be a beach read. No jargon, very simple. And it's an audiobook because a lot of people don't like to read these days.

Meagen Gibson

It's super accessible. And all of your social media have tons of the change triangle explanations so people can access that anywhere, but where can people find out more about you and your work outside of the book?

Hilary Jacobs Hendel

Well, I have a website that's my name, hilaryjacobshendel.com and it's really just full of free resources. The blog articles never go out of, what would you say? They never go to style. They're not

time dependent. They're just about different emotions and different scenarios that come up with life in relationships, trauma, in regular life and childhood. And just a way to help think about emotions and work with emotions so that it builds emotional health and well being for the rest of your life.

[00:49:01]

That the more you work the triangle, which means taking that pause in the moment of a trigger to identify what corner you're on and then what to do next. And maybe we can put up that diagram that I call the change triangle cheat sheet. It tells you what to do at each corner.

So definitely hilaryjacobshendel.com and I hope you'll all visit it and poke around. And if you sign up for my email list, I send a new article once a month and I try not to, I don't spam you with anything except maybe I'm going to let people know about this talk. But I don't like a lot of email junk in my email so I try to just write about something that will be helpful that applies to being human.

And I'm all over [social media](#) because that's the way to share education. Not because I love social media, but it's a good way to disseminate knowledge.

And then there's [The Change Triangle](#) YouTube channel, which is great if you want to hear a full presentation on the triangle or I do these mini meditations, or experiments as I call them in the book, where if you need to cry, there's one on how to move sadness through you. There's several other practical videos. I teach grounding and breathing where you can just learn some of the tips and techniques that I teach.

So I would love it if you all would stay connected to me in those various ways.

Meagen Gibson

Fantastic. Hilary Jacobs Hendel, thank you for being with us today.

Hilary Jacobs Hendel

Thank you so much for having me. Take good care.