



## Conscious Life presents

### Using the Change Triangle to Integrate Trauma

**Guest: Hilary Jacobs Hendel**

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#### **[00:00:09] Meagen Gibson**

Welcome to this interview. I'm Meagen Gibson, co-host of this Super Conference. Today I'm speaking with Hilary Jacobs Hendel, the author of the international 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*.

She's a certified Psychoanalyst, and Accelerated Experiential Dynamic Psychotherapy, or AEDP, psychotherapist and supervisor. Hilary Jacobs Hendel. Thank you so much for being with me today.

#### **Hilary Jacobs Hendel**

Thanks Meagen. I'm glad to be here talking about my favorite subjects.

#### **Meagen Gibson**

I'd love it if we could start with just giving everybody a brief overview of what is Accelerated Experiential Dynamic Psychotherapy, and why should people trying to heal and understand their trauma be interested in it?

#### **Hilary Jacobs Hendel**

I'm so glad you asked. To make this organized for all of you watching out there, it begins with the idea that there's reasons for hope for healing. Growing up I thought we just had to accept our lot in life, and do our best to push on, but as it turns out, the brain can change. There's three important factors for the brain to positively change towards healing.

We know that the brain negatively changes because one traumatic event can alter the course of your life, but also one very positive, brain integrating mind and body, integrating positive event can equally change the rest of things for the rest of your life. In AEDP we call it a transformational model.

## **[00:01:56] Hilary Jacobs Hendel**

How do we help people transform? There's really 3 key ingredients. 1) is just the awareness that the brain is plastic, meaning it can move and change and rewire. We're wired in our experiences, and we can rewire our brain with new learning, and new transformational experiences that we're going to be talking about today.

The other ingredients for healing, we have to be able to process emotions, and we're going to talk a lot about that today, that emotions are physical, they're body-based experiences. In particular, these important category of emotions called core emotions, which we are wired to have from the day that we are born, probably a little bit before, from the get-go, you could think of these core emotions, and there are seven of them that are the most important from a clinical perspective. Anger, sadness, fear, disgust, joy, excitement and sexual excitement.

These are the ones that when we block or bury, through no fault of our own, we have to create. The mind has to erect ways to deal with that emotional, for lack of a better word, the energy that emotions generate and bring up, that wants to come up and out. To heal, we have to be able to change the brain, we have to be able to understand what it means to process an emotion.

Relationships, and securely attached connected relationships are the third ingredient for healing because 1) we're wired for connection, and that's why the type of trauma that I'm really going to be addressing today has to do with childhood trauma. Many of these wounds consistent over a period of time and not even labeled as trauma, that they are, for all essence invisible, although that's changing quite a bit.

These are the wounds, for example, of having a family around us that is not attuned to our feelings whatsoever. Or worse, rejects our feelings, or worse, humiliates us for our feelings. As a result, there's no space for us to have feelings, we have to cope alone. And it's that aloneness in the face of emotions that in AEDP, we talk about creating psychopathology, which is just a jargony word for symptoms like anxiety, and depression, and dissociation, and out-of-body experiences, irritability, aggression, perfectionism, eating disorders, alcoholism.

All of these are defenses, protective defenses, believe it or not, against unbearable experiences that have an emotional component, and that we're alone with. It's logical, which I love about all this emotion stuff, that in order to heal, we can't be alone with our emotions anymore. Those that had to be relegated to the side that were unbearable because we were alone, in a therapeutic relationship with a therapist, who has some very specific qualities, like being able to be present, not being jarred by deep intense emotional experiences, being able to bear, and be there in a way that feels good and right to another person.

In that type of relationship we can go back and re-experience, learn how to re-experience our emotions in healthy ways. When we can do that, the symptoms melt away, we don't need them anymore for protection. We can now protect ourselves with our mind, and using our emotions, and setting boundaries, and using words. Those type of abilities that we have as adults that we really didn't have as children.

AEDP is a model that Diana Fosha developed, taking the best of current neuroscience and synthesizing it so that it's a model, where it's attachment-based, emotion-centered,

trauma-informed, in this way we're defining trauma as any experience where we were left alone with unbearable emotions.

### **[00:06:57] Hilary Jacobs Hendel**

And put it into a model that is incredibly effective, because many of the models out there, that just focus on talk and thinking, is really just half the picture. We have to work with emotions in the body in connection, and that includes all parts of our nervous system, is what is really, really effective.

I discovered AEDP back in 2003. Had the extreme good luck to have someone recommend Diana Fosha and her book to me, and to see her, and for 20 years I've been practicing it. I see the fruits of it for myself, and my patients, and the AEDP community.

I'm really delighted to be able to share more about it, and to let people know about it, because while it should be mainstream, some of these theories that are based in emotion are still relegated to the side, because we live in this nutty, dysfunctional, emotion phobic society still, that doesn't really understand, or has a block to understanding the relevance and importance of emotions, not as things to be acted upon, but as phenomena to experience inside ourselves, and then make good use of them, because they're data.

### **Meagen Gibson**

Absolutely. I'm so glad where you landed there, was perfect too, because as you were speaking I was thinking about emotions as data, as information. I think sometimes we get twisted up in the meaning that we're assigning to our emotions, and getting trapped in, oh, this must mean something, I must decipher it in this way, or unpack it in this way, or it's going to limit me in some way.

And when you look at emotions as information, and then practice with a skilled therapist like yourself, the ability to withstand the sensation involved in emotion, and then piece it apart, you're able to look at it as information, and then make choices instead of react.

### **Hilary Jacobs Hendel**

Yes, and I don't mean to simplify, emotions are excruciatingly painful at times. The more that we've buried our emotions from childhood, which we have all had to do to some degree, there is none of us that doesn't have trauma from just surviving our childhoods. Again, trauma as defined as unbearable emotions that can't be metabolized because we're too alone with them, and so we have to create maneuvers, these brilliant creative defenses to be able to go on with life.

Yet the body is so smart in a way that these things don't go away, they stay there, and if we're lucky we don't have symptoms throughout our life, but most of us do experience anxiety, and more and more depression we're seeing. So people, we need more education, just like we need education how to read and write, we need education about emotions, and the nervous system, so that we can prevent parents, and teachers, and people who work with children have skills and knowledge to prevent unwittingly creating trauma.

**[00:10:39] Hilary Jacobs Hendel**

We want to be able to ease existing symptoms, and we want to be able to know how we heal, should we want to heal. Not everybody is willing to go into a therapist, not everybody can afford to, or has access to therapy. But just by understanding why we feel bad, or feel bad about ourselves for no apparent reason, that we can figure out, understanding what might have happened that has led us to be the way we are, when we know we're not our full selves, we're not reaching what we think we can do.

We're timid about meeting people. We are scared to try and make mistakes because we were beaten up for our mistakes, sometimes literally, but sometimes just figuratively. Or emotionally blamed for making mistakes when we were just kids. It helps, the education I found to be transformational for myself, and particularly the triangle, the change triangle that I'm teaching anyone who wants to listen to me talk about emotions. I'm so passionate about sharing it, because when I learned how emotion worked in the mind and body, I was really helped, to put it mildly.

My working the triangle transformed my relationship with my emotions. My anxiety went down, I had suffered a couple of clinical depressions where I ended up on medication. And those I haven't had one since I've been paying attention to my emotions, I mean, it works.

**Meagen Gibson**

If you're in a place where you can't get support, how do we become safely connected in our healing journey without the aid of a professional like yourself?

**Hilary Jacobs Hendel**

It's a great concern. I think it goes back to that people mostly to me are wonderful, that when you approach people in a kind way, I know people would disagree with me, but I think most people are good and have intention to help. In fact, I think that at the basis, except for some people, we're a product of our experience, but we're also a product of our genetics. I'm not saying that genetically there aren't some people that turn out rotten sociopaths, that don't have a conscious, that don't have the capacity for empathy. But I think a lot of that happens from severe abuse and emotional neglect.

If we start with the presumption that there are good people out there, and that people can be educated on how to be there for each other. When my book came out, *It's Not Always Depression*, which shows, which teaches the Change Triangle in a very simple way. The Change Triangle, just to clarify, is a tool that I pulled out of the academic literature when I learned AEDP, and the other experiential therapies, it's an upside-down triangle. Let me just quickly share my screen, if that's okay.

**Meagen Gibson**

Please do.

**[00:14:04] Hilary Jacobs Hendel**

I didn't invent anything here, this is a triangle that I saw during my training. The very first time that I saw it, it didn't have as much on it, it was just a simple triangle with defenses on one corner, inhibitory emotions on the other, core emotions on the bottom, and basically that was it. What it was there to teach us at the time, is that we have these inborn programs called core emotions that are there to help us survive.

Meaning if you didn't have a program for fear, if we saw something menacing coming at us, let's just say an animal that seemed rabid or wild, the time it would take for us to see or hear, turn our head, orient in our brain to figure out what was happening, and then to run, would be too slow to survive an attack. So we evolved naturally over time to have these emotions which bypass thinking.

We take in information from the environment, from our senses, we might see a wild bear, we might hear rustling in the bushes, we might feel something like our hair standing up in our skin because something's coming close to us. It will ignite fear in the limbic system, the middle of the brain, which doesn't have conscious control. And then the nervous system, from the middle of the brain activates the lower brain, which activates the vagus nerve, which gets the body ready to run from danger. And it happens very quickly.

I'm sure everyone out there has had the experience of flinching, or running from danger before you really even know what's happening. It just happens in an instant. A flinch may be is the best way to know what the experience is, we can't control a flinch, it just happens, and it's a full-body experience.

The Change Triangle pretty much diagrams that we have these emotions that just happen to us. And if we are allowed to have them come up and out, and there's a safe other when we're a child, that allows us to make space for them. They come up like a wave, and then our nervous system settles down, and we come back to this place, that's a regulated nervous system. In the jargon, but what it is in plain language is, it's an open-hearted state of when we're just our authentic self. We feel calm, we feel curious, we feel connected, compassionate, creative, all these C words that explain or reflect what a calm nervous system looks like.

Then when something else happens that triggers an emotion, let's say something fantastic, like we hit a home run, we get all excited, and we got all happy. Then again, we have energy in the body, it comes up like a wave, and then we settle down, and that's when everything is working well. But for most of us, because our parents didn't understand emotions, and they had their own traumas, and there was no emotion education.

As kids we will get angry at our parents, for example, because we can't help it, our parent says no, and child gets angry. Most parents, or a lot of parents, will have a reaction to that anger, that the kid perceives as more of a threat than even the original threat. The child learns to bury the anger because they don't want their parent upset with them, they want to stay connected, and they want to feel in the good graces.

**[00:18:10] Hilary Jacobs Hendel**

Depending on what our environment was like to a greater or lesser degree, we will, this dotted line here reflects being cut off from our core emotions. When we suppress our emotions and push them down, we do it with these inhibitory emotions, anxiety, guilt, and shame can all work, each of them in their own ways, to cover up, or push down, or relegate to the side what our core emotional experience is.

Now I don't even feel anger anymore, I just go straight to guilt. I feel guilty all the time, I don't know why I feel guilty, but it's because originally there was an emotion that we were made to feel bad about, and it can become out of our awareness, believe it or not.

The bottom line is that when we have core emotions, and we don't experience them, and then they're mixed in with all these inhibitory emotions to keep them down, it feels so awful inside that we move our mind and body, create these very important mechanisms to protect us, so that we don't go crazy and we can go on with living. These are the defenses, and a defense is not a bad word, it's not pejorative at all. It's anything that we do to avoid feeling something that's uncomfortable.

The defenses that we feel, there's so many of them, there are different types of defenses. There's the big, what we call global defenses, they become part of our personality, like perfectionism, or addiction, or needing constant reassurance, or constantly apologizing. These are the things we do that are clues that there's something underneath going on.

In AEDP, we're trying to gently and without shame, that's the skill of the therapist, help the patient become aware of the way that they block and bury emotions, so that then we don't rely on that. We can now predict that we're going to start to feel some of these inhibitory and core emotions.

The therapy involves helping a person safely calm anxiety, or transform shame and guilt. So that we can access the underlying core emotions which are healthy, which we want to get to, so that we can help a person, not only in therapy, but afterwards, feel that they can make use of these emotions, and experience them to completion, so that we regulate the nervous system, and spend more and more time in this open-hearted state of the authentic self, which feels very good.

The goal is not to spend all our time there, that's impossible because life happens, but it's to, with greater reliability, be able to, in the face of triggers, know what's going on and be able to think, feel and relate all at the same time.

Getting back to the original question, when I saw this diagram, it reorganized my mind. I understood that I wasn't just an anxious person, and that was the end of the story. I had feelings under there, and I knew right away the feelings that had been blocked for me. I understood my anxiety over death and loss, and why I couldn't go to funerals because I was so riddled with anxiety, why I could barely call someone that came down with a terminal illness.

I was so riddled with anxiety because in my family we didn't do sadness, and because I didn't know how to be sad for those sad things, I just went to anxiety. Once I saw that, I didn't even really have to go to therapy, once I had permission that it was normal, natural for me to feel sad, and that it

was just really my mom, because of her parents, that she believed in cheering someone up. She was a great mom, she didn't mean to do any damage, yet it did.

**[00:22:44] Hilary Jacobs Hendel**

I'm a big believer that the education on emotions through the triangle is really the first step to healing. Because when we demystify emotions which are painful and scary, when we don't understand them, then at least we can get the scary part a little bit down, because we understand that this is normal what we're feeling.

And when we experience an emotion, we're going to have a physical experience that we're going to have to be able to tolerate. Not only name, I feel heaviness in my chest, or I feel tightness in my jaw, or I feel like I'm getting smaller. All these physical phenomena, we can learn to tolerate and observe with kindness and compassion towards ourselves, and to allow them to process and reorganize the mind, so that we're more integrated and more regulated, meaning calm, and connected, and compassionate, all this stuff.

**Meagen Gibson**

Absolutely. What I was thinking while you were talking too, is that none of this is said, or framed in a way that's looking to associate blame on anybody's parents, or the way they were raised. It's more about identifying the source of where things got misaligned, and then integrating, as you said, and being able to just have the full, complex human experience of life.

**Hilary Jacobs Hendel**

That's right. In part, when I work with people that really they say, I don't want to blame my parents. I knew they meant well, and I absolutely validate. We don't need to blame anyone. But is it okay to at least agree that the parent is the responsible party?

Now, there are other people that were really severely hurt by parents who, they had their own deep traumas, but they didn't get themselves to a therapist. They didn't do all that they could to have self-control, they didn't even realize that it was wrong, and they did severe damage. Then I'm a big believer, I know therapeutically that anger has to be processed before we can get to forgiveness in a real way.

Sometimes anger has to be processed again and again, and we never even get to forgiveness. The way we process anger in childhood, for example, in AEDP therapy, is through the use of what's called rage portrayals where we will imagine. I will help the patient when they are feeling angry now, make it like a movie and help them identify what the anger feels like in their body. Often a lot of energy, often like a tightening, often they'll feel something in their hands. I'll say, "What do your hands want to do?" For example, and the violence that wants to come out, because anger is a highly protective program. It defends us when we are assaulted and attacked, whether it's a physical assault, a sexual assault, or just an attack on the self like, you're terrible.

## **[00:26:06] Hilary Jacobs Hendel**

When you help somebody release the anger through a fantasy, depending on how much they were abused, you will see several possibilities happen. I show this in my book in detail for people that are interested in what a rage portrayal looks like. It can be quite alarming to hear for some people that we allow a fantasy come back to come forward. Sometimes it ends in hitting, sometimes it ends in shaking, sometimes it ends in murder.

Again, not a dress rehearsal for life, for what you do, this is about releasing buried rage that stays in the body, that's causing depression, or a low self-esteem, or aggression, or narcissism, or something, some unwanted symptom. There are times when these portrayals end in murder, and there's relief, there is no remorse, there is no guilt, and there's no forgiveness. That people were so badly hurt, it is just a relief to, in their mind, feel like they have fought back to the end. That's how badly people are hurt.

Usually the rage that's buried is commensurate. If it was just a little bit of abuse and neglect, there's one type of rage portrayal, maybe a slap across the face with some words like, "You never should have done this to me, that you were terrible for doing that."

To murderous rage portrayals, as we call them, to murderous and torturous rage portrayals, where it's not even enough just to murder someone. They need to be tortured first, because of the terrible torture inflicted on the patient before me.

That's just one very powerful way that healing happens, and brain integration happens. Because, hopefully it makes sense to people listening out there, that when you have to squash down the tremendous amount of biological energy that anger has, it takes a tremendous amount of defenses. Whether it's dissociation, or repression, or it goes into your bowel and you have IBS, or you go into your head and you have migraines, or it goes into your chest and you frequently have trouble taking a deep breath. That it's the muscular, and mind, trying to figure out what to do with all this anger, that's wanting to come up even long after the trauma and the abuses is finished.

## **Meagen Gibson**

Absolutely. I'm wondering, with these inhibitory emotions that you've mentioned of anxiety, shame, and guilt, are there often specific core emotions, or relationships that attribute directly to that?

For instance, I'm speculating, but say somebody like, I'm imagining my child, who has a ton of energy, is just a big person, and in a different environment, in a different household, I could see a different parent, "Don't be so loud." To be encouraging that person to be smaller, to be less, to not make any noise, to basically not be able to fulfill and fully express themselves. And over time, chronically, I could imagine that leading to a lot of shame about the core of who they are as a person.

What I'm saying is, are there certain behaviors and relationally that end up, you see time and time again, going toward anxiety, or toward shame, or toward guilt? And then obviously there's all kinds of defenses associated with that.



**[00:30:19] Hilary Jacobs Hendel**

It's an interesting question. What I think you're asking is, are there specific patterns with these things? And I want to say yes and no.

**Meagen Gibson**

That's fair.

**Hilary Jacobs Hendel**

The diagram is just a diagram, the Change Triangle. We are all on that Change Triangle, and in the same way we are all on it, and it is predictable, and it is a model that any therapist, or any person can follow to a point. But then it's complex to work, the Change Triangle is a lifetime of getting to know yourself.

I would say that, yes, in the case that you're describing, if somebody has a ton of exuberance and energy, which, again, the feeling of energy, of excitement, of joy. We can all imagine, I think most of us can conjure a memory of a spontaneous outpouring of joy, or even pride in the self, or, "Mommy, Mommy, look at me." And this crashing down of, "What are you so happy about?" Or, "Put a lid on it," or even, "I'm exhausted. I can't be bothered now."

What happens in those moments, and it can really just take one moment at a vulnerable really open time for a little person, where it's excruciatingly painful to be in that moment, and to be shot down. It causes shame, and it's like a turtle going into a shell. Shame is one of those complex emotions that we use matter of factly. But when you start to study shame as an affect, as an inhibitory affect, emotion. And affect is, again, the jargony word. I use the word emotion, because most people know that word better, but affects are in the body.

Shame can become bound to any other of the core emotions, and so what happens is in that moment, the brain, because it's so painful, and the brain remembers pain, says, "Don't do that again, don't ever be excited, don't ever be spontaneous. We have to now be vigilant and self-conscious all the time, so we can watch ourselves."

Shame then can bind to any and all the emotions, and keep somebody way down. When we have shame like that, and I'm going to suggest everybody out there google an article that I wrote for the New York Times, which is now on my blog called, *It's Not Always Depression, Sometimes it's Shame*. Which in a nutshell captures all of this with a particular case, where I told the story of a guy named Brian, who came with what was called untreatable depression, but it was really trauma around neglect and shame.

When we are in such a state of shame, and so paralyzed by shame, we are also anxious because it feels terrible and it's scary. We're alone and we're ashamed, and it's somewhat unconscious or implicit, it's just how we feel. But we don't know why we feel so bad. Are we bad? Is something else bad?

**[00:34:18] Hilary Jacobs Hendel**

We tend to feel guilty also. If guilt is for something bad that I did, shame is that I am just bad. But they all can be together, any type of alone experience can feel shameful, but it's also scary. All these things become somewhat mixed together, and that's where you really need a therapist, when there's a blob of bad feeling. Then we need someone who's got expertise in AEDP, or these type of therapies, to help you slow down, feel safe enough, feel bolstered enough, like where you are providing unconditional positive regard. No judgment about anything, even anger, and even in violent impulses, just no judgment.

The only rule is we don't do anything, the therapy is just about the experience, not about doing any bad actions, what I would say, destructive actions towards myself. That would be my rule, where I couldn't do AEDP therapy, is if you are self-destructive as a result of these sessions, or acting out. But other than that, we would want to tease apart, we'd be working the Change Triangle. What are the inhibitory emotions coming up?

One at a time we'd work with each one until we worked our way down, and we could start to get glimmers of these core emotions, including joy and excitement, which come up too, spontaneously, because those were often thwarted in childhood. We make space for those, and again they get processed one at a time, because they work differently, and they have different physical sensations and different impulses, which I go over in the book, *It's Not Always Depression*.

You get to understand in depth each corner of the triangle, and what you can look for inside yourself, or maybe going on inside somebody else, so that you can be more compassionate and understand.

**Meagen Gibson**

Makes such a good point, because you're right it's never just the one thing is it? Anxiety might be what the behavior and the coping mechanism feels like, and underneath it has some shame, and behind that is some guilt, because we have so many different parts that are working at one time.

We've got our adult self, and our child parts, and the relationships that we hold dear. It can get all so enmeshed and tangled up, that slowing down, as you said, with the help of a professional that can slow down, tease it apart, take one thing at a time, and spend some time there. It's got to be an incredible experience for people.

**Hilary Jacobs Hendel**

It is. It's not always complicated, in the example of me with anxiety and sadness, that was relatively simple for me, I could see that, and then I could relearn through exactly what I show in, *It's Not Always Depression*. How do I relearn to have my sadness again? How do I forge a more loving, connected relationship, and a welcoming relationship with my sadness? And how do I experience it?

There's like five steps to basically experiencing a core emotion. Should I go over that?

## **[00:37:50] Meagen Gibson**

Yeah, I was just going to say, please, by all means.

## **Hilary Jacobs Hendel**

1) We have to know we're having a feeling. Some people are so defended that they say, "I don't feel anything." Then we work with that, again, non-judgmentally. You have to be able to know you're having a feeling, like when something sad happens, I can say, "I know I'm sad."

Then you have to be able to, as I would ask if you came to me in therapy and we were processing sadness, let's say we lowered your anxiety, and you said, maybe you didn't even say it, actually, maybe I just noticed. Because in AEDP therapy, the body is where we're really looking. We're listening with our eyes.

Let's say you're talking, and I might see your eyes welling up a little bit, and you might not even stop, you're just talking and talking. I'm going to probably say, "I'm so interested in everything you have to say. Can we also slow way down, so we don't blow past your emotions? Because that's why you're here, so we can just honor what's coming up. I see your eyes feel like something changed. Do you notice that?" And you might say, "I do."

Then I might say, "What's happening?" And then you might say, "Well, I feel sad." And then I would ask, "Well, how do you know you feel sad? What's happening below the neck?" That would be step two, can you go into your body? Which is, by the way, that's the toughest part, that initial leap of faith that you can let go of your mind, and scan gently your body for sensation.

I would ask if you could do that, and let me know what's happening in your body that lets you know you're sad. You might say, these are some things that I hear, that I too experience, "My chest feels heavy." That's step two, of knowing, you naming your emotion, knowing what it feels like in your body. Then I would ask you, "Can you focus your attention on the feeling in your chest, with a stance of curiosity, and radical love, or compassion for yourself and just notice the sensation?" You can even drop the storyline, and just stay with the sensation and breathe.

By then I would have taught you how to do deep belly breathing, and the instructions for that are in the toolbox on my website, I have tons of free resources there. It's a great thing for everybody to print out and learn.

I'd say, "Can you just focus in on the heaviness in your chest, and just breathe?" By doing that, it will activate the emotion to start to move up and out, which is what we want. I probably would have already educated you that you could expect a wave, and that I'm right here with you, and can you breathe through, and let the feeling do what it needs to do, to come up and out? That's the third step to experiencing an emotion, is to be able to stay with it in the body, as you breathe, and let the full experience rise and then fall.

The wave of a core motion, I give an analogy, it's like stubbing your toe, where you stub your toe and it doesn't hurt right away, then you feel the pain and then it starts to build, and it's building and you're like, how much more of this can I take? And then all of a sudden you reach the crest of the wave, and it starts to feel better. That's how it is with an emotion as well.

### **[00:41:42] Hilary Jacobs Hendel**

Basically to experience an emotion, we want to be able to ride the full wave of the emotion, and land back in that calmer place, and we will, unless there's something interfering with it. For example, if I lose a loved one, I may feel like I'm grieving, but really it's like a circular, unending grief because there's anger. We had a difficult relationship, the person who died, and therefore I can't really process my sadness because my body has so much wisdom, it's telling me I really have to address this other piece as well.

When we get stuck again, that's a good time to see a therapist, if one is not already seeing one. It helps to know how to experience an emotion so that we can do that. I think what I was saying, is that was pretty simple for me, that I was able to recognize that my anxiety, that I had grown up with parents that really didn't make space for sadness. And that was simple.

Going back to the complexity of emotions, I had another example where I, in my second marriage, really had to stop people pleasing, taking care of my husband 24/7, which I was also taught to do, that's what a good woman does. Because my first marriage really ended in me being resentful, and I didn't want this marriage to end and to repeat old patterns. So in order to stop being resentful, I had to start saying no to things.

That brought up so much shame, and in order to get through the shame, I had to really feel the original anger at society, for teaching me as a woman that I had to be that way. My mother, my father, whatever messages that we got. I had to feel sadness for my little self, of having to learn those messages, and having it got me, my younger self I should say, get me into trouble. There was a lot of processing, and of course, the fear of disappointing somebody, and my fear of being abandoned, or my fear of dropping in esteem in somebody's, my husband's, eyes, by saying no.

I had to learn to tolerate his disappointment, and anger, and sadness that I was no longer just meeting his every need. That's complex, and that's not even a huge trauma. The people who work on themselves, I have just the most respect, to bounce, to try to come back, and start a healing journey so you can have a better life. There's nothing more that impresses me than people that want to work with their emotions, because it is not for the weak. People say it's weak to have emotions, it's the opposite, it's strong to be able to be with your emotions. It takes great courage.

### **Meagen Gibson**

To go off of what you were saying earlier about, if you haven't allowed yourself to feel emotions before, that first time of allowing that wave... I was saying this to Alex Howard earlier today, we were discussing somebody who's going through a therapeutic process, and having watched them go through it, and witnessing their overwhelm.

Remembering, both of us, remembering situations where you feel like the world will not be able to contain how big your feelings will be if you allow them. There is no expanse large enough to hold how much is in here. If I release control, if I allow this wave, I will be crushed, and I will crush everyone in my midst. It's really overwhelming at first.

### **[00:45:42] Hilary Jacobs Hendel**

Yes, it is. I think it deserves mentioning, that there are therapists, if you're not trained in trauma you can retraumatize someone by encouraging them to experience something that they're not really able to experience yet, because it is too overwhelming.

You're creating that exact same thing that happened in childhood, as the feeling of being overwhelmed without the proper support, whatever that is. Just the presence of a person isn't enough, it has to be the presence with also the person feeling that they are in control, that there's a process here that you're buying into every moment that gets set up.

I'll just say that the stories instead of going into it, because I know we're going to run out of time, that for people that are interested in that, the reason that I wrote a book with mostly stories, is because when you're teaching emotions, it's strange, when we read, we're having a left brain experience, we're reading words on a page, but to really understand what it means to experience an emotion, you have to try to give the reader an actual experience, and the only way to do that is through a story.

It's like being a fly on the wall in my office, where you get to experience with the patient, as an observer, what's happening. The stories are very evocative, they're moving and touching. I still cry when I read them, not because of me, but because of the people that I work with, and their courage.

It's not just like feel this feeling, it's really setting it up and saying, "Would it be okay?" A lot of permission. "Can we stay with this? Would that be okay? And can you while you're staying with this, do you feel me with you?" because if the person says, "No, I'm all alone, I'm back in my trauma," then you stop.

"Okay, let's stop, come back, feel your feet on the floor, feel your bottom in the chair. Come back, look at me, do you see me with you? What do you see on my face?" Because if you had a menacing parent, you want to make sure they're reading the right thing on therapist, that your therapist needs to register deeply. A therapist can't just say, "You're safe with me." That means nothing, you have to feel safe, and feeling safe has a whole constellation of different physical feelings that let us know we're safe.

If someone doesn't know what feels safe, then that would be the next inquiry. "What does it mean to feel safe for you? And how do you know when you're safe? And what does that feel like in your body?" We're really getting in AEDP, we're really trying to get out of the head as much as we can, have an experience, then go back in the head and organize what happened, so that it's like a left brain, and a right brain, cortical, physical, integrated experience.

### **Meagen Gibson**

Absolutely. I could talk to you for an hour, but I want to be mindful of the time. It's just like in a real therapy session where you're like, let's open up this can of worms in the last five minutes. We're not going to do that. Get to the good stuff right at the end, and you're like, "Well, let's get that next time." Hilary Jacobs Hendel, thank you so much.

### **[00:49:13] Meagen Gibson**

How can people find out more about you and your book?

### **Hilary Jacobs Hendel**

I really enjoy creating different resources that are accessible to everyone who wants them, I have a ton of free resources that are on my website [hilaryjacobshendel.com](http://hilaryjacobshendel.com).

You can Google the Change Triangle and you'll get there. There's a blog there with different subject matters. The blogs don't become obsolete because they're not based on current events, maybe once in a while, they're mostly topics of working with anger, working with disgust, working with sadness, working with joy, and various other topics related to relationships.

Then there's a toolbox section on the website, that has where you can print out the triangle, which I highly recommend printing it out, putting it up in your house, so that everybody can refer to it, and say, in a kind way, not to get you, but it's like, "I see your body language is like this, and you're not looking at me. Is there something that you're not able to say, or to share? Are you okay underneath all that grizzly defenses?" Really being able to be attuned to people's emotions, as well as their thoughts.

There's lots of stuff in the toolbox, and then there's videos, and then the book you can get everywhere, including in the library if you don't want to spend the money on it. I highly recommend, it's a self-help book for the public. That's why I wrote it, for people 15 and older, just to get the basic education and emotions, that hopefully one day, 20, 50, 100 years from now, we'll all be getting in high school.

There's no downside to learning about emotions, and every bit of upside that you can imagine, but just by learning about them you don't have to feel pressure, I'm speaking to everyone out there. To process anything, just learn, dip your toe in the water, see if it interests you, see if you relate.

Then I will say there's one other resource that I wanted to share, is that I developed a curriculum with my partner, Heather. For people that want to teach other people about emotions with the triangle, there's an extensive turnkey curriculum with videos and everything that I sell on the website.

There's some webinars again, for professionals, coaches, and therapists who want to learn how to work this way, using the Change Triangle, and to teach it to others. Lots and lots of resources, and I welcome everybody just to poke around. I'm so grateful for everyone listening today, thank you.

### **Meagen Gibson**

Thank you again, Hilary.