



WEIGHT LOSS FOR BUSY PHYSICIANS

— with Katrina Ubell, MD —

Katrina Ubell: Hey, my friend. How are you? Welcome to the podcast. How is your summer going so far? It has been hot here. When it's 97 in Wisconsin, we start to melt. My oldest son and I, we are like just such little fragile flowers in the heat, and when it's so hot like that, we just can't even take it. It's like, all our energy is just completely sapped, you know. We're just like, there's nothing left. So, we don't get enough hot weather here I think to really adapt to that heat. I think those of you who live in warm weather climates, you're like yeah, whatever. That's like spring for us. But for us, we're like how 'bout we just hole up in the AC and wait for fall to come? And then we can have our pumpkin foods that make us happy that it's time for scarves and mittens.

Alright, so today, we're gonna talk about emotions and emotional responsibility. So on last week's episode, you may recall when I interviewed Molly Claire. She actually mentioned emotional responsibility, and I realized that I hadn't talked to you about that concept yet. So if you were listening to that and thinking, "What is she talking about with emotional responsibility?" Here you go. There's no time like the present right? So what does that mean, emotional responsibility. If we break it up, we see that it's about who's responsible for our emotions. Now, it's important to first review what emotions are, because so many of us still get totally confused and mixed up on this. I see this all the time with my clients.

So, our emotions are the physical responses that our thoughts create for us. We have a thought, which is created by neuronal connections in our brain, and these connections then trigger a chemical cascade that impacts the body in some way. We call that physical response a feeling, or an emotion. So here's an extreme example. If I'm walking down the street and a man starts running toward me with a gun pointed at my head, that is a circumstance. I will certainly have thoughts about that. The thoughts will probably not be something like, "Oh, that's no big deal. Whatever." Right? I'd be much more likely to think, "Holy you know what. He's gonna kill me!" That thought feels very true and believable in that circumstance. That thought will trigger a chemical cascade that'll set off my fight or flight response. My adrenals will squeeze and I'll start breathing faster, my heart rate will go up, and I might start shaking. Any number of other responses. The word that I would use to describe this collection of physical responses is terror. Terror is an emotion. It's a feeling. Since we know from the thought model that our thoughts create our feelings, and our feelings drive our actions, what sort of actions will I take when I'm feeling terrified? I'm gonna run, right? I'm gonna duck, I'm gonna try to hide. I'm gonna do anything I can to escape this perceived threat on my life.

Emotions are usually a one word descriptor of this physical response. Some people like to say that a feeling is like a vibration in your body. If you resonate more with that description of it, then think about it that way. It's important to note, though, that this physical response or vibration is harmless. It might be uncomfortable, it might be extremely uncomfortable, but it won't harm me and it won't ever kill me. I can feel terror all day long and nothing bad will happen. This is really important to point out, because so many of us have been living our lives completely afraid of our emotions. Afraid that they'll get too strong and powerful, and they'll take us over.

So to avoid and distract ourselves from feeling these emotions, we eat. And some of us drink alcohol, too. You know how you can take a crystal wine glass and wet your finger, and then rub your finger around the rim to get it to vibrate and make that humming sound? If you fill that glass up with more and more water, the sound changes. And eventually, if you fill the glass completely full, it won't vibrate anymore. So one way of thinking about overeating, is that when you fill up your stomach by eating a lot of food, the food dampens that emotion vibration or physical response the same way water dampens the vibration of the crystal glass. This is one reason why we overeat, to deal with our uncomfortable emotions, to get those suckers to dampen down, you know?

What most of us haven't learned to believe is that we don't have to make that physical response or vibration go away at all. If I told you that I was going to inject you with an emotion that would last for five minutes, could you do that? Even if it was a really, really uncomfortable one. What if I said I was going to inject you with terror, that sounds fun. And then it would last for five minutes, but there wouldn't actually be any real threat to you? You're totally safe, you're just going to feel terrified for five minutes and then it'll pass. Who's going to sign up for that? But you could do that, right? You'd sit down, keep breathing, and talk yourself through it. It would definitely be uncomfortable but you could do it, right?

So if that's the case, then we can feel any of our other uncomfortable emotions as well, because the fact is, that most of us aren't feeling incredibly intense, negative emotions like terror or grief or humiliation on any regular basis. But we avoid our emotions as though they are that incredibly intense. For a lot of us, the majority of our negative emotions are things like bored or frustrated or restless or dissatisfied or embarrassed or annoyed. These are not that intense, generally. But we still eat to avoid them and to try to dampen them away. If you identify what emotion you're feeling and then intentionally practice feeling that emotion and letting it pass without you resisting it or avoiding it or reacting to it, then you start to see how it's totally doable to do this and you don't need food or alcohol to change it.

Sometimes I notice my clients getting confused and getting upset every time they have a negative emotion, and then aren't able to switch their thinking to feel better. They think they're either doing something wrong or there's something fundamentally wrong with them, but the truth is for most humans, about half of our emotions in life are going to be negative. By negative, I mean less good than neutral. So this is part of being a human being. We have our ups, we have our downs. Things work out for us and they don't. We have great days and we have hard days. So if this is the case, then why do we even bother with these coaching tools, right? Why do we even try to change our emotions?

The answer is because for a lot of us, 80% or 90% or maybe even more of our emotions are worse than neutral, because of our thinking. So when we work through the thoughts that we're choosing about our circumstances that are creating these uncomfortable emotions, we can get ourselves to that 50/50 place. I think rarely, sometimes you can find someone who's been able to change their thinking so dramatically that they only have positive emotions, but that's not what most of us are going to experience or even what we want really, for that matter. Because it's the contrasts in life that make us appreciate the good things we do have.

There's nothing like the unexpected death of a child to make us appreciate our own kids so much more. Right? If we never knew what it felt like to fail, we wouldn't be able to identify when we're succeeding. So our goal is not to wipe away the 50% of life that's filled with negative emotion; our goal is to change our thinking and our emotions when we can, and to know and believe that we can feel the rest of the negative emotions in life when they come without us having to resort to eating or something else to feel better. So since we know that our emotions are a physical response created by our thoughts, it's interesting to see how some of us blame other people for how we feel. This isn't actually possible though, right? How can somebody else influence my emotions if my emotions are created by the chemical cascade that's created by my thinking. But this is how so many of us live our lives.

This is called emotional childhood. Emotional childhood is when grown adults have not matured past childhood in terms of managing their emotions. They react to their emotions, they act out. They avoid emotions, rather than taking full responsibility for them and choosing thoughts that create more appropriate and better feeling emotions. Basically, emotional childhood is not taking responsibility for how you feel. Of course, we all identify as being adults. At least I hope we do. But we're often still functioning as emotional children. And not necessarily in every area of our lives, but for sure in some areas. It's important to know that we're not doing this on purpose, okay? We're not consciously choosing to live in emotional childhood. But most of the adults we interact with, including our parents, are still functioning as emotional children and this perpetuates the cycle for us.

Ultimately, we are responsible for how we feel in every moment. We're in charge of how we think and how we feel. Nobody else can make us think anything, so then by default, nobody else can make us feel anything, either. This is a pretty easy concept to understand intellectually at first, but I want to encourage you to start paying attention to how it's playing out in your life and in the lives of the people around you every day. I think it's easier to see it in other people first. You're going to be noticing it in everyone you're interacting with, all the time. But then I want you to spend some time really with some awareness about your thinking and your emotions too, and see how it's playing out for you.

When we're functioning as emotional children, we blame other people for how we feel, for how we act, and for the results we get in our lives. This is a super common way to act. Unfortunately, for most of us, nobody taught us any different way. At home or in school, when we were growing up. As adults now, though, we're capable of reflecting on our thoughts. That's that metacognition we've talked about before, meaning the ability to think about our thinking. Because of this, we have the ability to decide what to think and feel at any given moment, no matter what anybody else in our lives is doing.

As children, we did not have this capacity. We thought everything going on in our lives caused our feelings. Everything and everyone else was the cause, and we were at the effect of that.

Then the adults around us perpetuated this line of thinking by making comments about people hurting each other's feelings. You know what I'm talking about, right? Johnny pushes Susie in the line at school, we hear, "Susie, what's a matter? Did Johnny hurt your feelings? Johnny, you need to apologize to Susie for hurting her feelings." Right? We've all heard that. Some of us talk to our own children this way. So we learned at a very young age that other people are responsible for how we feel. This becomes so ingrained in us that we don't even question it, or recognize how disempowering it is. And we pass it on to the next generation, just like it was passed down to us.

Since this is how we're taught as children, most of us continue to function this way as adults, at least in some areas of our lives. This is really a pretty debilitating way to live and it also locks us into a complete place of blame. We blame anything and anyone, including the government, the economy, our bosses, our coworkers, our husbands, our ex-husbands, our in laws, our kids, our mothers, our fathers, and our childhood. And the list goes on and on and on. We blame other people, not only for how we feel, but then also for the actions we take and the results we get in our lives, too. So let me give you some specific examples of ways that emotional childhood might be showing up in your life.

So the first one: eating lots of sweets or junk food to feel better. That's pretty much everyone listening, right? Throwing adult tantrums, either outwardly or inwardly. You know what that's like, right? Many of us can stay fully composed outwardly when we need to be, but inside we're practically face down on the floor, kicking, screaming, banging our fists into the ground. And there's that two year old, wanting immediate gratification. I see this all the time with my weight loss clients. They want the weight to be off yesterday, and they feel very entitled. They think they deserve to have the scale move down very quickly and predictably. And I get it. I get it because I used to think this way too. Rebelling against the very things you want, like overeating to rebel when you want to lose weight, or drinking twice as much as you normally do when you're trying to cut back on your drinking, or going on an online spending spree when you want to get out of debt. Having lots of thoughts that start with "I want" or "I need." It's kind of like that gimme, gimme, gimme mindset.

Remember that wanting and needing something requires so action on our part. We just want it handed to us. Thinking someone else should take care of you, which is giving someone else the job of taking care of you, when in reality, that is your job. We think our spouse should take care of us. We think our employer should take care of us. We think our nurse or medical assistant or scrub tech should take care of us. Thinking someone else should make us happy, which is giving someone else the job of making you feel good. We think those same people should also be making us happy. Our spouses, our employers, our coworkers, even our kids. Not taking responsibility for your actions. This can be any number of things, but some classic examples are saying that you had to eat off plan at a party or someone's house, because they didn't have anything on plan for you to eat. Or, yelling or being short with your kids because they aren't acting the way you think they should.

Becoming and staying disconnected from yourself. People who do this often say that they were checked out. One way I think of this is like submerging yourself under water. You can still hear people talking, but it's hard to understand them. You're just blocking out reality. You're pretending that reality is different than it is. It's like when you convince yourself that your weight is fine, even though you haven't stepped on the scale in ages and you know your pants are getting more and more snug. You're blocking out the reality of the situation. Saying it's not fair. That's also entitlement, right? Believing things should be easy and should always work out for us. Exaggerating nonevents into drama, which is basically lying. We all know people who do this, right? Maybe you do it too? Just a little bit? Saying it's their fault, which is blaming other people and events for what happens to you. Wanting someone else to meet your needs, this one comes up a lot in relationships where we think it's our partner's job to fulfill our needs when the exact opposite is true.

So do some of these sound kind of familiar to you? Do you find yourself thinking and feeling this way, either from time to time or sometimes most of the time? Most of us do, to be honest. So if that's the case and we can see how living from a place of emotional childhood is creating so much suffering for ourselves, how do we mature past this? The only way to achieve emotional maturity is through self-responsibility. That means taking responsibility for your pain and also for your joy. It means not expecting other people to make you happy. You make you happy. It means not expecting others to make you feel secure or loved or relaxed. It means appreciating that you're the only one who can hurt your feelings, and that you do that with your own thoughts.

Let me repeat that. You're the only one who can hurt your feelings, and you do that with your own thoughts. Taking full responsibility for every single thing we feel, no matter what someone else does or doesn't do is no small feat. Okay? For most of us, this is a huge challenge. But it's totally worthwhile when we're able to get there. It's easy when you're first learning this concept, to flip into harsh criticism and judgment of yourself for any and all thoughts, feelings, and actions you don't like in yourself, okay? Some of you are very harshly critical of yourselves. What we tend to do, if we've been blaming other people a lot, is to then turn the blame onto ourselves. Like, oh my goodness gracious, this whole time I've been the one causing this problem. I'm such a horrible person.

Of course this is not our intention in this process, right? The intention is to notice oh, so if I feel this way or act that way, it's because of the way I'm thinking, not because of the other person. Be curious and fascinated about it, and treat yourself with kindness and compassion because now that you know, you can change it if you choose to. When we're living in emotional childhood and we take an action that we end up regretting, then we feel so bad that we hand off the responsibility for it to someone else. When we take responsibility as emotional adults, the number of times we show up in a way we don't intend to or regret are far fewer. But if we act in a way that we later regret, which still happens, we own our actions completely and apologize.

"Hey, I just want to let you know that was totally my fault. I did that. That was on me. The fit I had was totally because I got lost in my own brain. The reason I lied to you about that is because I wasn't taking responsibility and I was trying to hide. I wasn't taking responsibility for myself, but I am now." This is a really powerful and wonderful place to live from. It's a place where you have complete control over your life. Sometimes it sounds like emotional adulthood won't be pretty much fun or very exciting. Being a child and being cared for sounds so much better. I was just

telling my clients a little while ago how I used to think it would be so nice to just be a little kid and sit in a stroller and eat a snack and take a nap whenever I wanted to and get pushed around everywhere. Anyone else have that feeling? But really, the opposite is true. Being dependent on someone as an adult, when you don't need to be, is the most disempowering place you can be and live from. So this is such amazing, important work for you. Totally changes how you show up, to pretty much every situation in your life. I would love to hear your thoughts on this over on the show notes page for this episode. You can find that over at KatrinaUbellMD.com/27.

Okay my love. Have a fantastic week, and I will talk to you soon. Bye.