



WEIGHT LOSS FOR BUSY PHYSICIANS

— with Katrina Ubell, MD —

Katrina Ubell: Well, hey there my friend, welcome back to the podcast. I'm so happy to have you here. I do just want to mention I've had times before where I've had things going on outside my house and you guys always tell me you can't hear it. I once had a roofer right outside my window when I was recording and everyone was like, I couldn't hear a thing.

Well, today my neighbor is getting a tree taken down. And I thought that they were done, which is why I started recording right now. And then now it looked like maybe they were back at it again. So I don't know if they're grinding the stump or what exactly they're doing. But in any case, if there's some background noise and you can hear it, my apologies. I have a feeling you still probably won't be able to hear it. And that is what my hope is for you today. But just letting you know, FYI. I feel like once I tell you that I'm not distracted by like, oh my gosh, is it too loud? Should I stop? I just can do the podcast.

So what I want to talk to you about today is the concept of holding space. And this might be a new concept for some of you. Some of you might have heard it in the past, some of you might be pretty familiar with it and feel pretty solid on what it means. But I think a lot of people are confused about it. It's a term that I think has been becoming a little bit more popular. It's something that people are talking about a little bit more. It's something that we've always been doing, or at least we're working on trying to do it for people. But it just is kind of maybe a little bit of a different term.

Now I talk about it frequently, especially with the clients who work with me in my weight loss for doctors only program. I talk about it as a way that you can support yourself. So there's holding space for other people, but then there's also the concept of holding space for yourself. And I'm going to dive into both of those today.

And so holding space, there's so many different definitions. There's not just like the one way that people describe it, but the way that I think about holding space is if you're holding space for somebody else, then you have a conversation with the other person. The other person is doing most of the talking and you are there holding space for them to unpack whatever it is that they're dealing with.

So what that means is that you're not coming at it from a place of feeling like you need to fix what's going on. You're not there to give advice. You're not there to judge them. You're not there to convince them otherwise from whatever they're telling you.

You're not there to agree or disagree with them. You're just there to be sort of a vessel to allow them to explore what's going on for themselves in terms of their thoughts and their emotions.

So when I think of holding space, I often, even when I talk about it, I often kind of move my arms out as though I'm holding like a big package, but lightly, right? It's not like a super heavy box and I'm struggling and can't hold the load. I just have my arms extended as though I'm just very lightly holding like a very light but large pillow or something like that. It's that kind of feeling that I have where you're there, you're open, you're connected, you're not distracted, but it's not anything that's requiring a lot of tension or effort.

You're not struggling to hold space, it's not like a heavy, difficult kind of situation. You're just there to listen from a place of curiosity and interest and compassion and love. When you think about coming from that place in a conversation, if you're having compassion and love, this is not something that requires a lot of effort. It's not a muscular, something that requires a ton of hard work. You're just there loving them, which in some ways is the best feeling that you can have.

So I want to give an example that I can think of. I didn't even know that it was that someone was holding space for me at the time, but it really was what this person was doing for me. And I at the time I felt like it was such a great conversation and even close to 10 years later, I recall the conversation so clearly because of how this person was able to hold space for me.

So many of you know that I had a daughter who died, a baby that was stillborn when I was overdue, and this was almost 10 years ago. And it was obviously a surprise. She died while I was in labor. There had been no reason to think that there was any concern with the pregnancy at all. And so it was a super big shock for everybody. So including all the other people in our lives who loved us and were excited for us to have this baby.

And at the time I had been having some fertility struggles and I ended up doing IVF to conceive that baby and most people didn't know about that infertility stuff. So it was something that for whatever reason at the time I just felt like I wanted to keep it really, really quiet. Kind of when you live in the same community as where you work as a pediatrician, I just felt like it was going to become sort of fodder for gossip and that everybody would be talking about it.

And now in hindsight, I don't really think it was nearly the big deal that I made it out to be. I think I was worried that other people would judge me. But of course now knowing coaching tools, I know that that was just me judging me and thinking that others would think the same thing. But in any case, very few people knew. So it was pretty much obviously, like me and my husband, my parents knew. And then by default the people that I worked with, just the physicians, even the other staff, they didn't know or at least not that I was aware of. The physicians knew what was going on, mostly because I needed them to be able to switch around dates for me. I needed them to be able to cover for me when I needed to go in to get procedures done and stuff like that.

So very few people knew and it was important to me to keep it really private. So obviously it was so heartbreaking that my baby died. Right? That was bad enough. Not to say that there's like levels of, like if I had conceived naturally, like then it wouldn't have been as bad, No, it was of course awful.

But there was this added kind of feeling of like, oh my gosh, and we have worked so hard for so long to get pregnant again. And at the 11th hour it didn't work out. And so there was that kind of added layer of feeling like it was especially unfair.

And so I really didn't bring that up with most people because they didn't know about it. But one of my partners came over to the house. It was a few days maybe, I don't know, a week or so, maybe two weeks after. I don't actually really remember. It was still very fresh. She came over to my house just to spend some time with me. Gosh, I'm like getting a little choked up just thinking about it because it was like seriously that impactful for me. Choked up, not like about sad about that my baby died, but just thinking of choked up emotional about just what a great experience it was. And how much I learned really about how to support someone when someone else is really struggling.

I really had not gone through something like this with other people in my life. We have a relatively small family and most of my grandparents had already died by the time I was born. And even the one grandmother that I had, she died when I was seven and she lived in Germany, so I was somewhat close to her but not really. So it was just, I just really didn't have experience with this or helping someone else who was really struggling. And so I learned so much just from this one experience.

So what happened was she came over and I hadn't really talked to her since I delivered. And so this must have been before the funeral, so it was probably like we were probably four or five days out or something. It must have been because I remember that I was so engorged and I was like, hold on a second and I got more cabbage leaves to put in my bra and ice packs and we went down into my basement and sat there on the couch and talked while I iced my chest and had cabbage leaves on. So it was still just, it was very fresh, just a few days in.

And so she wanted to hear the story, she just wanted to know. She said, just tell me what happened. And she just did what was the epitome of holding space. She was 100% with me. She wasn't distracted, she wasn't in some other place. Like you know when you're talking to someone and you can tell they're not really there or they kind of leave you and then they come back. She was 100% there the entire time with me, was just willing to listen. She didn't interrupt, she just let me talk. She let me explain the whole thing.

When I had tears and I was sad, she was right there with me, but she didn't make it about her. And that's a really important thing about holding space is not making it like, oh yeah, I know exactly what you're talking about. Or like, oh my gosh, my heart was broken too. And this is what happened with us and we were so sad when we found out. Where now all of a sudden I feel like I'm consoling her.

She stayed there with me and she listened. She asked questions when it was appropriate. I did not feel judged in any way at all. I just felt like it was such a safe place for me to be able to unload all of it. What I was feeling, what I was thinking, what was going on with having family around and people coming into town. Just how my son was doing, how my husband was doing. Just to be able to talk about all of it and she didn't come in with any kind of idea that she would be able to make it better in any way, that she would have any advice in any way.

In fact, it turned out, I didn't even know this, that her mother had gone through a similar experience to what I had gone through. And so she shared that with me because she told her mom what had happened with me and her mom talked to her about it, and what she did is she just shared what her mother had said. She didn't say it like, and you should do that too, or this'll work for you too. Or maybe this will make you feel better or this'll be a solution for you. It was just a conveyance of information for me to then decide what to do with it. It was kind of like a, if this helps at all, I just want you to know, I want you to know that you're not alone, that other people have gone through it and people who've gone through it even decades ago and what their experience is. To give you some taste or idea of what it might be like moving forward into the future.

And we just sat there and talked for a couple of hours. I mean, it was pretty much just me unloading the whole time and her just being there with me. And the important part about this, like how one specific designation or way to know that she was holding space is I knew that I didn't feel like I had to take care of her in any way in that conversation. So in this kind of a situation where it's something sad has happened, pretty devastating, what can be so hard for the person who's going through it most acutely is when they feel like they have to take care of other people.

You're working so hard to try to take care of herself and then and now you're trying to make someone else feel better or trying to make it so that they aren't breaking down having a hard time. When someone's holding space for you, you don't feel any need to try to manage them in any way. They're managing themselves and they're doing a really good job of it and you're just allowed to be you in that moment. And that's really what holding space is.

It's listening and not listening from a place of me, me, me, like I have something to say. I have something to contribute. I know, I have that thing. I'm going to interrupt you and tell you that thing that I think might really help you. Or you're in your brain going, oh my gosh, this is so uncomfortable. Oh my gosh, how am I going to get out of here? I don't want to listen to this anymore. Having this kind of underlying conversation with yourself of I don't know what to say. This is so uncomfortable. You're just willing to be in the discomfort of it. You're just focusing on what the other person is saying and being a sounding board. Letting them be heard.

I was just kind of looking some things up on the internet about holding space. Just thinking, oh I wonder what people say about holding space online. And I found a male coach who had a, just to give him credit, it's called connorbeaton.com, but he has a blog post called, WTF is Holding Space, a Man's Guide. It was like, it's so funny cause apparently and a lot of relationships now women are saying you need to hold space for me. And the men are like, I don't know what that means.

So this was written more from a masculine perspective. But something he says that I thought was so good. He said holding space is like creating a metaphorical bucket for someone to emotionally and verbally vomit into. It's like that's such a good visual, right? Like you're just holding the bucket and they're just like emptying it all out. And you're not like, oh my gosh, how do I get you to stop vomiting? You're just like, it's okay. It's a big bucket. You just empty it all out. I'm here for you. So it's coming from a place of true love for the person who is talking, okay? Who is emptying everything out.

So that is what I think of when I think of holding the space for somebody else. Now, as a coach, it's very important to hold space for your client all the time and to remind yourself that you can't possibly know what's the right thing for them. When I coach somebody, I don't know what they should do, I don't know how to fix their problem. My job is to show them what their thoughts are so that they can get some clarity around it and then decide for themselves if they even want to fix it. And if they do, I help them to find a solution. But it's driven by the client, not by me going, okay, listen, this is what you need to do to feel better.

And many of us have had that experience where we start opening up about something and then the person who's listening is wanting to fix it or solve it or just kind of wrap it all up into a pretty bow. And that's really not what we want. We want to just be able to talk it out. I know for myself, I often in the process of talking it out am basically finding the solution for myself already. I don't need someone necessarily to offer me a solution. And if I do want help or I do want an idea, then I ask for it. Then it's obvious to the person listening. For instance, say my husband, what do you think? What are your thoughts about this? What do you think I should do? Or what do you think a solution might be? Something like that.

It's very different if he is there just listening to me and I'm talking it out as I'm even just working through the whole conversation, the whole discussion of what's going on for me, I often can find what the solution is or figure out what my next steps are for myself, even if I don't know what the bigger solution is.

So let's now transition to talking about holding space for yourself. Because this is something that I do all the time for myself and this has been a skill that I've developed in the process of really working on loving myself and truly accepting myself and stopping thinking that there are things that are wrong with me that are just fundamental. Or that I'm just not good enough and if I just am perfect enough, then I will be good enough.

So I talk about holding space for yourself because it's a very similar kind of situation. Now when you're doing your self coaching and you are emptying out the contents of your brain on paper, we call that a thought download. You are just basically the one side of that conversation, right? You're just emptying out what everything is. You're doing the emotional and verbal vomiting. And say the computer screen or your notebook or a pad of paper is the bucket. You're just emptying it all out.

And when you hold space for yourself, you don't then go back and reread that or look at what your thoughts are and then judge yourself negatively. And start going like, well, that's just so stupid. Why do you even think about it that way? Or oh, you're still, you're not over this yet? I thought we were done with this. This is so frustrating. That's total judgment. Imagine being in a conversation where you empty out everything to someone and they're like, "Oh really? That's what you're dealing with? That's ridiculous." Right? Like it feels so awful. But that's what most of us do when we're coaching ourselves.

Or even just when we are aware of what's going on for ourselves and then deciding what to do next. We judge ourselves so harshly. We think that we're super for not having a solution yet or stupid for having this problem. We think that it is just more evidence that we aren't valuable, that we aren't worth anything. It's just this constant barrage of why we're not good enough.

When you hold space for yourself, you're able to look at what's going on for yourself. But from a place of love and compassion and openness and curiosity. Where you aren't pretending like you already have the answer. And in doing so you're able to really question what you just emptied out. So for instance, what our brains really want to do is to come up with some sort of meaning for things. Things will happen, there'll be circumstances that happen in our lives, and then our brains will create a story that puts some meaning to it.

This has happened, I'm sure for you before, right? When you're like, well, I know that she was thinking this or that because she didn't come up and say hi to me, or something like that. And then later you find out that that's not at all what was going on. You were so off the mark in your assumption. But what our brains do, and we're really skilled at this, is we create the story and then we just decide to believe it even when we have very little or no evidence to support the story. It just becomes the truth for us because we just decide to believe it.

So what happens when we think that way and we believe own stories is we can't get out of it. We don't know how to kind of hit the eject button on that story because we just think it's the truth. That's one thing that is so helpful about coaching. It's someone else who can be like, well hold on. Maybe it means something else. What might it also mean? What are the other possibilities that we never even have considered?

Now when you're doing your own self coaching though, you can do the same for yourself. Where you do your thought download, you see everything that's going on in your brain. You can see all your thoughts, see all the emotions that they're creating for you, and then you can start questioning it, truly from that place of curiosity going, what if that just weren't even true at all? Even though of course there's that part of you that's like, of course it's true. What are you talking about? Duh. Completely true.

You can take on that other role by holding space for yourself where you really are living and coming from your prefrontal cortex, that highest part of your brain and really evaluate it for whether it's serving you or not. So you can look at it from a place of just what are the other options? What are other ways that I could solve this problem? Do I even want to solve this problem? Is this even a problem?

Just holding space and just kind of working it out for yourself without judging yourself. This is so important. Without judging yourself harshly, without thinking it's stupid. Without being frustrated with yourself, you're just there to look at all of it and then maybe offer some suggestions. I always think of it as, I have different ways of describing it, but like if you think of like a rusty lock and you need to kind of wiggle the key and turn the knob a little bit and just kind of wiggle it and work it and work it and work it, and then like finally you get it free.

Or the same thing as sometimes when you travel and you have some necklaces and then they get tangled up and those are the worst, those knots. They're all tangled up and you just have to start somewhere, right? You need to loosen this little loop and loosen that loop and see if you can get it moving over here. And loosen it some more and loosen it some more. This isn't something that you just pull apart or if you yank really hard, it's going to get better.

I think of yanking really hard on it as just judging yourself very, very harshly. Or being frustrated with yourself that you still have this problem. Or thinking that it's stupid, right? You're just like, this should be solved already. But that's not going to solve the problem.

This is where your self regard is so important in the weight loss process because you're not going to be able to come up with the solutions that you need to actually solve this weight problem for good when you're judging yourself like this. You need to be willing to be there with yourself while you tease the nod apart, while you wiggle the key and wiggle that knot. And just learn more, figure it out, figure it out, figure it out. Like, oh, okay, this is the next step. This is going to be the next thing. Maybe I should try this. Oh, that didn't work. Okay, what's another thing that I could try?

That's holding space for yourself in knowing that some days it's going to be a hard day. I've held space for myself when I've had a big realization about the next thing that I need to work on for myself personally. I can remember one day when I realized like, oh my gosh, like this is this issue that I'm having. I can see why I'm struggling in the way I am. I really didn't have awareness around it. I didn't know what was going on and now I have this awareness.

And having the awareness actually felt pretty terrible. I felt kind of disappointed in myself or just I just didn't feel good. And I just decided to hold space for myself while I processed that emotion, meaning I didn't tell myself that it was stupid that I was feeling that way. I didn't rush myself out of that feeling. I decided to stay with myself while I felt that and process that for as long as I needed to. Knowing that as soon as I was ready for a solution, I would know, and then I would figure that out. That would be the next step.

So holding space for yourself means, okay, I've got you. I love you. It's okay. Think about doing that when you have an urge to overeat or an urge to binge. Rather than, oh God, there's an urge to binge. I really want to binge. What we're doing then is we're resisting it, which is pushing it away. And when you're holding space, you're instead going, come in, come to me.

Think about a toddler or your child who's sad, right? You don't go no, go away. Get away from me. You gather them up into your arms. And that's what I mean when I talk about putting her arms out there. I sometimes literally think about like holding myself, holding myself on my lap, like visually, right? Like I'm here for you. I have got you. It is okay. You can do that for yourself and you don't need someone else to do it for you. Of course, it can be nice when you have someone in your life who can do that, but I think it's equally as powerful, if not more powerful, when you can do this for yourself.

Say you have some bad outcome. You have some outcome that didn't turn out the way you wanted it to. Say a patient dies. Say you make a mistake. Any number of different issues that can come up. You hold space for yourself. You go, yeah, this is hard and I'm here for you. I'm not going to abandon you. That's what we usually do. We want to resist who we really are. We want to resist the negative emotions, the parts of ourselves that are maybe less desirable that we wish would change. We just resist them and shove them away. And in doing so, we never actually solve that problem. When you gather that part of you up in your arms and you just love on her, you can start to actually figure out the solution.

So for some of you, you might've listened to this and have been like, this is kind of a little on the woo spectrum. This is like we're dipping our toe in on the woo. But I want you to about it as a possibility for you and maybe you'll be able to hold space for yourself in a different way, than I've described. Maybe there'll be a different way that resonates better for you, but I want you to just think about the concept, especially the next time you're feeling some negative emotion or you are definitely feeling an urge to eat and you don't need more food.

I want you to think about how you can hold space for yourself, how you can practice that. It might feel kind of weird at first. In fact, it probably will. It might feel like you don't deserve that loving kindness from yourself and that's something else to explore. But then get curious about that. Why do I believe that I don't deserve this?

Rather than going, well, it's a fact that I don't deserve this. Okay? Questioning all of it. I'm telling you once I really could work on questioning everything that I believed, it made such a huge difference for me personally and emotionally. And it doesn't mean that when you question something that you are going to think differently about it. In fact, you might decide you want to continue thinking about it that way, but the difference is that you have recognized that there's options, that you don't have to think about it in any certain way, that you're choosing it. You are in control. Okay? Versus this is just the truth and now I don't have any control over it. It makes all the difference. It's so, so, so, so huge.

All right. So thank you so much for joining me today. If you have questions about what I'm talking about here, I would love to address them on a future podcast. You can go to katrinaubellmd.com/157, 1-5-7 and leave your comment there. Also, you can go to my website and send a message that way as well. Going to katrinaubellmd.com to send me a message there if anything new comes up.

Have a wonderful week and I'll talk to you next time. Take care. Bye bye.