

Ep #166 : Trying to Fix your Feelings? Why That Backfires (& What to Do Instead)



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With Your Host

Kristi Angevine

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Welcome to Episode #166. I'm Kristi Angevine, your host, and I'm here to help you figure out why you think, feel, and act as you do so you can start being intentional with this one precious life.

Do you ever find yourself feeling something really uncomfortable and you instantly want to change it, fix it, or get rid of it? What if, instead of resisting or trying to fix, you are just with this feeling. This episode explores why curiosity, even though it's often elusive, can be the most powerful way to meet what's present without needing to fix it. So let's dive in.

Welcome to *Habits On Purpose*, a podcast for high-achieving women who want to create lifelong habits that give more than they take. You'll get practical strategies for mindset shifts that will help you finally understand the root causes of why you think, feel, and act as you do. And now, here's your host, Physician, and Master Certified Life Coach, Kristi Angevine.

Hello, hello, everybody. I am so glad that you're joining me. If you are a new listener, I wanna just take a second and say thank you. Thanks for taking your time to come check out the podcast. I hope that you find it valuable. My goal for you is to learn something new, something a little bit unconventional that's also highly practical. So you don't just increase your knowledge base, but you increase a skillset that you can apply in your everyday life. Because having extra knowledge is great, but having extra intellectual knowledge about things without knowing how to actually apply it in your everyday life is a great way to walk around feeling really ineffective.

So what we're gonna dive in today is something that feels like a little bit of a theme. You know how you have those times in your life where it just seems like something's in the water and everybody you run into happens to be going through something that is maybe not identical, but kind of related. Well, this is a theme that I've noticed, not just in my life, but in many of my friends and colleagues and clients' experiences lately. And this is the experience of hitting a bit of a rough patch and reflexively wanting to fix how you feel and fix it fast.

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So say you get that text that says, hey, can we talk later? And you have a wave of shame just overcome you. Or recently, I was actually listening to a voice message from a dear friend of mine. And it started out saying, hey, I just wanna bring something here to name and process. And I stopped listening right at that moment because I felt this massive surge of panic. And I thought, uh-oh, I must have done something wrong. And I just wanted to fix that feeling immediately. Or maybe for you, you've had the experience where someone you really care about just doesn't seem to understand what you're saying no matter how hard you try to clarify. And you're left feeling unseen, criticized, or rejected.

Now, in most of these situations, our first reflex is to try to figure out what's going on so we can fix how we're feeling and fix it immediately. And here's what I've learned the long, hard way. When we have feelings that prompt an urgency to fix, that is simply a cue. What if discomfort isn't something to fix, but something to simply be with?

Now, obviously, this does not apply to an urgent situation. If you feel a flare of, oh, crap, as you see somebody about to spill their coffee or trip or walk in front of a car. By all means, you should rush in to help fix the situation. But when it comes to emotions that feel awful, the urge to fix is the quickest way to extend how long we feel awful.

Now, I'm gonna speak for myself. When I feel awful, when I feel undone, when my world feels like it has gone sideways, the last thing that crosses my mind is to stay with the awful. Stay with feeling awful? That's like staying longer with a migraine, no thank you. But the reality is this, an uncomfortable emotion is kind of like a little kid knocking on a door and the desire to fix. Well, that's like an older sibling coming in and trying to stop the noise of the younger kid knocking on the door. And to try to stop the noise, they pull their sibling away and what happens? Well, the younger one, who used to be just knocking, might start yelling. So ironically, things get noisier as opposed to quieter.

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So just like if you wanted to reduce the noise of a kid knocking on a door, you might be most successful if you just opened the door and saw why the little kid was knocking in the first place. One of the best ways to reduce the discomfort is to be with the discomfort. Even though this oftentimes seems like it's gonna be too much or make things worse. So although it's counterintuitive, one of your best allies when you're feeling awful is patience with curiosity. So instead of fixing, we get to practice the act of being with and seeking to understand. But let's just be real, this is not necessarily easy.

So let's spend the rest of the episode discussing why this isn't easy, what we typically do and how come that's what we reflexively do, and what we can do instead when we are not feeling good. So first let's start with resistance, what it looks like and why we do it.

When it comes to resisting our feelings, if we are doing anything other than accepting, embracing, welcoming, or even just having a willingness to be with our feelings, we are most likely resisting them. And resistance can take many forms. Think about how you might resist your feelings. It can look like judging what you're feeling, having an urge to escape or distract yourself from how you feel, intellectualizing what's going on. It could just be simply scrolling and checking out. Or, as we're talking about today, resistance can come in the form of immediately searching for a solution so you can fix whatever's happening.

So how come we resist emotions? Resistance is simply a strategy from a part of us that's endeavoring to protect us in some way. Often, it's trying to keep us from feeling overwhelmed or powerless or some pain that seems unfathomable. And the reasons for resistance are multifactorial. There's an element of biologic survival. Discomfort is a sign or a signal of danger. And if discomfort is a signal of danger, we should do everything we can to fix it, right? There are cultural messages like suck it up, turn that frown upside down, don't wallow. And also, no one really teaches us how to be with uncomfortable emotions.

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So I'd like to invite you to interpret resistance and the desire to fix how you're feeling as a trailhead, a cue to dig a little deeper, an invitation to slow down and learn more, not as a directive to go find the solution. The oft-paraphrased Carl Jung quote is "what you resist not only persists, but will also grow in size."

So with that in mind, let's discuss a really radical reframe for uncomfortable emotions. Now, fixing seems intuitive, especially if you've got a vocation where your job hinges on fixing and providing solutions, and if nobody taught you how to be in the space of having no solution to an uncomfortable feeling, you are going to naturally gravitate towards fixing problems.

The radical reframe is dropping fixing and exchanging that for simply being with, and perhaps even befriending with a spirit of collaboration, whatever is most uncomfortable. Now, why on earth should we shift from trying to fix something that feels terrible? Well, fixing implies that something is broken. Fixing implies there is a problem. In contrast, being with is an act of care. It's an invitation to relate to yourself the way you would relate to someone you love.

Now, before we go on, let me share another image for you to keep in mind. I want you to imagine a puffer fish. When a puffer fish is puffed up, they are huge, and they theoretically could be very scary looking. But when we take a second look at the deflated form, this fish may be quite small. And this is kind of like our uncomfortable emotions. They might initially seem like a big scary puffer fish that we need to fix, but really, they're not all that scary.

So I want you to imagine the feelings that you typically want to fix. Maybe take a second right now and think about if there's anything going on in your life that has been particularly difficult, particularly draining, like kind of follows you home, feels taxing. If you had a magic button just to fix it, you absolutely would. And think about those emotions that go with it. Maybe it's irritation, discouragement, panic, shame, anxiety. Think of these emotions

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like pufferfish, or if you want a different image, you can think of a big, huge shadow that's coming from a cute little puppy illuminated by a flashlight.

Now how on earth can you convert your approach to the pufferfish or to the scary shadow from fixing to allowing? Well, this is where curiosity comes in. Curiosity exchanged for fixing allows us to be with and get to understand what we're actually feeling and why. Because just like a scary shadow can turn out to be a meek, cute little puppy, sometimes behind our annoyance is a feeling of being unseen. Underneath our frustration could be a sadness. Right there next to our anxiety there may be a fear of being alone. And these feelings behind the feelings, they're things that we're never gonna have access to if we're constantly trying to fix those initial surface feelings.

So let's talk about curiosity. How easy is it for you to get curious? For many of us, when we are curious, when we feel fascinated about something and we are keen to understand all the things, in that state, it feels pretty easy. But what I've thought about a lot lately is how sometimes when we are not curious, it actually takes some effort to get curious. Being curious feels great, but getting curious, that can be a little bit trickier.

Now, sometimes the effort is minimal, but sometimes it can feel colossal. So how about for you? Is it ever hard for you to go from not curious to curious? For me, it is difficult, especially when I'm resisting what I'm feeling. All my energy is going into trying to feel differently. And the last thing I want to do is get curious.

In Internal Family Systems, curiosity is one of the qualities of self with a capital S. So when curiosity is challenging to access, we can say that the difficulty is simply a result of something being in the way, usually a part of you being in the way.

So here's how I think of it. And I'm chuckling to myself right now because I'm noticing that I am just filled with all sorts of analogies these days. So you might be at risk for analogy overload. But the way I think about curiosity is, if curiosity were like your favorite sweater that you keep on a

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little hook in your foyer, and it's within easy reach, and you can grab it anytime you like, and magically it always goes back to that hook for easy access whenever you need it. I wish I could do this with all the items that I own.

But let's say one day you can't get to your sweater. It's still there on the hook, but you just can't get to it because you are outside the house and the door is closed and you can't reach the sweater from the backyard. Or you're actually standing right there by the hooks, but you can't see the sweater because it's under your kid's backpack and three other items. So it seems like it's gone despite the fact that it's still there. And with these things in the way, it takes a little bit of effort in order to make it easy to get your sweater, to get curiosity.

Curiosity is just like that sweater on a hook. You have to trust it's where you left it. And you might need to find the key, open the door, walk to the foyer. You might have to move the backpacks and the grocery bags out of the way to get to it, but it's still there waiting for you. And once you get it, bingo, you pop it on and you're in this state of curious wonder and fascination and it feels so nice.

Now, the reason I go through the sweater analogy is to normalize the fact that sometimes curiosity isn't always instantly easy to access. It's easy to feel when it's present and just like a comfy sweater, it's cozy and it's nice when it's there, but sometimes accessing it isn't just instantaneous.

So all this to say, curiosity often begins with courage and persistence. What if I told you that sometimes you have to be willing to be courageous and willing to be tenacious in order to access curiosity? Well, courage and persistence, they are like the lesser talked about ingredients that you might be able to use for a cake if you're out of something else. You know, those sort of obscure substitutions.

When you are actively fighting how you feel and you desperately want to feel better, you wanna feel less tense, less panicked, less irritated, the

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insider advice for feeling better is to have the courage to drop the reins. Invoke courage and get a little bit curious with something as simple as, how come this is what's here for me right now? And then persistence comes in when the first attempt fails miserably. When you throw up your hands and you say, fine, how come this is here? And then you feel worse, you have to go at it again. Deep breath, stop trying to feel better, bravely let go and get curious, truly curious.

Now, this is not easy. It might sound simple, but trust me, despite the fact that it is not easy, it is less energy than the fight. But doing something counterintuitive requires a dose of brave oomph, when you would rather do anything but. And bravery and courage, they don't necessarily feel that great.

And this is how it is for me. When I feel awful, I feel like I barely have any energy to do anything but survive. It's kind of like treading water desperately, trying to keep my nose and mouth above the water's edge so I can get air. And if somebody were to come up and say, hey, Kristi, just relax, float on your back for a moment, and then, hey, while you're at it, why don't you dive deep under the surface and I promise it'll be better. Well, I'm just trying to keep my nostrils above the surface of the water. That is going to sound insane.

But imagine that there's an underwater bunker or some source of oxygen that I can't see down under the water. In this case, it would make so much sense for me to just float on my back and then turn over and dive deep. And this is kind of like accessing courage and curiosity when you feel terrible and you really just want to fix whatever's going on. It's counterintuitive, but it's the most effective way to actually get to the heart of the matter.

So let's take just a minute to recap. Most of us try to fix our uncomfortable feelings. We either judge them, push them away, try to figure them out, try to make them go away by escaping them, numbing them, but you actually don't need to fix or figure anything out. When you stop trying to fix, you're

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going to get closer to understanding what's actually there for you, which is going to take you a step closer to actually getting relief.

So what are you currently trying to fix when it comes to your emotions? What are you expending lots of energy trying to change or solve when you could simply allow and be present with what is? Whatever it is, instead of continuing to cover it up or move on or fix it, I wanna invite you to try getting brave and getting curious. And remember, it doesn't feel great to do this, but eventually it does feel better and feel significantly better than what you feel when you're desperately trying to fix.

When you are curious, simply ask, how come this is what's here for me right now? And just wait, just notice what happens when you stop striving to fix. What usually happens is that puffer fish, well, it's no longer inflated. The puppy that's making the big shadow, it walks around the corner and we see the puppy. The swirl of anxiety and overwhelm slows enough for you to realize you're just actually sad or hurt or scared. And there's something so settling and grounding, something kind of pure about finding the primary core of what's actually going on. For example, sadness, when there's not anxiety covering it up, when we're not fighting to make the anxiety go away, it's somehow easier, even if it's uncomfortable.

So curiosity may not be easy, but it is the doorway to relief. So this week, if you notice yourself in a hurry to fix something that you're feeling, I wanna encourage you to have the courage to slow down and get curious about what's going on, and then tap into some persistence. You may need to relentlessly tap into courage and curiosity a few times in order to really start understanding the very thing that you've been trying to fix.

If you found this topic helpful, and if you're wanting more support to actually apply what you're learning here on the podcast, stay tuned, coming soon is information about the next round of Habits on Purpose for Physicians Small Group Coaching. This group coaching program is a powerful way to take the insights and ideas into your lived experience with support and alongside an intimate community of other women physicians who really just

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get it. So to be the first to hear about when early enrollment opens, make sure that you're on my e-mail list. Just head on over to habitsonpurpose.com and sign up for the newsletter so that you don't miss a thing.

Now, if you're not a woman physician, but you're still looking for more support, still go sign up for the e-mail list because that's where you'll hear from me, information about future workshops, classes, webinars, conferences that I'm gonna be speaking at, places where we can meet up in real life, and things that I don't share here on the podcast. So head to habitsonpurpose.com and sign up for the newsletter and I look forward to talking to you next week. Take care.

Are you a woman physician interested in being more intentional in your life, being more deliberate with your habits? Maybe you're feeling a bit frayed on the edges with all the pressures of work and life, and you may have a tendency to overthink, people please, second guess, or feel so much guilt when you do something for yourself.

Perhaps your charting takes forever, you bring work home, and you're just not as present as you would like to be. Maybe you scroll, or shop, or emotionally eat, or you use a drink to wind down more often than you'd like.

If you can relate to this and you just want to feel less reactionary and more in the driver's seat of your life, you need to understand the root causes of your habits. Habits like perfectionism, a harsh inner critic, people pleasing, numbing, ruminating, overcomplicating, procrastinating, and so on.

And that's exactly what you can work on in the next round of small group coaching called *Habits on Purpose for Physicians*. *Habits on Purpose for Physicians*, or *HOPP* for short, comes with CME and is a small group of women physicians who meet weekly for six months.

And in *HOPP*, you get practical, deep dive coaching and teaching from me. And I come at this from a perspective of cognitive, somatic, and Internal

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Family Systems informed approaches in a way that is not only accessible, but applicable to real life.

And you get a ready-made structure that you don't have to create on your own, and you get probably one of the best parts is a community where you can connect with other physicians doing the same work.

Enrollment information and the link to join the waitlist can be found at <https://habitsonpurpose.com/hopp>. And when you go there, get on the waitlist, because when you're on the waitlist, you'll get access to early enrollment and some bonuses only available to those who sign up early. And the reason why this is important is spots are limited. So signing up sooner as opposed to later is really smart so you can ensure that you get a spot before they're full.

Also, if you are interested and you want to join but you find the price is a barrier, there are scholarship options so don't hesitate to fill out the easy application for either a partial or a full scholarship that will ultimately be linked on the main sign-up page when we open up enrollment.

In the *Habits on Purpose for Physicians* group, you will unpack and unlearn old habits so that you can create new ones that are sustainable. So I hope you'll consider joining. The signup page with all the details will come out closer to enrollment for the next round, but go to <https://habitsonpurpose.com/hopp> to get on the waitlist. I can't wait to see you there.

Thanks for listening to *Habits On Purpose*. If you want more information on Kristi Angevine or the resources from the podcast, visit [HabitsOnPurpose.com](https://habitsonpurpose.com). Tune in next week for another episode.