

Ep #33: Habit-Building Classics: How to Feel Better Now (Part 1)



Full Episode Transcript

With Your Host

Kristi Angevine

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Welcome to Episode 33. This is Kristi Angevine, and today I'm rereleasing one of the most listened to episodes of this podcast. It's an episode that's packed with such important content if you're working on changing any of your default patterns and habits.

This rerelease was planned for a while, but actually works out extra perfectly, because as you may hear in my voice, I have a non-COVID cold that's got me a little bit hoarse and coughing a ton.

Now, if you're newer listener, this episode and its sequel gives an essential foundation for understanding why you do what you do. If you're a longtime listener, this is your chance to revisit some really powerful content with new eyes, and the benefit of everything you've learned up to today.

The episode is about feelings and emotions, why they're important, and why it's critical to pull the curtain back, to see the inner workings, if you really want to get to the heart of why you do what you do.

And if you're listening to this in real time, enrollment for the next round of *Habits On Purpose for Physicians Small Group* coaching opens really soon. If you're not already on the waitlist, you'll want to do that ASAP, by going to habitsonpurpose.com and joining there.

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.

So, yesterday was a really huge treat for me. Something in the podcast universe wasn't allowing me or any of the podcast production team, i.e. People who are much more tech-savvy than I am to see the reviews that you've left. So, something changed. Who knows what? Then, all of them showed up, and there were nearly 100 reviews. So, now that I can see them, I want to give a quick shoutout to 2 of my Canadian listeners.

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I won't share your names, but when you hear the reviews, you will know who you are. So, here's the first one. I started listening and listening to all three right away. First, I love your voice. It's so calming, and I just want to keep listening. And second, I love your authenticity. It's so nice to hear a real person talking about what worked for them in this busy world. As another busy female physician, I feel like I get you, and you get me. Thank you for putting in the time to share your awesome wisdom. You are so brave; please keep them coming.

The next one from another Canadian listener is this. Despite the description in the about section for this podcast, this is not just for women. I just finished listening to episode one, and I'm hooked, and I'm truly looking forward to completing the other episodes. Highly recommend this podcast for those who are looking to really learn how to create long-lasting habits. Then, this reviewer in parenthesis says, please update in your description the about section, as your podcast is empowering to all.

So, I just want to say thank you so much to both of you. These comments mean so much to me because my goal is to share with authenticity, to keep it practical, and for everything I say here to be empowering to all. As someone who has spent decades cringing at hearing the sound of my voice, it is really amazing to me that one of those most common descriptors in the review comments references and I'm doing air quotes "calming, soothing voice."

If only my 10-year-old, 15-year-old, heck, my 30-year-old self could have known this was coming. So, the last thing I want to mention before we dive into today's topic of how to feel better is this. I've gotten some really great questions, and in a future episode, I'm going to be answering some of these listener questions. A few of these questions that have come in some far are things like, how do I stay motivated? How do I start thinking and believing new thoughts? How do I stop talking so negatively to myself? How could I change mindless scrolling on my phone? How can I start being okay with working less and embracing what I want to be doing?

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If you want your question answered, or if you have a particular habit or topic that you want to hear discussed on the podcast, all you have to do is let me know. You can share in the Habits On Purpose Facebook group, or you can find me on Instagram @kristi.angevine, or if you're on the mailing list, just press reply. Now, what you're going to learn in this episode is the groundwork for a game-changing skill when it comes to being more deliberate and intentional with your habits and with your life.

So, let's get started. How to feel better now, part one. Today I'll tell you why emotions and feelings are important. I'll do this by defining what emotions and feelings are and how we usually handle them. Then I'm going to explain how this relates to changing habits. I'll touch on what we miss out on when we do this, and I'll give you a hint at an alternative way, and I'm going to end with the one thing that you can start doing today.

Then, in part two, you'll learn some practical strategies for different ways to respond to your emotions and how and why this is so important for habit change. So, let's talk about emotions. First and foremost, I am not a neuroscientist, a semantic expert, or a psychologist. What I'm sharing here is a view of emotions and feelings that draws on a multitude of fields. We can spend days and days talking about all the nuanced complexed theories and the research into emotions into semantic science and trauma to neuroscience and barely scratch the surface.

What I'm going to do today is just give you a high-level, very broad brush strokes, simplified perspective. The goal is for you to understand the essence of the emotions and feelings as they relate to habits and to keep this all really grounded in reality and keep things really tangible. So, to that end, I'm going to keep things really simple and also remind you that just because something is simple doesn't mean that it's necessarily easy.

So, first of all, why are feelings and emotions important? Well, there are a few reasons. We do almost everything in life for a feeling; a feeling we want to change, a feeling we want to have, a feeling that we think we'll have when. So, if you don't buy it, well, don't worry. I didn't either when I first

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heard this idea, but check this out with me as an example to illustrate a little bit better what I mean. Why did I go to medical school?

If you asked me that question 20 years ago, my answer was I wanted to learn that material and skillset. I wanted to be a doctor because I wanted to help people and have a fulfilling vocation that wasn't just a job, and it seemed like it paid well. But just like those first phase answers that I mentioned in the first episode, these answers were just superficial surface reasons.

Why did I really want to go to medical school? I really wanted to go because I thought that when I learned that material, had a vocation that helped people, and made good money that, I would feel good. I'd feel confident, competent, helpful, secure, happy, respected, liked, or how about this example? Why, when waiting in line at, let's say, the grocery store, did I used to always open my phone and scroll?

Well, I felt bored, restless, self-conscious, or unsure what to do with my eyes or my body. I didn't really like feeling that way, and when I would open my phone and scroll, I would solve for those feelings. I scrolled for the feelings that I would relieve or the feelings that I would get to feel instead. So, feelings are important because they are the reason we do everything we do in life. It's for a feeling that we want, think we'll have, or a feeling we want to change. Why else are emotions and feelings important?

They're also important because they're the drivers for everything that we do. This is how emotions and feelings relate to your behavioral habits. In order to change something you do, you have to understand the feeling that drives you to do the thing in the first place. If you want to change your cellphone use, behavioral hacks only go so far if you neglect tending to the emotions that are driving the habit in the first place.

The final reason that emotions and feelings are important is this. Emotions and feelings reveal to us what we are making things mean. We will often notice a feeling before we notice what we're thinking. So, the way that we feel can give us clues or breadcrumbs back to whatever we're thinking. In

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this way, they're like little teachers signaling to us the way to better see the different thoughts that precede them to see the ideas or beliefs or socialized programming that we have deeply internalized as a fundamental paradigm or lens through which we see the world and ourselves.

So, now, let's define emotions and feelings. What are they exactly? Some theorists in the study of emotions assert that there are universal core emotions like sad, mad, fear, happy, disgust, and surprise. Others conceptualize that there are primary, secondary, and tertiary emotions. The myriad of constructs and theories is vast. So, what follows here are some very simplified ideas, and there are so many descriptions, and my take is this.

Just like you have your favorite color, your favorite climate, the favorite geography, or the favorite place you love to travel to, you get to decide on your favorite description, the one that resonates most with you. And a caveat, we humans, we do know a lot, and also there's so much that we don't know; that we have yet to fully understand. So, to say that one description is the end-all-be-all is actually quite naïve and a bit like what we do as children. When we have a very concrete all or nothing simplistic way of interpreting all of the world.

So, what I'm offering is definitely an oversimplification. Sometimes, distilling these really vastly complex things into a digestible and simple idea is really useful, even if it's not 100% comprehensive. So, bottom line, you get to decide what description of emotions and feelings that you like. None of them are right or wrong, and only you will know the one that works best for you.

So, here are some different ways to think about emotions and feelings. And you may notice that when I talk about these terms, I'm specifically saying the word emotions and the word feeling, and I'm not using the terms interchangeably. So, here's why. Emotions are the names or the labels that we give to a physical feeling in our body. Emotions are things like anxious,

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mad, sad, overwhelmed, content, forlorn, grief, powerlessness, rejection, joy, pride.

Feelings, on the other hand, are the sensations we feel in our body after we have a thought, conscious or subconscious. So, some of you may like the description of feelings are vibrations or energy in our body. Either way, we label these feelings, sensations, vibrations, energy with certain names. The names that we use our emotions. So, for example, if I think the thought, oh no, I messed up. I might feel a sharp, dark, pit sensation in my stomach and label that shame, or I think this is everything. I could really light, diffused, soft, kind of floaty, yet, grounded sensation all over, and it feels like what I would call peacefulness.

Or I will think I have no idea what to do, and there's a subtle restless feeling in my face, and I name that confusion or uncertainty. So, another way to conceptualize feelings is that they're a physiologic, hormonal, bodily experience after having a thought. It's like an internal bath of cortisol, dopamine, serotonin, oxytocin, adrenaline, etc., or you might like the description that emotions are the affective state that follows a sentence in your mind.

Lisa Feldman Barrett, in her book *How Emotions Are Made*, says an emotion is your brain's creation of what you're bodily sensations mean in relation to what's going on around you in the world. Emotions can be brief and intense, like a flash of embarrassment or excitement. They can seem longer in duration, like, love or resentment. Now, a distinction worth making here is that there are bodily sensations that are less related to thoughts. Things like sleepiness, physical fatigue, physical pain, nausea, a startle reflex, hunger, thirst, and these things aren't solely created by thinking.

Similarly, certain substances, medications, recreational substances, caffeine, alcohol, and activities like exercise, sex, long hugs, nursing, these create certain bodily experiences that are less directly caused by our thoughts. Now, ultimately the description that resonates with you may be

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totally different than what resonates with me. For me, with the very concrete thinking, medical mind, initially the descriptions of an emotion as a vibration in my body those sounded like something supernatural or otherworldly, even though they're probably quite accurate in terms of the energetics of an emotion.

But here's what I like. I like the idea that emotions are labels for the physical sensations of my body that happen because I have a thought. A sentence or a thought that may be too quick for me to notice in real time, steps that I experience the feeling as a direct consequence of something outside of me. So, let me give you an example, an expression on someone's face seem to instantly make me feel anxious or reassured, or someone drives a certain way, and I feel rage at my fellow humans.

My old way of thinking would sound like those asshole drivers make me so mad, or the look on her face instantly made me feel rejected. Now, my experience now that I know these concepts are often similar because, in the moment of someone doing something that I see, it's this imbecile act while driving, I in the moment still feel angry. I now know it's not because of their action. Their action wasn't like a potion that jumped into my body and made my adrenals bathe me in a hormonal cocktail that I label as rage.

It's because of something that I'm thinking. It's because of what I make their style of driving mean. Now, in case you're like many of my listeners, and you might be thinking is she telling me that rage is bad. I should just change my thoughts about the idiotic unsafe driving that I'm witnessing? No, no, and no. We always get to think whatever we want. I may feel rage because I think that's awful and you shouldn't do that, and I may like my reasons for that automatic thought.

Rage and other emotions you're feeling are not on some moral hierarchy. The goal of this work is not to become perpetually serene and unbothered. This deserves explicitly stating, especially when we're in a social, political, environmental time in history where lots of deeply gut wrenching, disappointing, and scary shit is going down. As humans, who are not

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robots, the fulness of our human experience includes things like rage, grief, anger, fear, anxiety, etc. and the goal of exploring our thoughts and feelings is not to do as one of my mentors, Rachel Hart, says, it's not to scrub your brain clean of any thoughts and feelings.

This is really a key concept to keep in mind while you do this work, which brings me to the final piece to keep in mind when you're thinking about your emotions and feelings. Let's say you're tuning in to your body, and you feel a tightness in your neck, a buzzing in your stomach, and a steady, tense squeezing in your temples. You know the feeling well, and you call it anxiety. What can happen next is you might have some thoughts about the emotion of anxiety, and it may carry certain connotations for you. Maybe you think anxiety is a sign of weakness. Maybe you think I shouldn't feel so anxious. It means there's something wrong with me.

Confident people don't feel this way. These thoughts about the label of the sensation can illicit another layer of emotion on top of the original one, a pancaking, if you will, where you have anxiety layered with, let's say, insecurity and judgment. So, when you consider emotions and feelings, keep in mind that the names of the emotions can be useful in one way. And if you love words and language like I do, you might really geek out finding the perfect label.

Like, it's not just the emotion of sadness. It's heartbroken. It's not just worried. It's trepidation. And if having a particular label really floats your boat, go for it. But keep in mind finding the exact word for an emotion can be an unnecessary distraction. If you don't know the exact label, you don't have to have the emotional vocabulary of a bibliophile. You can just stick with the basics: happy, sad, mad, worried, worried, etc. You can stick with the physical sensations without a word; tight, heavy, open, light.

If certain labels or words for feelings have a connotation for you, like it's wrong to be angry or anxiety is for losers, be aware of that. So, bringing all of this together, emotions are the labels or the words we use for the feelings in our bodies. These feelings come from the hormonal physiologic

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responses in our bodies from the thoughts that we think. Bringing all of this together, emotions are simply the labels for the feelings that we have in our body after we have a thought.

Emotions aren't defining characteristics of you. You are not your emotions. Just like you are not your thoughts or the sentences that go through your mind, and emotions and thoughts, they're not objective qualities that reveal something about you as a person. Emotions and feelings are simply parts of your experience, and as such, you get to learn from them. You get to learn how to experience them in a way that's helpful, or that doesn't make them more unpleasant than they need to be. You get to decide what you want your relationship to these emotions and feelings to be.

So, now, let's talk about what we usually do in response to emotions and feelings. There are three common responses: we react, we numb, or we resist. So, let me define each of these and keep in mind none of these responses are bad or wrong. They're actually all quite resourceful in their own ways. So, to react to an emotion is to express things outwardly like feeling a strong emotion and then yelling, throwing things, being curt or snippy, withdrawing, brooding, venting, crying, criticizing, blaming, defending, complaining.

To numb is to dampen a feeling to try to change a feeling from the outside in or to distract ourselves from a feeling by doing something else. Let me give you an example, numbing is like having a drink to take the edge off from a stressful day or gobbling up a bunch of orders at a cocktail party because you're anxious but not necessarily hungry. Numbing is really common, and it's easy to miss if you don't use something like food, wine, or phone. It can be with substances, but it can also be with things like screens, sleep, exercise, picking at your nails, reading, learning, staying up late, self-coaching, overworking, organizing, and over tidying your house, diving into projects, shopping, doing any external thing or activity where you are using that thing to either fix or change an emotion.

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Now, before we numb an emotion, it can often feel like we need to fix something like we really need to take the edge off. We want to turn our brains off. We want to occupy ourselves. Numbing can sometimes feel hard to stop. It can feel compulsive, urgent, or oftentimes overly pleasurable, and sometimes numbing can have negative outcomes.

Now, the third way that we commonly deal with emotions is to resist them. When we resist them, it's like trying to suppress them. You know how it feels like if you take a beach ball and you try to push it under the surface of the water? That's kind of similar to what resisting an emotion is like. Resistance can be trying not to feel something, but instead of numbing and trying to fix or change it.

Resistance is any version of not wanting to feel a feeling and trying to push it away, try to mentally fix your thinking in order to feel better. Judging yourself for having a feeling, thinking you shouldn't have a feeling, thinking that a feeling should go away faster, thinking that a thought shouldn't be there, that a feeling shouldn't be there, frantically trying to make them go away. Telling yourself things like, I know better, why am I feeling this way?

Now, let me just repeat, reacting, numbing, and resisting emotions and feelings these are not inherently bad responses, and frankly, they're quite resourceful. They're the best response we have at the time to address an emotion. But there's a fourth option, and I'm going to give you a hint about it. And in part two, I'll go over exactly how to do it and why.

So, first, let's take a minute. What's the purpose of defining emotions and getting really clear on our usual responses to them. How exactly does this relate to your habits? Remember, everything we do, our actions and inactions, everything is fueled by how we feel and how we respond to these feelings. If I'm overwhelmed, I may complain, procrastinate, or numb by using my phone. If I'm worried about failing, it shows up in perfectionistic actions like excess proofreading, fixating on minutia, imagining judgment, taking things really personally.

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If I can solve for my anxiety with a cupcake and a beer, that might become my routine. Our habits grow from repetition, so the repetitive responses to our emotions cement our habits. So, to change a habit to be deliberate with your habits, you have to be cognitive of your emotions and your usual responses to them. Now, let me assure you this is not a soft skill, to understand and be familiar with your feelings, to know how to name them, or to know literally what they feel like in your body, to know what your common triggers are, what thoughts you have in these certain circumstances that create these feelings.

This is one of the most practical skill sets you can learn. Trust me, it may be counterintuitive or seem plain bizarre if you're like I was when I first learned about the semantic experience of emotions, but it's an essential skill. This is why, once you have this foundation of familiarity with your feelings, you can start to identify your unique patterns, and this helps you better understand why you have the particular habits that you have.

This, my friend, is how you start to develop new habits and a new relationship with your emotions. A relationship with your emotions that's less passive recipient like I'm picturing a piece of paper being pushed around by the wind a relationship that is more deliberate, open, and curious. So, imagine this, instead of walking around experiencing the world as it happens to you, as if things outside of you cause your feelings, and then responding to your feelings by either reacting outwardly, numbing, or ignoring them, or resisting, suppressing, judging them.

Imagine a new way that sounds like this. You feel stressed, you notice the feeling of stress in your body, and ordinarily, you've responded to that stress by trying to control minutia, getting snippy with your kids or your partner, or checking out by putting your head down and working or grabbing a drink or complaining to others. Or my favorite thing venting by text to one of my best friends.

Instead, since you understand your feelings differently, you slow down, and you name what you're feeling. At first, when you try to name the feeling, it

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just feels bad. Still, after a little bit of time, you recognize that the emotion you are feeling is not just a generic bad stress. Still, it's frustration, and for a moment, you tune into the physical sensations of frustration.

For a moment, you drop the narrative of there's so much to do, or I hate humans today, or nothing's going as planned. You then realize frustration is simply a set of sensations from some hormones in your body that resulted from some thoughts. It might not be your favorite choice off the menu of emotions, but it's not actually excruciating. When you just give it some attention, it likely doesn't even last as long as when you're trying to push the proverbial beachball under the water's edge or resist or numb the feeling.

By doing this, you can actually just let that sensation, that feeling, flow through you like water might flow in a stream. You can witness it, and you can even think to yourself, yup, this is what frustration feels like. And eventually, you might get curious. What was I thinking about what was going on in my day that made me feel frustrated? And over time, with practice and repetition, the new habit you developed is one of allowing feelings, of having an intentional strategy for approaching your feelings and for learning from them.

This is where agency lives. So, here's your homework. If you like homework this week, I invite you to tune into your emotions and feelings and start to notice your usual responses. Do you react externally? Do you brood, stew, blame others, complain, get really curt and snippy? Or is your preferred mode to numb, distract yourself, do something to feel better, like use your phone or turn on the TV or go shopping for things you don't need? Or do you judge your feelings and try to hurry up and fix them?

What is your unique response? And remember, as you do this work, there are not bad responses, but some are helpful. Some are not, and if you want to keep this conversation going. You want to let me know what you find out, find me on Instagram. It's @kristi.angevine or in our Facebook Community called, Habits On Purpose, where we discuss all of these topics. You can

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communicate directly with me and others doing this work. In How to feel better now, part two, I'll talk more about exactly how to allow emotions and how emotions can be your teachers that really help you change your habits. See you in the next show.

Now, if you haven't already listened to Episode 7, that's the sequel to this episode, and that is the best place for you to go next. If you listened today and realized that you'd like help to do the work that I discussed here, and you want to learn how to practically, in real life, actually change your relationship with how you feel and design a new intentional relationship with your emotions, you might be interested in the small group coaching program that starts in October.

The *Habits On Purpose for Physicians Small Group* coaching is a six-month program for women who want to better understand why they do what they do, so they can be deliberate with this one precious life.

The program comes with CME and it's capped at 30 women, so once enrollment fills, you won't be able to start until the next round. So, to learn more and be the first to get all the details, go to habitsonpurpose.com and join the waitlist. I'll talk to you in the next episode.

Thanks for listening to *Habits On Purpose*. If you want more information on Kristi Angevine or the resources from the podcast, visit www.habitsonpurpose.com. Tune in next week for another episode.