

## Ep #83: Dealing with Disappointment in a More Productive Way



### **Full Episode Transcript**

**With Your Host**

**Kristi Angevine**

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## Ep #83: Dealing with Disappointment in a More Productive Way

Welcome to Episode #83. This is your host, Kristi Angevine. Today I'm talking about the emotion of disappointment, what it is, why we have it, and what happens when we have the habit of resisting it and judging ourselves for having it. 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. So, last episode, if you caught it, Episode 82, I alluded to some of the challenges I've been having with the fire season, the smoke in the air, and the poor air quality here in Central Oregon. Because of some of the forest fires, in the time that it's sort of dictated that I've spent inside as opposed to being outside.

I've also had quite a bit of traveling recently, right on the heels of our family getting a new puppy. What I've noticed is that, even though nothing major has gone wrong for the last month or so, I've had quite a bit of negative emotion that's been present for me. Particularly the emotion of disappointment. Disappointment is a really interesting emotion, and it's one I used to have a really hard time with.

So, today I'm going to discuss what disappointment is. I'm going to talk about why it happens, then I want to touch on the counterproductive responses we often have to it, and then give you a different way to respond to and actually embrace your disappointment.

What is disappointment anyway? What does it mean as an emotion? So, I want you to think back to a time that you've been disappointed. When you felt disappointed, what was going on for you?

For me, I've been disappointed that I couldn't ride my bike outside because of the air quality. I've been disappointed that I didn't sign my son up for basketball in time because it filled up too quickly and I didn't realize when

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registration opened. I've been disappointed that a dear friend of mine seems really stubborn, and I can't make them do what I think they should do.

I've had disappointments seeing that I'm double booked with two complex patients at the same spot. I've been disappointed in myself in the aftermath of being impatient and curt. I've been disappointed when I've seen a missed opportunity. So, what is it for you?

Have you been disappointed that you didn't get a position or didn't get published? Disappointed that you got injured? Disappointed you overate? Disappointed you had that extra glass of wine? Disappointed that you yelled at your kids, or you were unkind to your spouse? Were you disappointed that somebody lied or didn't seem to care? Disappointed your job's not what the recruiter made it up to be? Disappointed a loved one can't make it to your wedding, a holiday, or the birth of your child?

As I talk, I want you to keep that experience in mind, when you've been disappointed. So, what is disappointment? In essence, it's a variant of sadness. I've heard it really beautifully described as a feeling of loss when we're in a painful gap between our expectation and reality. When we're in that really very uncomfortable space between the idea we had in our mind, and how things actually turned out.

We're oftentimes experiencing the emotion of disappointment in the setting of things not turning out as we hoped or expected, predicted, or preferred. We have the emotion of disappointment when there's a difference between the idea in our mind for how things would go and how things actually turned out.

Now, this could be related to other people, to external circumstances, or to how we behaved, performed, or responded in a circumstance. So, it might be how other people acted or what other people said. It might even be what other people are thinking or feeling or believing. It might be the setting where it rained, it was smoky, an event was or wasn't canceled, or traffic was bad.

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It can occur in response to how we personally performed. How we personally behaved or responded, that stands in contrast to how we hoped we would have behaved or acted. As a really concrete example, this happened recently to me.

We got our new puppy, and we were bringing our puppy home. We have two cats that are about a year old. We were trying to be really careful with introducing this wild new puppy to these new cats. So, we brought the puppy in, we sat on the couch, and we sort of let the cats come to me and see the puppy, and just sort of try to keep him calm.

One of the cat's approach seems sort of mildly interested, but not bothered. And the other cat seemed a little bit more standoffish, a little bit more nervous. And so, after a bit of time, we decided, instead of just holding the puppy, we would stand up and let the puppy be on the floor and see if the more standoffish cat would sort of have an interaction.

I stand up to do this. Right as I set the puppy down near the more standoffish cat, my keys on my lap fall on the floor and make a really loud noise. So instantly, the cat's tail gets hugely big and puffed up and all her fur is everywhere. She's basically on the brink of hissing. She is completely startled in a stress response.

My experience of standing up, dropping my keys, and seeing this, was that I instantly felt the emotion of disappointment. So, what's the actual cause of disappointment? It seems like it's the uncomfortable space between our expectation and reality that makes us feel disappointed, but it's not.

The real reason we feel disappointed is how we interpret this discrepancy between the idea in our mind and reality. It's this interpretation that generates the disappointment. So, take me, the keys dropping, and the cat getting startled.

It's not the act of the dropping of the keys. It's not the noise. It's not my cat's tail puffing up that made me feel disappointed. It's not even the fact

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that I look up and my husband says, “Oh, bummer,” and looked like he felt disappointed, that made me experienced the emotion of disappointment.

I felt disappointed because of how I was thinking about these things. Now, this is lightning fast. Subconsciously, I thought something like, “Oh, dang,” except probably not dang, “I wish I hadn't dropped these keys. I wish this hadn't happened. Oh, no, this is not how I wanted it to be. Where's my time machine? This is not good.”

In essence, my subconscious evaluation of the event is something like ‘this is not how it was supposed to go, and that is bad.’ My evaluation creates the emotion. Now, let's be real. The way I casually talk about this event is this: I dropped my keys, the cat got scared, and it made me so disappointed. My lived experience is the noise, the scared cat; the things outside of me created my emotion of disappointment.

But the reality is, they didn't create that. Those things were neutral data points until I assigned meaning to them. The meaning I subconsciously and essentially, instantaneously, assigned to those events. That is what created the emotion of disappointment within me.

So, if my default interpretation had been, “Oh my gosh, that's hilarious. Of course, this would happen. Talk about a comedy of errors,” I would have probably felt the emotion of amused. Had my default interpretation been, “These keys don't belong here, who put these keys here? They should have been put away,” I might have felt angry. Had I thought, “Well, it could have been worse. This is no biggie,” I probably would have felt neutral or businesslike.

My thoughts, my interpretation, my evaluation, and my meaning making, are what creates the emotion of disappointment. So, this is how disappointment is created for me. I have subconscious thoughts, that I'm not aware of, that auto populate. A chemical is created, a set of neurotransmitters are released, and then I experienced a physical feeling in my body that I label with the word “disappointment.”

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Now, why is it important to know what actually creates disappointment? Knowing that it's generated from within means this, we don't actually have to control external things to change how we feel. It is profoundly powerful to know that our emotions are sourced from within. When we understand our emotions are sourced from within, we can refrain from trying to control external things in order to control how we feel. And this can be deeply liberating.

The next part that is so fun, is that we then get to embrace our emotions as teachers, teachers that are bringing us very, very important information. So, before we get into what's available, when you see disappointment as a teacher, let's talk about what you usually do in response to disappointment.

You've heard that expression, "There's no off ramp to the human experience." Well, by being alive, we are guaranteed to feel disappointment. I like to think that disappointment and sadness, and pretty much every other emotion you can think of, they are part of the admission fee for being human.

When we're alive, we are going to experience the full scope of human emotions. So, given that disappointment is inevitable, let's think about what your habitual response to that experience of that emotion is. Do you give yourself compassion for feeling disappointment? Do you treat yourself like you treat a friend who feels disappointed?

Or do you get overcome by it? Do you sometimes feel stuck in it? Do you berate yourself and tell yourself that you shouldn't feel disappointed? Now, most of us do the latter. Either we feel engulfed by it and rather stuck in it, or we resist it or judge ourselves for it. Both of these are unpleasant, and frankly, both of them block us from navigating the emotion in a way that can open us up to learning from it.

So, let's discuss each of these and then some more productive alternatives. When we feel flooded with disappointment, it can feel like disappointment has happened to us. We can then feel stuck in it,

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ruminating on what went wrong, time traveling to the future where things are worse, blaming or complaining, or beating ourselves up.

If this is you, there's a very simple way to get a foothold and get your nose above water so you don't feel completely consumed by it. The very simple way is go to the body. What this means is, literally take a few breaths. When you feel disappointed, say, "This is disappointment," and pivot from your thinking mind and move to your body. Scan your body and see what disappointment feels like in your body.

Feeling the feeling of disappointment in your body isn't actually that bad when you're just with the physical sensations, and you don't layer on top of it any additional meaning or rumination. Check this out, notice the difference: You feel disappointed, then you replay the event over and over and over. You replay, standing up and dropping your keys and seeing the cat freak out. Right?

You replay the event over and over and over and you think something has gone terribly wrong, and you envision things getting worse. It's like a record player that keeps skipping and playing the same old two-minute segment of a song again and again and again. And as you go through your day, all you keep doing is beating yourself up and feeling stuck in that emotion.

Versus, you feel the emotion of disappointment. You notice it, you name it, you pause the rumination, you pause the time travel to the negative consequences, you pause the self-recrimination, you pause the blame, you take five breaths, and then you see what disappointment feels like in your body.

Is it heavy in your shoulders? Is it tight? Is it fast? Is it slow? Where is it? What's it like? How would you describe it to a Martian or a research student? How would you describe the physical experience of this motion, say, in contrast to the emotion of peacefulness, or anger, or happiness? When you do this, you make it so much easier on yourself to just be with the emotion.

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Now, let's just say you're more of the camp who feels disappointed, and then you resist it, or you judge it. And it might sound like this, "Oh my God, here I go again, disappointed over something so silly. What is my problem? I don't want to feel this way. Who am I to whine and complain about this first world problem? You know what, I should know better. If I just thought about it differently, I would feel differently."

The special kiss of death, if you're a coach, is you tell yourself disappointment is just an indulgent emotion. So, if this type of judgment about disappointment is familiar to you, you have the habit of making yourself wrong. And my friend, there's zero upside to this.

Now, if it worked, I would be all in. But as a long-term strategy, it does not work at all. Judging an already unpleasant or uncomfortable emotion just piles on discomfort and blocks you from understanding why the emotion is there in the first place.

So, what to do if this is your habit? Well, number one, simply recognize you're doing it. And similar to what I just described for feeling the emotion in your body, the first thing you want to do is just pause and say, "Ah, there I go judging. I see you, inner critic, with your clipboard and your overly tight bun, criticizing and judging. Thank you. But no, thank you."

Then you face the disappointment squarely, and you talk to yourself with kindness and compassion. It might sound something like, "Oh, of course I'm disappointed in the situation. Other people thinking about it in a similar way would also be disappointed." What happens when you talk to yourself in this way, is you open the door to acceptance and just being with the emotion instead of trying to push it away or fix it.

So, now let's talk about an alternative way to respond to disappointment. It's useful to think of disappointment as bringing a package of information. Think of how you approached maybe a lecture about a topic you're interested in, or a book that has things in it that you want to know about.



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Approaching those, you might wonder what you're going to learn. You might be ready to take notes. You might feel curious. What if, when you felt disappointment, you approach it in this way and you instantly knew disappointment was your teacher?

Consider what it might be like if every time you felt disappointed, you thought, "Ah, this is here to teach me something. There's some really important information here." So, what might disappointment possibly have to inform you of? What might it reveal?

Well, it might be reminding you of what you think is important and what you value. Say you didn't get the academic job that you're hoping, and you will feel disappointment. It reveals how much you value teaching.

It might be an indicator of what matters most. Say a family member canceled a trip. It shows you how much you really value connection with them. It might reveal a rulebook you have for "how things should always go." You might have an idea, "This should be easy. I should be able to handle what comes my way," and feeling disappointed reveals that rulebook.

Disappointment might show you what you believe about yourself. It might sound like, "I did X, Y and Z, and I feel disappointed because I believe I should be more conscientious. Because good moms, good doctors, good employees, good wives, good daughters, good," whatever, "are conscientious. This doesn't happen to them."

When disappointment is a teacher, it says, "Hey, there's a difference between what you expected, predicted, hoped, wished, preferred, wanted, and how reality went. This is a data point, it's neutral. So, let's learn why I'm here." When you can be curious, you can learn so much about yourself.

So, the next time you feel disappointment, try this: Name it, notice what it feels like in your body, and then get curious. What's this here to tell me? Specifically, why might I be feeling this now? And my favorite question to ask is: Who am I going to be in the face of this disappointment? Who am I

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going to be in the face of this discrepancy between what I wanted and what happened?

Now, I'm not suggesting that you're going to relish the emotion of disappointment every time it comes knocking on your door. But when you're not worried about being consumed by it, and you're not going to resist or judge it, it is so much more tolerable and pleasant.

I'm going to close with a few of my favorite intentional thoughts, that I think on purpose, in the face of feeling disappointed. "Oh, hello, disappointment. Ah, here's to being human. How human of me. This is here to show me what really matters. This is here to reveal my rulebook. This is hard, and that's okay." And one of my go-tos is, "Of course, I'm disappointed."

These thoughts help me access things like acceptance, curiosity, and compassion. So, try it out. And if you found this episode helpful, please consider following the podcast and leaving it a rating and review. This helps more than you could possibly know, and I would be so grateful. I'll see you next week.

Would you like to start exploring your own thought patterns and your own beliefs about yourself in the world? Are you at a point in your life where you're really ready to be deliberate with your approach to life and deliberate with your habits?

If so, I would love to connect. I would love to help you with the exploration and the application of the concepts that I teach. I keep a small, private practice panel, and if you're interested in private one-on-one coaching, you can learn more about it, and if we're a match, by going to [HabitsOnPurpose.com/private](https://HabitsOnPurpose.com/private).

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