

## Ep #103: Mindful Self-Compassion with Dr. Erica Bove



### **Full Episode Transcript**

**With Your Host**

**Kristi Angevine**

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Welcome to Episode 103. I'm your host, Kristi Angevine, and I am here to help you understand why you do what you do, so you can live your life on purpose instead of on autopilot.

Today, I have a conversation with the lovely Dr. Erica Bove about the mental and emotional challenges that come up around fertility. Join us as we dive into the importance of mindful self-compassion. Even if you have no fertility challenges, today's conversation is relevant to any challenges where there are variables beyond your control. Let's get started.

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, everyone. I am so excited to bring you yet another conversation episode. This time, surrounding a topic that I've not brought up on the podcast before. This topic is the challenges that arise around fertility and infertility. My guest is Dr. Erica Bove. She's a double board-certified OB/GYN and Reproductive Endocrinologist. She's also a certified life coach and the founder of LOVE & SCIENCE Thriving Through Infertility.

As an expert in embodiment, as well as sex and intimacy, Dr. Bove helps women professionals thrive while undergoing fertility treatments. In her words, she believes, "That the best outcomes are obtained when the whole person is seen and understood." Isn't that not beautiful?

Listen in as we discuss thriving, and how to do it in the face of unknowns. Listen, as we discuss mindful self-compassion and the power of not making ourselves wrong. You'll also hear us discuss a very different approach to your inner critic.

Now, this conversation centers on fertility, but as you'll see, it has relevance beyond fertility. So, even if you have zero interest in fertility, or your days of worrying about getting pregnant or not are well behind you, you are going

## Ep #103: Mindful Self-Compassion with Dr. Erica Bove

to love the topics that we discuss. I hope you enjoy listening as much as I did having this conversation.

Kristi Angevine: Everybody, I am so excited to bring Dr. Erica Bove on to the podcast. Erica, can you just introduce yourself?

Dr. Erica Bove: Absolutely. Just like you, Dr. Kristi, I am a board-certified OB/GYN. I also did a three-year fellowship in infertility and reproductive endocrinology, so I'm a fertility specialist. I still practice, and during COVID I got this crazy idea to be a life coach. And so, also very parallel to you, I did the Life Coach School certification.

Once I was certified, I then got this crazy idea that I would marry my two passions of being a fertility specialist and a coach, because I saw this huge need of women undergoing fertility treatments who just were not getting what they needed emotionally.

I could just see the various many ways that that was not only stripping them of their power, but it was also starting to interfere with the success of the treatments because the overwhelm was this huge block, in the way of moving forward. And so, I thought, "Hey, I'm going to take the coaching principles and start my own practice."

It's called LOVE & SCIENCE because that's what I say when I do an embryo transfer; it takes love and science. The second part of it is, Thriving Through Infertility, because I really do believe that women can thrive, and not just survive, as they're undergoing these treatments.

Kristi: Okay, this is going to be such a great conversation. Let me just ask... The people who are listening to this, they can't see what I can see. I can see this beautiful piano and this lovely light behind you. I'm wondering if you could just tell us where in the world you are. And, I don't know if you can see out one of your windows but if you can, can you just tell us what's out there?

Erica: Oh, my goodness. I've actually been in this home for about two years now. It happened, as the universe does, it just came to me. I always said I

## Ep #103: Mindful Self-Compassion with Dr. Erica Bove

wanted a home with beams, with wooden beams. A friend of mine said, “Hey, I have this place, would you like to look at it?”

One of the beauties of coaching is that we can actually work from home if that serves us, and so I am in my living room, in my home in Menands, New York, which is a suburb of Albany. That's why I'm here. Actually, I grew up in Vermont, and it's less than a two-hour drive from my parents' house, which is just wonderful.

So, I have the piano I grew up playing right behind me, and it does not go a day without getting played. It just doesn't. It's the most loved, used piano that we have. It's beautiful. Then, out my window, I see my amazing diverse neighbors. Every single person in each home on my street is from a different culture. It is just the most beautiful thing.

Growing up in rural Vermont, that was not my experience. And so, that's been super amazing for me and my kids. I see snowmen. I see lots of snow. I see ice. I see beautiful tall trees, where we watched the sunrise through them this morning. I see bunnies' and squirrels' and deer tracks, and so many things that bring me joy.

Kristi: This is so good. Hopefully, to those who are listening, who are maybe at the gym on the treadmill, or on call or something like that, that can sort of bring them to this conversation, now that they can see where you are.

My first question is, as a Reproductive Endocrinologist and an Ob/Gyn, was there anything that happened for you personally, that made you drawn to doing the work you're doing today?

Erica: Yes. That's such an excellent question. I don't know if I've ever answered that.

Kristi: I also want to preface this with, of course, please only share what feels relative to share.

Erica: No, no, no. I think it's a combination of things. I know we've talked before, and I've shared a little bit about how I went to med school to be a psychiatrist, to cure the world of eating disorders. And so, I think I've just

## Ep #103: Mindful Self-Compassion with Dr. Erica Bove

always been in tune with the human condition of suffering, relieving suffering, and compassion. What motivates people to do what they do? And how can people choose a different trajectory?

So, that's always been in the forefront of my mind. I went to med school, and I realized I absolutely love women's health. Psychiatry was awesome, it's just that the pace was not for me. I can't describe it any other way. I felt like I was with 'my people' in women's health.

And so, when I was in medical school, I was actually running a lot and I just didn't have any periods. They just stopped. As I think about it, they really had stopped a lot earlier, like when I was in high school and competitively running, and in college and everything.

But in med school, I was like, "Oh, this is not normal. This is not supposed to be this way." And so, I actually saw a reproductive endocrinologist myself at that time. They were like, "Oh, you have this thing called 'hypothalamic amenorrhea.' You may have difficulty conceiving. There's a whole thing that you've got to do. But don't worry, we'll help you out when the time comes. But you have this thing."

It just sort of got me thinking. They actually said I had a combination of PCOS and hypothalamic amenorrhea, which now, as a specialist, I know happens quite frequently. So, that's when I was first like, "Oh, I might have a hard time having kids, and I think I really want kids. I think that's part of my calling, of why I'm here on this earth."

Then, I decided that I was going to pursue a career in OB/GYN; I almost left my OB/GYN residency, which is a whole other story, just because I was in New York City, I was from Vermont, and it was very overwhelming. As you know, a lot of the tasks of an intern are very different from the very meaningful, beautiful career in women's health. It's more like checking boxes and things like that.

I actually had interviews even in other specialties, but I was like, "No, there's enough that I want to stay in this." So, as I did my residency, it was those moments in infertility that I found the most meaningful.

## Ep #103: Mindful Self-Compassion with Dr. Erica Bove

So, I think the combination of me becoming a fertility specialist, always being attuned to the more human side... I think that if you were to line up 10 REIs in a room... I mean, this is not a comparison, but I'm just always highly sensitive to the dynamics in the room.

Are people sitting towards each other? If it's a couple, are they sitting in different directions? What's the body language of my patient, or patients? How are they doing on a very deep soul level? And not just like, "Oh, did the transfer work? Oh, did they get a period?" It's a more holistic experience when I see people in this way.

So, I think once I was out in practice, and I've been out for almost nine years now, I was like, "Something is really missing in this experience for people." And so, I started becoming a coach. I started trying out some of the concepts of coaching and mindset work. Especially as it pertains to people whose eggs are not working very well.

It becomes this conversation of, "You've done three IVF cycles. It doesn't look like it's working. What are the other options at this point?" And sometimes people start to think about purchasing donor eggs to build their families, and I've helped many people with that. I will say, there is usually a big mental hurdle to navigate, when people decide to switch paths from using their own eggs to somebody else's eggs.

And so, I started to practice with the coaching principles. People were like, "That was amazing. I've never thought about these things. I've never even thought about questions like what does it mean to be a mother." Those very primal things.

It wasn't me telling people what they needed to do. It was me, as I'm coaching, showing people their own thoughts, their own feelings, their own limiting beliefs, and helping them draw the wisdom out of themselves. I'm getting chills thinking about this, but I'm like, "This is like magic. This is amazing." I can't think of anything more powerful than being in a position to help people figure out what they want to do with their own childbearing, and empowering them to make those decisions.

## Ep #103: Mindful Self-Compassion with Dr. Erica Bove

And so, that's when I really started to think about, "Okay, it's time for me to marry these two things and offer fertility coaching, specifically, to work alongside the infertility experience." I'm not here to replace anybody's doctor, this is purely coaching and not medical advice. But I think it complements the experience so well, because it can be a very isolating experience. And one where the mental thoughts can just be very defeating.

Kristi: Just hearing you speak, I can't help but think how phenomenal it would be if, in training, there was an extra track where not only did you do your fellowship, but you could also have a specialization in the mental/emotional aspects of supporting people. It probably will never happen at an institutional level, but just hearing that, it just seems, like you mentioned, there's something missing.

I know that's in every field, but I can see how, particularly in this field when that aspect of holistically taking care of someone and helping them understand how the way they're thinking about things is influencing their experience, it is just so foundational. So, I love hearing you talk about this.

It does occur to me at this moment, there are... of course, I don't know exactly who's listening at this moment. But I'm thinking that there are people listening to this podcast who do not have kids, do not want kids. There are people listening who have kids, they've got all the kids they want and they're not thinking about infertility. Or they did struggle with infertility and they have moved on, and so revisiting that is kind of uncomfortable.

They might be thinking, "Wait a second, this is a podcast talking about infertility. I don't know if this has anything to say to me." The first thought that crosses my mind, and I'd love to hear your take on this, is that what we're going to talk about, yes, it's through the lens and it's related to the specifics of someone's infertility journey. But it's relevant to things well beyond infertility, because it has to do with things that are behind that challenge. What would you say to that?

Erica: Yes, that's an amazing point. I think biology can be strong for many people. And for other people who are like, "I'm clearly not meant to bear

## Ep #103: Mindful Self-Compassion with Dr. Erica Bove

children. I don't want children," and that's very strong. I think in the other direction as well, the biological urge to reproduce can be very strong.

A lot of my clients are physicians, because we know that one in four female physicians struggles with infertility. We used to say one in eight, now it's one in six in the general population. But in the female physician population, it's one in four. And so, I want to speak to this from the lens of a physician patient, because I think that that has a little bit more nuances than the general population sometimes.

What I see a lot, for my physician patients, is, "I'm a doctor. I *should* know these things. I *should* know what to do. I should understand the biology. I should be able to be my own doctor, but I don't understand it. I can't interpret the different studies, and I can't apply them to myself. Not only do I feel powerless and discouraged and hopeless, I also feel this second arrow of judgment because I'm a doctor and I should know these things."

That brings up that human condition for all of us, when we take the initial pain, which is the actual thing itself, and then we add a second layer of suffering, which is the self-judgment. And so, I think when that happens, we all need to get really curious with ourselves and to say, "Okay, why am I judging myself for this? What do I need? How can I get what I need? How can I allow myself to be taken care of?"

Because what comes up in this journey routinely, is that we can't do it alone and we need to ask for help. You know I would say, and your clients I would venture to say, being an Ob/Gyn, we all have to get to this point, and have a certain level of wanting to do things ourselves, being very self-sufficient.

So, when it comes to either asking a colleague to take a shift so that we can get a blood draw or an egg retrieval, or when it comes to asking somebody's own doctor to take care of them and then switch to the role of being a patient, I think it can be very uncomfortable. I don't like being a patient at all. I even froze my eggs in my divorce. I know that's a whole different circumstance and situation, but that was very difficult even for me and this is what I do for a living.



## Ep #103: Mindful Self-Compassion with Dr. Erica Bove

I think we just have to acknowledge that it's a very complex process; from the financial to the medications to the uncertainty, and to all the different variables. And then, trying to figure out, especially, where that shame and self-judgment comes in. I think that's at the root of a lot of the struggle that I'd say 99% of my clients have with the fertility process.

Kristi: I love that you've hit on so many things that people who are outside of infertility struggles deal with; with asking for help, and/or layering on self-judgment on top of primary pain. And so, for anybody listening who's fertility is not their struggle, or it's not something you've ever encountered or know much about, this is still for you. Because of these things that are sort of at the heart of the struggle.

You mentioned this second layer of suffering, the self-judgment of, "I should be able to do this on my own. I should know better. I should..." Is that one of the common things that you see in your clients?

Erica: I do, and I think that's compounded by the fact that a lot of women professionals start trying to reproduce at older ages. So, we know our biology. We start menstruating in our teens. And then, back in the day, people used to have their first kids at 16, 18, 20. In the way our society has shifted, I think there are so many positives.

I'm in this situation, here I am, and as a physician I couldn't have done this generations ago. I also think it adds this added layer of complexity. Because to be a professional woman and a mother, in our current state, is nearly impossible. It's just impossible. It is impossible on every single level.

And so, I think when people find themselves at 36, 38, 40, 42, even 44, and say, "Oh, my goodness, my training took 10 years. Now I'm trying to conceive and it's not happening. I should have started sooner. If I only had not made my career the priority, this wouldn't have happened." We don't know those things.

I mean, it could be that someone might have infertility at 25, if that's when they started trying. We don't know. But it's like, 'I should have,' 'I could have,' 'if I would have' done these things; that regret can be just so taxing.

## Ep #103: Mindful Self-Compassion with Dr. Erica Bove

So, a lot of what I do is this mindful self-compassion. Of, “Listen, you made the best decisions you could at the time. We all do. How can we help you give yourself grace, to hold space for yourself, stay in the present moment, and move forward?”

Because unless we operate with mindful self-compassion, it just becomes this internal war that can actually be insurmountable.

Kristi: When you're talking with people about mindful self-compassion, what are the things that your clients find challenging about leaning into and embracing that?

Erica: Oh, my gosh. I don't think we're taught this. I don't think anybody teaches us mindful self-compassion. I think that for many of us high achievers, the way that we got to where we are is through a lot of grit, a lot of self-flagellation, a lot of inner critic. The inner critic for so many of us is so strong, and so to risk letting go of what led to our success thus far, that can be incredibly scary.

And then, it's like, “Well, am I letting myself off the hook? Am I just going to let myself go?” I mean, my clients are high achieving women, and so I think this is where coaching comes in. Because I think that we can actually turn that inner critic into an inner coach. It's just a very subtle shift, but we need to pause and we need to listen to ourselves.

I will tell you; I figured that out in therapy. I love therapy. I figured out in therapy, maybe five, six years ago, that I was fluent in criticism. I was like, “Oh, my goodness, I didn't know that was a language.” But when I actually stopped and listened to my own internal dialogue, it was just criticism after criticism after criticism.

A lot of us just don't even realize we have this negatively running tape, and so part of it is the thought download, looking at the circumstances... which is just neutral. It's a coaching principle, as you know... and shining a light on those thoughts. Being like, “Huh, is that true? Would anybody in a court of law agree to this? That's so interesting that that thought is even there in the first place.”

## Ep #103: Mindful Self-Compassion with Dr. Erica Bove

Then, we can decide to choose. We can challenge, gently nudge, and challenge the thought, and then find something else that's more true.

Kristi: Completely. I love that you said you're fluent in criticism. Is that how you phrased it? Like it's a different language that you didn't realize you knew. I love that idea.

Erica: I think that's where I love... I don't know anybody else who's doing this. I hope to grow this, train people to do this, and just sort of change the culture from within. But I think that having the evidence-based approach, that can be where we start to challenge those assumptions that are perhaps not true.

That's where we can say, "Okay, what reasons do we have for authentic hope here? What thoughts could that generate?" There are reasons for authentic hope, I am not a false-hope kind of a person at all. But I think when we can pare away the clutter, and be like, "Oh, you've had a baby before. Oh, you're only 32 years old. Oh, you have a robust anti-mullerian hormone, and you are probably going to get a lot of eggs and embryos to choose from."

There are all these different things in our fertility world that you might not know, say, if you're a cardiologist, or an accountant or something else, but there's a lot of things we can really hang our hat on and be like, "These are good things. How can we stay with those good things, in terms of generating more hopeful feelings, more authentic optimism?"

Because I think a lot of people just say, "This is too much, I've got to stop." And that may be the right decision for somebody. I also think that if we make decisions based on fear and despair, that's hard to reconcile. Because I think, sometimes, if we don't achieve the goal we initially set out, then years later we do have that regret.

So, I think it's helping people make the best decisions they can, with all the available information. I say, "I want you to look back, in two or three years, and feel really good about this decision that you made."

## Ep #103: Mindful Self-Compassion with Dr. Erica Bove

Kristi: I love how you phrased it “authentic hope,” as opposed to “wistfulness” and “hopefulness”; which sometimes carries that connotation of, ‘I’m creating this fantasy that butts up against the evidence. I’m doing it to sort of placate myself, to survive something that’s literally not good. And then I’ll look back and say, ‘I was just fooling myself.’”

We talked about that. And for people who may not have heard this idea, I’ll just sort of recap it. When the idea, or concept, in coaching is that if you can parse out facts that could be proven in a court of law, that you can find it in a scientific journal that somebody has found in a lab, that everybody would agree that your anti-mullerian hormone level is..., and you’ve had a kid. And you could say, “Those are facts.”

You can separate those out, from the narrative about those facts that you have in your mind, and just notice what that narrative is. And if that narrative is, “I’m never going to make it. it’s not going to work. It’s awful,” that will generate a certain emotional experience.

Versus, “Huh, maybe this is possible, maybe not. Maybe I can work with this.” You might have a different emotional experience. I can see, if you fast forward, even if you have two people, one has authentic hope and one has despair, and neither of them conceive at the end of three years, the experience of those three years is going to be entirely different.

Erica: Yes, that’s exactly it. It’s exactly it. I think it brings up the question of thriving, right? It brings up the question of, how do we want to show up every day? One thing I work with my clients a lot on is, how can we stay authentically hopeful, and at the same time let go of the outcome? Because I think sometimes, we get so focused on the outcome, and for good reason.

Because childbearing is just so deeply ingrained in our biology for many of us, and it’s very profound. But I think it’s that belief that it’s possible, and understanding that whatever happens on the other side it is going to be okay. There will be a pathway to parenthood, we just don’t know exactly what it looks like yet. There will be a pathway.

## Ep #103: Mindful Self-Compassion with Dr. Erica Bove

It's kind of like having a guide to help navigate those things. Pointing to your other question earlier, that is so key in any thing in life, right? We have our plans, we have our desires, and we have the things that we really want to manifest. And at the same time, we need to find a way to say, "This, or something better."

Kristi: Yeah. Just hearing that, I want everybody to really hear what you said, "How can we stay authentically hopeful, and let go of the outcome?" Be okay not knowing what the outcome is, and also be okay if the outcome that you think you want, or that you do want, doesn't happen. I think that applies to so many things, right? I think that's a tricky one. Right?

Erica: It's so tricky. It is so tricky. In your Episode #100, when you were talking about what can we control, what can't we control. We can control our mindset. We can control our community. We can control that we take actionable steps, and the best steps that we can. At the end of the day, we can't control the ultimate outcome, and we can't control the timeline.

Sometimes I say to my patients, "If this embryo transfer doesn't work, don't worry, we're going to stay with it. I still believe in you. We've got this. It's just that sometimes it doesn't happen on the exact timeline that we're hoping for." And that can be, especially for us type-A people, that can be really hard to reconcile.

But if we can learn that skill... It's something that's a practice, it's a discipline. It's one reason I love yoga so much. It's something that I talk about, things I struggle with. I struggle with it, I work on it, and I truly think it's the way through. Because that's how we need to live our lives in order to be able to wake up in the morning and do the things we need to do in the best way possible.

Kristi: I love that you pointed out that it's a practice. Because for anybody listening to this, they could listen and be like, "Oh, wow, it sounds like Erica and Kristi, they've got it all figured out. They do mindful self-compassion. They have completely detached from the outcome so that they're thriving." And I just want to point out that, at least for me, I mean, if you pull back the

## Ep #103: Mindful Self-Compassion with Dr. Erica Bove

curtain and take a look into my everyday life, there are things that I coach people on that I...

One of the reasons I coach them on it is because I have intimate familiarity with how exquisitely really painful it is to struggle with these things. And if I didn't see it as a practice, it would be very easy for me to be like, "Well, it's never going to work." They are things I struggle with, as well.

Knowing it's possible to have a different way to look at things, and think about things, and having that sense of agency. Of, "Okay, so if I take all the things I can't control and I sort of separate myself from them a little bit so I have a little space, and then go, oh, where's my control?"

That helps me grab my footing, even if I have to do that every day. It gets easier over time. It's like yoga, you don't just do it three times, and then go, "I'm done. I'm done with yoga. I completed it."

Erica: That's right. One thing about yoga I love so much is just the simple expression, "Stay on the mat." Sometimes my tendency is just to fight or flight. I'm like, "Flight. Just let me get off his mat as soon as possible." Because that's cleaner. But I think that if I can speak to my clients, I can speak to us, as coaches...

I'll even say, I have a whole group of clients, of fertility specialists actually, who are... We transfer stuff, right? So, if a patient doesn't get pregnant, it's like, "Oh, my gosh, it's my fault." There's all this stuff that also comes with providing this care to people.

I think trying to figure out just being a human being, and the 50/50 of life, and how to feel the uncomfortable emotions and then let them go, it's just... I think when we align ourselves with other people who are on the same path, and the same journey of, 'okay, I'm not just going to go binge watch on Netflix for 10 hours, but I'm going to just take even 20 minutes with my journal, and just acknowledge what I'm feeling.'

People who are attuned to that, I think that's when I'm like, "Okay, I'm growing. Okay, I'm evolving, and I can help other people do the same."

## Ep #103: Mindful Self-Compassion with Dr. Erica Bove

Kristi: To just echo what you said earlier, this is not something that people teach us, but these are things that are easy to learn. I say easy to learn, they're not so complicated that we can't quickly go, "Oh, wow, that makes sense. If I can acknowledge what I'm feeling, if I can write about it... They are things that I can talk to my fifth grader about. And kids, they get it, it's absorbable."

There are barriers to learning it that make it challenging. Where we're thinking, "Oh, we should already know how to do this." But in general, for anybody listening, these are things that are not so complicated that you have to go to grad school to be able to apply them in your everyday life right now. Which, I think, makes them seem accessible, very practical and pragmatic. Which is what I love about coaching. Which is why it's so useful.

I'd like to take a little bit of a left turn and go back to something you said a second ago. Noticing you are fluent in criticism, and with your clients, helping them let go of the inner critic in a way that your inner critic transforms into an inner coach. I would love to hear a little bit more about that.

Because one of the common things that we see in the sort of conventional advice about a mean inner narrative, is that you need to argue with your inner critic. Tell it to shut up, go away, and banish it. Slam the door in its face. And this idea of your inner critic turning into an inner coach is very different. So, yeah, tell me your take on that.

Erica: Interestingly, I actually think that the link is mindful self-compassion. The easiest entry point into doing that process, of turning the inner critic into an inner coach, is asking yourself: How would I speak to a friend about this? There's the inner critic self, and then the self that's like, "Oh, my gosh!"

That kind of internal warring, that arguing of the inner critic and the response to that, and then what do I do about it? Like you said, shutting it down, or maybe taking certain steps that involve some degree of self-flagellation. It's like a whole cacophony, a whole symphony in there sometimes.

## Ep #103: Mindful Self-Compassion with Dr. Erica Bove

And so, I always think to myself, “Okay, what would I tell my friend if they said, ‘It’s your fault that you’re not pregnant by now.’” Right? Just take that thought, “It’s your fault. You waited too long.” What would my best friend tell me? What would I tell my best friend if they continued with that, with that stance?

I would imagine my best friend would be like, “Oh, my gosh, Erica. Look at what you’ve done. You went to college, you went to medical school, and you went on this long journey to serve other women. This is what you wanted to do. Of course, you have that thought, that makes sense. But oh, my goodness, I love you so much. You are doing the best you can. And you know that it’s not over for you. The jury isn’t out. But really try to be gentle with yourself, because this is not your fault. You didn’t cause this. If you can, give yourself some grace.”

And so, I think that validating is really important. Because if we tell ourselves we’re not making sense, that’s invalidating and shutting ourselves down. So, we have to tell ourselves that we make sense, first and foremost.

There is a reason that we have that thought, right? Oh, it makes sense that you have that thought, however, how does that thought make you feel? What are some other things that we could try that might challenge that? We are the hardest on ourselves. We are absolutely the hardest on ourselves.

And when we can say ‘what would a friend say to us in that situation,’ I then borrow those words to talk to myself. In terms of holding space for myself, holding space for the human experience, forgiving myself, thinking about ways forward.

That’s that grounding in the moment, that keeps me not stuck in the past about judgment, about my past decisions. And also, not anxiously worrying too much about the future. Because it’s like, “I’ve got this. I’ve got myself. I’ve got this.

Kristi: One of the things that I’ve found super useful is a little variant of ‘what would my friends say?’ It’s, how comfortable would I be saying the



## Ep #103: Mindful Self-Compassion with Dr. Erica Bove

things I'm saying to myself to my daughter, or to my best friend? Like, "This is all your fault. I can't believe you don't know better." Instantly, I cringe.

I can see the criticism for what it is, and then being open to 'how would I talk to my best friend? How would that make me feel if I did that for myself?' It's such an effective shift.

The thing that crosses my mind now is, I'm imagining somebody thinking, "Okay, that makes perfect sense. I would be kind and warm, and I would help my friend make sense. When I do that to myself, that feels great." And then hearing these objections of, "But if I'm not hard on myself, if I don't point out the reality of things, I'm just going to be this passive person. I'm not going to do anything."

Because, as you mentioned, the inner critic has perhaps been really useful for driving them, in a certain way. What would you say to that?

Erica: I think that we have to remember that we are who we are, right? And we are, at our core, these amazingly motivated, talented, beautiful people. And so, the inner critic, that's that part of us that's just trying to keep us in line. It's just trying to stay in your lane, do the things. But that's not the source of our inspiration. That's not the reason that we are her.

Our purpose, our drive, our desire, all those things are so much more than an inner critic that's just kind of like a traffic cop. Or like a person who's literally just like, "Just don't get in trouble while you're doing it." So, I think if we can see it for what it is, and that that kind of 'stay in your lane' voice did serve us at one point in time...

This was very clear to me when I ran a 10k over the summer. I am a runner. I know you love mountain biking, and feel like they're analogous. So, I used to be a competitive runner. I actually was the state champion when I was in high school, and so I was really, really hard on myself and into running. I was always speaking to myself with a negative self-talk, right?

And so, residency went on, fellowship went on, and I didn't run too much. But then I got back into it, and I realized, I remembered, how much I loved

## Ep #103: Mindful Self-Compassion with Dr. Erica Bove

it. So, then, after doing the coaching work and starting to talk in terms of mindful self-compassion, if I'd have a thought...

I think once you're attuned to these things, sometimes you're like, "Oh, my gosh, you're so slow. That wasn't very nice. Can you choose something different?" You start to retrain the brain as you're training and having more awareness of these things.

And so, the funny thing was, I ran the race in June, and I was faster than I was 20 years ago. I realized that the entire time I was being kind of myself. So, that was just a very concrete example of, 'your inner critic is not what causes your greatness. It's you, Erica. It's your motivation. It's your drive. It's your love of running. And your loving voice is actually going to make you faster, because you're not going to be warring against yourself.'

It's just going to allow those parts of you to flourish. Is it scary? Heck, yes. Absolutely, it's scary. Because it's a new way, it's a new path. "I don't have too many models of what this looks like." But we have to remember that our essence is us.

There's actually data about this, if we can treat ourselves with love, kindness, self-compassion, it actually opens up those creative parts of our brain where higher level thinking is possible, problem solving is possible. So, we think that we're keeping ourselves small by letting go of our critic, but actually, we're taking away the brakes. So we can actually evolve into our greatest selves.

Kristi: I think that's the irony that the critical voice may not appreciate, right? That voice is doing its best to keep us safe and motivated, etc., and it worked for a while. Yet, I find, sometimes when we sit with that voice and go, "Hey, do you see how it feels super discouraging to receive that? And how, ultimately, the very thing that you want, to go do these things, is kind of foiled when this is the background narrative?"

Sometimes those critics move to being like, "Oh, well, I'm this detail-oriented voice in your mind, and I can help you with all the details."

## Ep #103: Mindful Self-Compassion with Dr. Erica Bove

But perhaps with a different tone. “Because if it's going to work better, okay.”

Erica: Is that motivation based on fear, versus love? And all those different things. And so, it's really, really tricky for those of us where the inner critic has been so strong for so many years. One thing that helps me is sitting with it, like you said, and thanking it. Just being like, “I see you. I hear you. Thank you for trying to keep me in line. Thank you for everything you did all those years to help me, when I was...” Whatever it is, I thank the inner critic, and I just say, “You know what? I don't need you in this way anymore. You can stay, you can stay in my party. You can be here, but I have new friends now too, and that's okay.”

Kristi: That's so good.

Erica: Thank you. It's not banishing it. It's not shunning it or splitting it off. It's integrating it in, and being like, “Yeah, you're a part of me. But I'm so much bigger now.”

Kristi: Totally. Yeah. The lens that I look at the critic through, it sounds very parallel to what you're talking about, which is that it's a part of us that's taken on a role out of necessity, that maybe it doesn't even enjoy, but it does it because it feels like it has to. Sort of like the bodyguard that's tasked with protecting the baby, you're not going to stop doing that job until you know the baby is safe, right? You're not going to go retire.

But if you knew there was a different way, and the very thing that you wanted wasn't going to be sabotaged by changing your tune, these inner critics, oftentimes, are like, “Absolutely, I would like a break. I would love to be your inner cheerleader. I would love to just retire and go sit on a boat and have a cigar. You just go do you.” When you can have that sort of dialogue of, “Hey, thanks for your line of duty, you've done amazingly. There is a different way, where you don't have to work so hard, and we can do this differently. Would you be interested?” That type of collaborative conversation is just different.

## Ep #103: Mindful Self-Compassion with Dr. Erica Bove

Erica: Yes. The working hard, I think we don't realize how much mental energy it takes to keep up that level of hyper vigilance. In the fertility journey, specifically, there's so many details; what are my follicle sizes? What is my estrogen level? When is my egg retrieval going to happen? What is my IUI going to be like? There are all these data inputs.

I think that is part of the inner critic is to be that hyper vigilant voice of 'careful, careful, careful, careful.' It's almost like all these threats. As a physician I do this, and as a coach I do this; I'm like, let me do the worrying for you. Like let me take that energy, that burden, off of you, so that you can relax and be the client or the patient.

Obviously, mindset work takes energy, but sometimes in coaching this has been a beautiful thing. Sometimes, whether it's anger about something, getting double booked, that always used to steal so much of my energy. And then my coach said to me, "This is stealing so much of your energy. Can you just have less resistance to this and see what happens?"

And all of a sudden, I have all this new energy back. I was like, this is amazing. It was just because I was having such a strong emotion and resisting so much. But I didn't realize how much it was stealing from me.

So, I think viewing it that way, as, 'oh my goodness, this is very costly. And how can I reduce that energy expenditure, so that I have more energy for other things?' Maybe I want to paint. Maybe I want to go for a walk in nature. Maybe I want to journal or listen to music or have a bath. But those things sometimes are only accessible when we kick something off the island. I don't mean splitting, but I mean, just tone down the inner critic. I feel like I have better things to do with my time.

Kristi: Yeah, making a change. That job description, that role, that's just not needed. That role can be kicked off the island. And the part of us that does that can totally say it. It makes me think of... thank goodness I've never had this experience... but the advice they give you if you get caught up in a riptide. That you do not swim against it; relax, let it take you down, and then when you can, you swim.

## Ep #103: Mindful Self-Compassion with Dr. Erica Bove

Because all that resistance, number one, it's counterproductive. It exhausts you. Versus if you're just like, "This is what I've got. I've been double booked. Here's the facts. How can I think about this? How can I experience this in a way that's not denying the fact that I got double booked? Maybe I would appreciate that not having in the future. But also, it's not like fighting against it in a way that just is so exhausting."

I think that your point is so good, that we don't actually recognize how depleting it is to have that constant hyper vigilance. I know, for me, I don't think I realized how hyper vigilant I was. We can even take the qualifier out; I didn't realize how vigilant I was about so many things. I didn't even see it, right? The fish in the water just didn't ever notice it. I was like, "Isn't everyone like this? Doesn't everyone constantly scan and look?"

Erica: Oh, my gosh. When you talk on your podcast about habits being overwhelm, overworking, overthinking, that's the heart of it right there. Because that is absolutely a habit. And those habits, they keep us small, they steal our energy. That's why I think what you do is so brilliant.

Some people might just think, "Oh, a habit is like drinking too much. A habit is like shopping too much," or whatever. But we have these patterns that are truly habits, that are not our highest selves. And so, that's why I just want to tie it in, because that is the core of your work. We can let go of that, but we have to see it first, and we have to be shown a different way.

Kristi: I so appreciate that. It's really a kind comment. Thank you for that. And tying that in, because the work that you and I do, there's so much overlap and so much parallel. I think that idea of just acknowledging that there are lots of patterns in the way that we behave, many of which are driven by things that have been kind of socialized and programmed into our mentality, that we don't realize aren't just intrinsic and fixed.

They're actually things that we've learned, and that we were very resourcefully learning how to navigate the world. But because we learned them, we can therefore unpack them and learn a different way that brings us so much more energy.

## Ep #103: Mindful Self-Compassion with Dr. Erica Bove

That's the thing that gives me so much hope, hearing how you're talking with people, because I had some struggles with fertility. Nothing that was pronounced, but the bit that I did have was very stressful. I didn't have a Dr. Bove in my life to walk me through it. I just think how beautiful that there's this resource that exists now.

So, I would love for people listening to know how they can find you, how they can read more about your resources, how they can connect, and how they can work with you. How do people find you?

Erica: Absolutely. I think the best way is my website. It's [LoveAndScienceFertility.com](http://LoveAndScienceFertility.com). I'm also on Facebook and Instagram; they are the same names, which is kind of convenient. Love and Science Fertility for Facebook and Instagram. I'm also on LinkedIn. Some people prefer the more "professional" way. It's just my name, Erica Bove MD, on LinkedIn.

But I think if people are hearing this, and they're like, "Oh, this sounds really interesting. I'd like to learn more," I would love to connect through a discovery call. Through my website, if you're interested, say "Work with me," and then we can have a chat about what I do, a person's style and what they might need. Also, I have an email list. If you're not a part of my email list yet, be a part of it. You can sign up on my website, as well. There are lots of wonderful nuggets there, as well.

Kristi: If you aren't sure what she just said, like where to go, just go to the show notes and we'll have everything linked there. You can just click it and just go find her. I just really love that we get to have this conversation. I know we were talking before we pressed record about how we could just keep talking longer than we actually have time for in our schedules.

But it's been so fun to hear all the things you brought up, and I think it's so useful for being "merchant of hope" for people listening, knowing that there is a different way that they can experience any life challenges, specifically infertility. So, I really appreciate you coming on and taking the time to share all this with us.

## Ep #103: Mindful Self-Compassion with Dr. Erica Bove

Erica: Oh, absolutely. Even broader than fertility, I think sometimes we're kind of sold this bill that, okay, if you choose to go into medicine or any of these other professions, it's like you have to make all these sacrifices and that the best you can do is survive and not thrive.

Part of my passion, part of my mission is to say, "No, we can actually do better." We need to learn different skills, we need to learn better boundaries, we need to learn how to say no effectively, and yes effectively. The 'hell, yes' thing you talk about. Absolutely.

But I would love for us as women professionals to make the bar "thriving." Not this, "Oh, am I surviving?" But, "How can I thrive?" And maybe we start small in one area of our life. We're like, "Oh, this feels good. I think I can uplevel this other area of life."

This is my mission. I think we can join in that together, to help our people, to help our audience be like, "More is possible." Sometimes it's just these 1% shifts; for instance, turning our inner critic into an inner coach.

Kristi: Yeah, setting the bar as "thriving." Not like, "Maybe one day I'll thrive.? If that's the bar, what are the skills I need to learn? How can I do these 1% practical shifts?" So that, no, you don't have to go off to Nepal for a year to do these things. You can do them in the trenches of everyday domestic life.

Erica: That's right. Well, thank you. I'm so inspired by you. I'm so grateful that you're part of my village. I just love hearing what you have to say. I feel there's such an alignment and so much power here. So, thank you for inviting me to be here, and I look forward to so many more conversations.

Kristi: I totally do, as well. This is so perfect. Awesome. Thank you so much for being on. Everybody, go follow her and find her in all the places.

If you're a woman physician who wants to start examining your internal world, so you can be more effective in your outside world and more intentional with your habits, you're going to want to go to [HabitsOnPurpose.com/waitlist](https://HabitsOnPurpose.com/waitlist) right now.

## Ep #103: Mindful Self-Compassion with Dr. Erica Bove

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