

Episode 99: Why You Still Go Quiet (Even When You Know Better), with Meg Josephson

Mandy: Think of the last time you were in a conversation where something really needed to be said and you said nothing. You told yourself it wasn't the right moment, but honestly, something in you just shut it down. And then at two in the morning you're saying the thing you wanted to say to the ceiling, to nobody feeling frustrated with yourself.

And round and round it goes inside your brain. This episode is about that, something that shuts you down in those moments. Before we dive in, welcome to enough the podcast. I'm Dr. Mandy Leto, executive coach to senior leaders, and in every episode of the show, we get into the stuff that high achievers are too busy performing to talk about.

The self silencing, the over accommodating the inner critic that never clocks off and the question humming underneath even the most impressive career. Am I enough yet? Today I'm in conversation with Meg Josephson psychotherapist and New York Times bestselling author of, *are You Mad at Me?* You're about to get a coach.

Therapist, both with skin in this game, taking real life scenarios apart, together. Like that meeting where you froze, or the conflict you've been circling for months, and those 2:00 AM replays, you know the ones, we're not explaining them from a distance, we're getting inside of them by the end of this conversation.

That's something that shuts you down in those moments, will finally have a name. And a way through. Let's get into it with Meg.

Imagine that we're observing a fictional executive.

Meg: Okay,

Mandy: so picture this scene. This person is in a boardroom with a number of different suits. This person is, in this case, a woman, and they're observing this situation. It's a risk discussion. Unfolding. She has some concerns because she's an SME. She's a subject matter expert on this, but the senior stakeholder who happens to be her line manager's boss.

Is really bullish on this opportunity and she wants to say something because she's quite a senior person herself. Mm-hmm. Mm-hmm. But she's feeling the enthusiasm and she's kind of getting carried along by the enthusiasm. She doesn't wanna be that sort of sad trombone downer in that conversation. So she chooses to say nothing.

Then she's working the spreadsheets all night. She writes this very polite email with lots of caveats, probably has a couple of emojis in there, which she doesn't send, and then she passive aggressively snaps at her partner over dinner. She fitfully sleeps and she's replaying this conversation in her mind at two o'clock in the morning.

Wakes up exhausted and she's irritated with herself asking herself, why didn't I just say something? What is going on there?

Meg: Oh, so much. So many good things. Hmm. First of all. There's obvious self silencing. There's, there's some anger, there is some resentment. And resentment is such an important emotion because it's saying there's something need that's not being met.

There's something happening here that, something that needs to be addressed, and I'm ignoring it and. Resentment festers as we're seeing. You know, she wanted to say something at this meeting she didn't allow herself to, and so now it's being projected onto her partner over dinner because that anger has to go somewhere.

So it's, if it's it, I imagine this person has been doing this for a long time in terms of shoving it down, shoving it down, shoving it down. It's going to continue to build and explode and spill over and be projected into relationships that she feels the safest in IIEA partner where it's, it's a comfortable to let that out at what cost, of course, but.

She's also angry at herself. It's pointed inward because she's abandoning herself. She's neglecting her needs. Um, she's not feeling authentic. She maybe that email, even, even though she didn't send it, it didn't feel true to her. She's fluffing it up. No worries if not. And smiley face here and exclamation points.

What's also happening is I think she's in an attempt to keep the peace she is avoiding discomfort, her own discomfort, the discomfort, perceived discomfort of her coworkers of other people. Uh, so in a way to keep the peace. She's avoiding conflict, she's avoiding hard conversations that need to happen that may bring up disagreement, uh, but in an attempt to dodge that.

She's creating a lot of tension within herself. That's my overview of what we have going on. Remind me how it ended.

Mandy: Where she wakes up completely exhausted, having lived on the fumes of sleep, and she's probably gonna pump herself full of caffeine and push down more of that passive aggressiveness, which will leak out and she'll be incredibly hard on herself.

Meg: Yes, yes, yes.

Mandy: And I suspect it will look fantastic to the outside world because. She's managing it so darn well. Mm-hmm.

Meg: Yeah. And it is exhausting. It's exhausting to. A replay. Things in our head, replay the scenario, the conversation, the imagined thing, the fake argument in our mind. That fake argument is usually a sign that there is resentment that needs to be looked at.

There's some need that isn't being met. There's some words that need to be expressed, but it's exhausting to go through that loop and to. Continue to shove it down as opposed to, and this is, I'm simplify, I'm oversimplifying here, but the opposite being, acknowledging what am I feeling right now? I'm feeling like I have an opinion that I wanna share that people may not agree with, and I'm feeling resentful that I feel like I can't share it.

And then it's maybe having clear, direct, honest communication with that person, managing that hard, uncomfortable conversation, soothing herself after of it's okay that I said that I was allowed to speak my opinion, and then maybe she would've had a a, a more easeful. Dinner where she wouldn't snap and react because she felt more regulated in her body.

And this isn't to say that having honest communication doesn't mean we're not overthinking, but I think we're, what we're doing is our, we're increasing our ability to be with the discomfort that goes with it. That's the practice.

Mandy: And when we're fawning, I want you to define fawning in a second, but when we're fawning it, at least from personal experience as a recovering fauna, uh, somebody who's in the process still at my age of doing it, and I've become much more compassionate with it, but it feels like those options that you just described, they make perfect sense, but they don't feel available.

In the heat of the moment. So for somebody who's never actually had language for this and they said, what is that fawning thing? Could you give us a definition of what that actually is?

Meg: Yes. So our bodies have what we know, four responses to a threat fight or flight, which I think a lot of us are familiar with freeze.

And the fourth one is the fawn response. Um, and so when our body's detecting some sort of threat, whether that threat is. Real, like there's a line in front of us or an abuser or perceived someone's being a little cold or someone didn't respond to your text. And now it's like, are they mad at me? Did you do something wrong?

Are we okay? Uh, that's a perceived threat or remembered. So it can be something that we, our body remembers from our, our past as well. Our body goes into appeasement mode, so we try to appease the threat. Be liked by it, satisfy it, impress it so that we can feel safe. And so the phone response really says, I can't feel okay until we're okay.

I can't feel my safety comes from pleasing you, and I can't feel safe until I know you like me. It's an unconscious, brilliant survival mechanism and sometimes we need it. When we're doing it all the time, um, often learned in childhood, if it's our default state, we, you know, we kept the peace and that was how we found safety.

We were perfect and easy and good. And I'm putting air quotes everywhere because what does that mean? That's our default way of being. And sometimes we need it for survival, for safety to get a paycheck. But when we're doing it all the time in all of our relationships, it becomes exhausting. And I think the greatest sort of consequence to go back to our original, uh, narrative example, is it leaves us feeling really far from ourselves.

Who am I when I'm not pleasing everyone else? Who am I when I'm not being a chameleon? In my relationships we're when we are so hyper attuned to what's happening externally. Do they like me? Do they think my joke was funny? Are they upset with me? We become completely disconnected from our inner world and disconnected from what am I feeling?

What do I need right now? What do I think of this? And we don't. We will prefer to. Shove down our needs to keep the peace, even if that means hating ourselves for it, even if that means overthinking social interactions at 2:00 AM or not sending an email that we really wanna send. So the real work is, uh, I think coming back to who we really are.

Mm-hmm.

Mandy: And it can sound so easy. I know a lot of times when I'm coaching somebody, for example, and I'll speak to the line manager and they'll say something like, oh, well, she just needs to be more confident. Yeah, she just needs to be more vocal. Or she just needs to put her opinions out on the table as if it were that straightforward, as if it were that easy.

So how would somebody be able to tell. I know you've just given us quite a forensic response to what fawning is and some of the signs are, but a lot of people who I work with that are in their forties, fifties, they're very, very senior. They're mid-career, they've got a glass box office and they're like, well, I don't do that type of thing.

If I recommend your book or you know, share about the whole concept of the fun response, how would somebody even begin to recognize that they do this?

Meg: I think of it sort of, there's an inner experience to it and there's an outer experience. And I think for people that have achieved a level of success, they have it all on the outside.

Perhaps it's more of an inner experience for them where um, they're really hard on them, hard on themselves. They beat themselves up for everything. And I wanna say, I'm gonna interrupt myself in saying. This isn't, I, I wanna be clear. This isn't a bad thing. It's a protective thing. And so for many people, like people pleasing and being really hard on ourselves and being a perfectionist has helped us to get to a level of success.

And so it can be like, why do I, why would I wanna stop that? Why would I wanna turn that off? We're not saying we're stopping this protective response. We couldn't if we tried, it's an unconscious response, but what we're doing is we are becoming aware of it so that when we're doing it, when it's not helpful.

We can pause and choose a new way. The sort of inner experience, if you struggle with a level, really high level of perfectionism, nothing is enough for you.

Mandy: Mm-hmm.

Meg: Throw your podcast in there. Nothing is enough for the inner critic. You, you achieve something. And the the goalposts just move. Okay, nevermind.

Once I do this, then I'll be happier, then I'll be worthy, or then I'll have done enough in my mind because the fond response, find safety in doing more. Find safety in trying harder. If I just do more, if I just try harder, then I'll be loved. Then I'll be worthy. So it's

Mandy: not actually in the achievement, it's in the doing of the I, which I call next thing. Like you're yeah, you're, you're always needing the next thing. So it's the pursuit of some kind of ideal that. Actually is like a hall of mirrors.

Meg: Well, absolutely. And I, it's, remember this, this is a, this is a part of us that is really trying to protect us. So this part feels inherently deficient. And so if we are finding safety and have historically found safety and trying harder in our relationships at school, at work, it wouldn't feel safe to feel enough.

You know what I mean? Like that part has found safety in trying harder and it's trying to protect us. So it has to keep going and going and going in order to feel okay. And that's where our awareness becomes so important of being aware of that story and how that's not, it's this endless, uh, aimless or it's this endless pursuit of enoughness that will never arrive.

So that that sort of constant, I'm, I need to keep going. I need to keep trying harder in order for me to feel happy and okay and safe. That's a huge, huge piece of it. I would say something that's a little sneaky with the phone response that people may resonate with is this feeling of being. And secretly bad or like I'm about, I'm in trouble feeling like,

Mandy: Oh yes,

Meg: I talk about this of my first job out of college, getting anytime my boss would slack me just this sinking feeling of I'm about to get fired.

I did something wrong. I've been caught or something there. And I think many people who resonate with this framework. They're probably never doing anything wrong. Like they're, they're, they're the goodie people. And so it's, it's not a rational response, but that's also common overthinking. Um, overextending ourselves feeling like we can't say no, uh, always feeling like we've done something wrong.

If someone's in a bad mood, feeling like, oh gosh, it's my fault. If you're at a party, you're at a work event and you are in a social setting, scanning, did they think my joke was funny? Ruminating? Did I say the wrong thing? Did they like me? Maybe it's you feel like someone doesn't like you, and so you try harder.

You, you try to prove yourself in the relationship so that finally they like you. It's really sneaky and it can be quite subtle, and it also kind of works, which is just at what cost.

Mandy: Do you also find that there can be this chaser of shame afterwards? Because especially when somebody has started doing therapy and or coaching or self-development or reading a lot, and then they realize that they have this fun response and then it's like.

Oh, there's me trying so hard, like here I am, tap dancing for worth. Like this has happened to me not even that long ago. Like I realized I really, really want this person to like me. And then kind of pulling back from that like, ugh. Shouldn't I be over this by now? So it becomes this weird internal negotiation where part of you starts waking up to it and then it's, I don't know if shame is the right word, but this inner tussle of like, ugh, here we are again. Haven't we read enough books, haven't we? Of course. So it's, it's, um, it's a journey, isn't it?

Meg: It is. It's a daily practice. And I think, I love what you're saying. I think there are a few layers to it. The first of which being. Perfectionism seeps into all aspects of our lives, including healing. And so I think because we're perfectionists in other areas, boom.

We're like, okay, I, why aren't I perfect at, why haven't I fixed this yet? What's wrong with me, shouldn't I? I've done the therapy, I've read the books. Shouldn't check, shouldn't it be done? There's a belief there that something is wrong with you, that needs to be fixed, first of all. But also that if you just work hard enough.

It will happen. And so as opposed to it being a practice of this is what's coming up for me today, this is what I'm seeing today and constantly and regularly returning to just being aware of what is coming up for us and having compassion for that part. But I think that perfectionism, perfection is very black or white.

I'm perfect or I'm not. I'm good, or I'm bad, I'm safe or I'm not. And so have I healed it? No, but we, we think of ourselves as these like things to be fixed. And I think the true practice is recognizing we don't need to be fixed 'cause we're not inherently broken. And that's where it gets to the core, core belief of not enoughness.

If we believe that we are enough, we don't, we won't think that we need to check box, fix ourselves.

Mandy: And I think that's, that's the work right there, because it's so easy to fall into. Yeah, well that's fine for other people, but secretly that doesn't apply to me, so I still need to keep doing the next thing and the next thing.

Because it feels like, again, coming back to that idea of other options, feeling so discombobulating or. Utterly impossible. Like, yeah, that seems like such a existential net falling out that if I'm not constantly looking to self-improve or be like a fixer upper project or read the, the Tower of Self-help books on my bedside table, uh, this feels so not enough.

This feels so, dare I say. Ordinary.

Meg: Yeah, absolutely. And I think in my clinical work, I, I use a lot of Buddhist based psychology, a lot of mindfulness based practices. And part of that, uh, I think the foundation of that is having awareness so that we can see those thoughts and see those stories and emotions.

As if we are just watching them. And so it, I think what tends to happen is when we're, when we're shaming ourselves for not being healed enough, we then shame ourselves for shaming ourselves. Shouldn't I be nicer to myself? Why aren't I more compassionate? Everyone's talking about self-compassion, and so that's also just another voice to notice.

We're just having awareness of these voices so that we can see them. From a bit of a distance and see them more clearly, but not adding these extra layers of tension. Stripping away that tension so that we can just see what is this primary emotion that I'm feeling? Anxiety, shame, anger, and we can simplify our inner experience.

Mandy: I wanna shift into talking about conflict. And why conflict tension, even if the tension isn't being caused by you, but walking into a room and you know, that moment where you just feel that everything is so tau in this room. Yes. So, conflict, tension, confrontation. Why does this feel so impossible? You've touched on a little bit of it already.

But this is a particular red button for so many people. Yeah.

Meg: Let's start, I'm gonna start kind of this psychodynamic earlier childhood lens, I think for, for, and then we'll kind of go into the now, which I think for many of us who fear conflict as adults didn't witness conflict being dealt with in a safe regulated way.

Growing up, we witnessed conflict being handled in extremes. Anger, screaming, yelling, name calling, or silent treatment.

Mandy: Ding, ding, ding.

Meg: Yep, yep, yep, yep. Same, same, same.

Mandy: Yeah.

Meg: And so naturally, and also, let me back up. Let me pair that with, and there was no repair after the fact, so. I wanna be clear. Conflict's gonna happen, like work.

Parents are exhausted and they're gonna get reactive. Sometimes that's, that's human. What is so healing is the repair that comes after the fact. Hey honey, I'm so sorry I yelled at you earlier. That was on me. That wasn't your fault. And I'm really working on managing my temper. But when that doesn't happen, the child makes sense of it by blaming themselves.

I'm, I'm a dad upset, so that's my fault because I'm alone in my room trying to make sense of it. When that happens again and again, it goes from I did something bad to I am bad, which is shame. That is chronic shame. I'm bad. Something about me is so wrong that I make people upset. And so when, when that is the baseline for people that grew up in unpredictable or tense or passive aggressive home environments, what ends up happening is we go into adulthood believing if someone's upset with me.

If there's conflict, the relationship is over, it's ruined. There's no going back. They're gonna hate me. And it, it's a big deal in our minds, understandably, because it was a big deal when we were growing up. So I think that's a really important context to go into that with, of understanding kind of the why of why many of us have this belief.

And so if we're entering an adult relationship, we're entering a room where there's tension. Remember that our bodies are trying to protect us, and so we'll remember these, all these past experiences where conflict did feel unsafe, conflict did feel uncertain, and we're going to remember what worked. It worked for me to.

Really scan their moods to overanalyze their facial expressions and their body language. It worked for me to suddenly compliment someone to, to diffuse the tension or to be helpful to them or to, uh, crack a joke so that they're happy again, like it's in our body to remember how to do that. And so that I think is a huge piece of how we navigate.

And avoid conflict as adults.

Mandy: I think there's also a never being able to speak your experience as a young person. 'cause I mean, I grew up in a very up and down type of a place. It was a loving home, but my father was an alcoholic and very domineering personality, so very stern. When he was sober, he was also a school teacher at the place where I went to school. So like there was nowhere to hide. I was always under scrutiny to perform and to be as perfect as possible.

Meg: Wow.

Mandy: And I remember the times when, as a feisty young child, when I did try to speak my mind, I would get spanked. I would have my mouth washed out with soap Irish Spring. I still remember the taste or.

Just otherwise like being, I get the silent treatment sometimes, or lots of bad things could happen if I spoke up. So I remember pulling my little kitty chair into my closet and I had a green. I had a green, it was not a felt tip and a pencil cray. And I wrote on the wall, which was really bad. I wrote on the wall of my closet, I hate mom and dad.

And then there was a big gap and this is the fauna in me coming out. 'cause I remember seeing it later when I moved out of that room and I had forgotten about it. I hate mom and dad. And then there was a big space sometimes.

Meg: Oh my gosh. Wow. Wow. And also that's so important. The sum, the sometimes is so important in the making sense of childhood.

It's so confusing because we almost want it. I remember wishing this myself. I wish it was all bad all the time. Then at least it would be easier to decide how I feel. My dad was an addict as well, and he had a lot of volatility and there was also some sweet moments too. And we would sing the Dream Girl soundtrack in the car together and we would when he was good.

He was so funny and my best friend as a child until I got older and started to make sense of things. But I remember wishing. To your a little girl story. I wish like it would be so much easier for me to hate them or to just fully love them. And that nuance, that it being there, being loving moments and painful ones is so confusing to a child.

'cause the child just wants to understand and so that sometimes there's such an innocence to it of. That little Mandy just wanted to know what's going on here. And of course, also I imagine it's like, what if they read this? So I need to say sometimes so they know I also do love them at the same time.

Mandy: And that was, do you

Meg: remember what was going through that, that little girl head?

Mandy: I don't remember what it was about, but I also thought. It probably wasn't my mom, but I had to put her there too. Oh, of course. So that it wasn't too intensely focused on my dad.

Meg: Yeah, yeah.

Mandy: But oh my God, I haven't thought about that in years. That's funny why that just came out of nowhere in this. I'm glad you shared it.

Meg: It's such a good, it's such a good tangible. Example of that, what, what's going through a child's brain of trying to make sense, trying to protect, trying, there's so much happening there.

Mandy: So we're just carrying all of this unhealed stuff into meetings, into relationships, and it's so, it's so over. But what I'm hearing you say, and also what you talk about in your book is it's not, it, it ain't over till it o till it's over.

Meg: Well, I think what's, this is where I, when we react, when we react to something, maybe our reaction is over apologizing or are you mad at me? Am are we okay or overthinking? That's the reaction most of the time. That's a window into our past wounds. There's something about this situation that is reminding us of the past, and we are going into that autopilot, automatic reactive, protective way of being.

When we can pause and slow down our inner process and choose to respond instead of react, we are telling our bodies we are not there anymore in the past. We are here right now. Mm-hmm. And so just because that was our past, it doesn't mean we're doomed and we're always going to be thinking and feeling this way.

But the first step is really that awareness of recognizing when it, when that is happening, when that. Fond response or pleasing or avoiding conflict responses coming up and pausing, slowing down. We're already breaking the pattern because we're saying to our bodies, we're here. We're not there.

Mandy: One thing I read from, I had Ingrid Clayton on the show, and one thing I read, remember reading from her book was looking at the back of your hand in that moment.

As a pattern interrupt, it just puts a crowbar in the machinery of how we've always reacted before. Because if you look at your very adult hands, they're not necessarily the chubby little starfish hands that would've been holding that green pencil crayon. Right? And that can be a moment. 'cause it feels like there's parts of us that just don't know that we are actually very capable adults now who are not in those situations.

So when we're in tension. When there's conflict happening, it's sort of like physically it can feel like being in that situation again. But that's why it can be so discombobulating because like, okay, I'm now operating as a 54-year-old woman, and yet I feel like I'm eight and I'm in trouble and somebody's mad at me.

Meg: Yeah, absolutely.

Mandy: Mm-hmm.

Meg: And there's, um, I have an acronym called Nicer and it's, it's sort of this mindfulness technique of bringing us. Working through uncomfortable emotions and and thought patterns. The R at the end of nicer is return. Return to what's real and true right now. Whether that's the back of your hand, your breath, any sounds in the room, and so important to end on that because we're working through that emotion, we're working through that thought pattern, but to then.

Shift our focus to what's actually here, what's actually happening in this moment. It, it's so important because we're saying we're, we're. Like you said, we're automatically breaking that pattern. We are processing that emotion, but in a way that is grounded in a way that's regulated and in a way that feels safe.

We can be our adult selves in this moment while processing those older wounds,

Mandy: which sounds so welcoming. All right. Are you ready to go into this scenario lab?

Meg: Yes, I am.

Mandy: So I wanna, I wanna play you as a therapist, me as the coach. I'm gonna give you three. Scenarios where I've changed the names and identifying details of particular real life situations.

And we're gonna geek out on this, you as a therapist, me as a coach, and we're gonna see how we can move the situations forward.

Meg: Love it.

Mandy: So I have Sophie, who is a 46-year-old managing director at a global investment bank. She sees risk in a steering meeting that they're sitting in. And the stakeholder very similar to our, our opening situation. The senior stakeholder is bullish. Sophie stays quiet, she doesn't wanna be a downer, and she comes back to this place of freezing frame. So practically identical scenario just to ease you into the situation. Freeze frame right there. What is actually happening in Sophie's? Brain and body if you put your therapist hat on. So she's freezing in that moment. She's not saying anything. What's going on?

Meg: I have to imagine there's some, her body has detected some sort of threat where it's, it sound, it sounds like she's freezing and fawning at the same time, which are actually. There are, there are similarities physiologically to those thought responses, but I, I have a feeling that she probably, there's some emotion there, there's some expression there.

She wants to say something, but it, some part of her body doesn't feel safe to do so. Whether that's true or not, whether that's real or perceived. And so she is finding safety through freezing. She's finding safety through self silencing. And that's what I would imagine is happening internally for her.

Mandy: Mm-hmm. I don't know if you know anything about the work of a woman called Kasha orac. I don't her work. So she's written a book called A Woman's Guide to Power Unbound is the name of the book, Unbound. And she worked in New York, uh, as as a dominatrix. In the Dungeons of New York. And then she saved the money that she made there to train as a Taoist nun, and now she runs an academy helping women to be in their power.

And I worked with her for a week a couple of weeks ago in in Romania, and we were talking about being in the dominant state and being in the submissive state. So when we're in a dominant state, our attention is out. When we're in a submissive state. Also can be very powerful. And that's what she said, don't like the word submissive kind of maybe isn't the right word, but like that being in receivership like we are in the experience.

Whether we're, whether we're making love, whether we're having a massage, whether we're making a request from that place of it would be so delicious. It would delight me. If you would bring your chocolate fudge special cake that you are so brilliant at making, I would love it if you would bring that to the party on Friday night.

I would, ugh. It would mean so much to me, and there's power in both states. Being in the dominant state, being in the submissive state. So one isn't better than the other, but it's also understanding That brought such an interesting lens for me in this whole thing about fawning is the, what I'm seeing. And I'm just, I'm processing this out loud as I'm thinking about it.

'cause this is quite recent, this, this, these sessions that I did with her. But one of the things that often doesn't feel available to us. In those situations where there's tension or confrontation or conflict, someone has said something to us and we immediately go attention in and lose our words and go into that freeze response. And one of the things she suggests is understanding like when you've gone into that state. And then asking a question to bring the attention out again, it could be, you know, it doesn't necessarily have to be profound, but depending on the circumstances, it could be, did you really ask me that? Did I hear that correctly?

Or whatever the scenario is of just starting to become practiced, that the question can feel quite. Spicy or pointed, but it doesn't need to tell me what's going on for you there. If I as a coach kind of offer that perspective of. Volleying out a question.

Meg: I love that. Because what ends up happening, did you say Sophie?

Mandy: Sophie? Yeah.

Meg: For Sophie, what's happening is, you know, and what ends up happening for a lot of us who are self silencers, we make ourselves quite small, is that inner world is totally disconnected from the outer world. Like we're. Or rather we are disconnected from our inner world in an attempt to be hyper attuned to what's happening externally.

What I love about what, what you just said is it's bridging the two back together. The goal is to be connected to ourselves while it being in relationship to other people and being able to tolerate conflict and to be out in the world. And so. Uh, clinically how I might view that is if Sophie is freezing, and I would be curious, I would wanna ask what is happening is, are you dissociating?

Are you fantasizing? Are you, are you leaving your body or are you really. Are you really tuned into the environment? Are you over hyper attuned? I would wanna know what's happening internally for her, but this, this idea of sort of titrating bringing, which, what that really means is using mindfulness in a way that is anchored.

So sometimes when we're really in survival mode and we're, we're really triggered in some way, mindfulness of the body can feel a little too much. It can feel like. Well, it's, it doesn't feel safe to access myself. Somaticly titration is noticing more what's happening in the environment. So maybe I'm noticing everything that's green or maybe I'm noticing everything that's moving or still in the environment or that has shadows or doesn't have shadows or using the environment as our anchor.

And I love what you, that, that's what brings up for me that question. Outward question feels to me like the anchor. It's reminding the body, okay, we're, we're, this is where we are. We're here right now. And asking a question to kind of ground yourself back into your physical environment. That's where my mind went with what you were bringing in.

Mandy: And it can be. It could be something like, I'm sorry, could you repeat the question? It could be something really, really basic like that so that I didn't know about that phrase that you just shared. So that's, that's a way of just getting back into being able to have it be safe for us to be not inwards or like to bring our attention out.

Is that what I'm hearing you say?

Meg: Yeah. It's, it's mindfulness, uh, um, for people that have a really heavy trauma history, titration is a helpful. Somatic grounding, mindfulness based practice when accessing the body feels like too much, which is true for a lot of us. The body hasn't historically been a safe place to be, whether you've experienced abuse or uh, complex trauma, whatever it may be.

So we can use our environment as the anchor as opposed to the breath or sensations in the body or something like that.

Mandy: So for Sophie, who's sitting in that meeting room. And this conversation is happening and she's starting to, she's starting to go into some kind of a state. So I'm not a therapist. I would come at this from a very different angle.

That's why I thought it would be fun to kind of come at this from both of our lenses, but. For her to stay in before she even slips over that edge of like going into freeze or whatever state that might be. Would that skill that you just explained, could that be something that she was doing in real time?

As she knows that she's probably prone to freezing and or fawning in conflict situations, like looking around the room and looking at something smooth or something green,

Meg: absolutely reorienting herself to some, I think it finding sort of a neutral stimulus. Whether that's a sound, whether it's the sensation of her feet on the ground, that can be, that's something that I, I like to go to is okay, I'm, I'm on the ground.

I'm in this moment in time, and also can just be a simple recognition of. What am I feeling? I, I'm feeling anxious or, and it could be a, a is the mindfulness technique of just labeling what is this inner experience that I'm having? That can be certainly a way to come back. Maybe she would want to try just one deep breath in for four out for six to stimulate her vagus nerve, and when we elongate the exhale.

It sends signals to our bodies that we're safe. So there are a lot of things that she could do from a therapist lens. I, I feel I'm, I'm, I'm the nuance. I'm like, I'd wanna hear more about what, what's your history and things like that. So I'm, I'm complicating it in my mind. But those would be some, some practices of, um, just what, how, how can you come back to now in a way that feels safe to you?

That's probably what I would. I would advise

Mandy: that feels like a really good pre-step to potentially then asking the question. Yeah. Love that. So as a coach, I might say, like if she does, if it is her job to point out risks and she might be the one feeling a bit like the killjoy and they're all bullish and here she is, she's gonna be the, the downer in the conversation.

But in some ways that's her job. So those steps that you talked about. And then I might suggest something like, well, I see a risk to X. If we do Y would you like me to outline some options? Because then she's saying the thing, but she's, she's providing a question afterwards because then they can. They're at choice, but the attention has gone back out.

Meg: I like that a lot. That feels like such a hybrid approach of expressing her thoughts and you know, maybe controversial opinion, but also inviting in that question and gives her a pause too, asking that question, it gives her at least two seconds to kind of catch her breath as they're answering the question too.

Mandy: Yeah, so I love that approach and often I've used that technique too, that it's just like feel your feet on the floor as you're asking the question. So you're sort of rooting as, as you're bringing your attention out.

Meg: I would add another thing too here, which is, um. To practice not shaming. For Sophie to not shame herself for feeling anxious in this setting, it's okay if her voice is feeling shaky.

If her palms are sweating, her heart's beating, thinking about speaking up. That is okay. Mm-hmm. That's a normal physiological response that's happening. And so what ends up happening is we can kind of like complicate our inner experience by why am I like this? Why can't I just calm down? And it's this anxiety is allowed to be here.

This, this, uh, fear, this shame is allowed to be here and move through that discomfort. While doing the thing while speaking up, uh, instead of, I can only speak up once the discomfort has gone away. I can only speak up once my voice no longer shakes or my palms no longer sweat.

Mandy: I wanna segue out of this scenario lab into what I call the Discomfort Gym of really talking about. This concept of discomfort, resilience and finding ways to grow the capacity, the physical capacity, the emotional, the mental capacity to stay in tension. To stay in discomfort without tapping out, without sort of ejecting, without disconnecting.

And that can be such a difficult thing to do. So when things get awkward, um, you know, when, when things kind of get emotionally sweaty, it can be so tempting to, it can be so tempting to, well, not even that it's conscious. But I wanna play a little bit with how do we start to train that. Capacity. So I know you've already talked about noticing.

I know you've already talked about naming the thing. This is what I'm feeling. There's certain somatic things like feel your feet on the floor, do the breaths with a longer exhale. Look for objects in the room, neutral objects. I threw in the idea of cash banx idea, like throw out a question once you get, once it feels safe to go out again.

But if we were gonna really back and forth here a little bit on how somebody can grow that. Capacity. What would you say?

Meg: Mm-hmm. Oh, I love this topic so much and I, I discuss it. I love your, your phrase of discomfort resilience. I think that's so wonderful. I often talk about it as taking in bite size pieces of discomfort is so important.

We want to be able, in order to effectively build up that discomfort resilience, we want to. Be able to process discomfort in a way that still feels safe.

Mandy: Yeah,

Meg: we can be uncomfortable and safe at the same time, so we wouldn't want to, we don't wanna dive into discomfort, but rather dip our toes in so that we can still be able to come back out.

And this is so important for a few reasons. If we are doing something that's new, anything that's new, unfamiliar will feel scary. We know this, right? It's. But if we're doing something new and we're doing the most uncomfortable thing, I'll use an example. Let's say you're trying to set boundaries in your life and you're like, okay, I'm gonna set a boundary, and your first ever boundary is with your very volatile parent.

That's probably not going to go well. That's probably going to feel very scary, very uncomfortable, might. Create an outburst that wouldn't be a bite-size piece of discomfort, in my opinion. That would be a diving headfirst into it. What could end up happening is the brain is like, what? See, this is why people, please, what are you doing?

Take me back to what we know, and so it can kind of create this backlash effect. What's really important is that we are showing our bodies new experiences. That feel safe? I don't mean comfortable, but that we're still, that we're still safe, like nothing horrible. Our world hasn't stopped turning. So what that might mean is we're saying to our, our first ever boundary is saying to our best friend who's calling us, and we have a busy evening, Hey, I only have 30 minutes to chat.

What's up? Or, um, maybe it's, um, what's another example? Maybe it's, maybe it's speaking up for yourself in a context that is, it's expected to speak up for yourself. Uh, like you're, you said massage earlier. If you're getting a massage and you'd like it to be a little firmer, maybe it's, it's asking for more firmness because that's expected.

In that situation, you're not, there's probably not gonna be some consequence for you saying that. So increasing our tolerance for discomfort happens. In bite sized pieces so that we can digest it. That is such an important piece. That's the first thing that comes to mind for me.

Mandy: So when you're, say you're at the deep tissue massage and you're like, oh my God, this is gonna leave bruises tomorrow.

I want to make the request. I've actually been that person before that has actually just thought, oh, this is good for me. I shouldn't speak up. This is just good for me to have like deep tissue massage. And had bruises on my forearms afterwards. So let's go into a real life scenario like that where the stakes are slightly lower than speaking up against, you know, a senior stakeholder in a meeting.

So you're in the massage room, you're face down in the little hole, the AK is playing and it's a little uncomfortable. So you actually decide you're going to say something and you know, you might feel your heart start to pound. You might ask for the pressure to be less. And then of course they adjust because it's a, it would be a very normal conversation to have.

Are we doing any kind of processing on the back of that, like. Are we noticing like, okay, this is fine.

Meg: That moment of acknowledgement that I did it and look, I'm still safe,

Mandy: Okay,

Meg: is such an important moment of pause. And the same is true in our relationships. If you are deciding to have an honest conversation with a friend.

And you're so scared of conflict or, or a coworker, you're, you're deciding to bring something up to them and it's just a small thing that's been on your mind, like something, Hey, have you been able to, to finish this assignment? Or, I wanted to check in on this, or whatever it may be that you've been, you know, trying to silence, but it's important to bring up whatever it is, acknowledging after the fact that you did it and the world didn't stop.

I think is so, so, so important. Doesn't mean that sometimes when we have honest conversations there will be some discomfort. There might be a little bit of friction, but I want the practice to be showing our bodies that that doesn't mean we are unsafe. We can be uncomfortable and safe at the same time, but a little bit of friction in relationships that are safe.

It's really healthy because it actually means that both people are able to beat themselves. Both people are able to have their own opinions and preferences and thoughts, and it, there's enough space and safety for those things to exist. At the same time, of course, I'm not talking about abusive high conflict relationships where conflict is cyclical and happening all the time, but for there to be a little bit of.

Oh, I actually see it this way. What do you think? I see it this way. Uh, and we can show, expose ourselves to those instances where conflict can be safe. That's where the healing happens. We need to show our bodies that that can happen.

Mandy: Mm-hmm. I was recently in a situation where I kind of took the next step of this. To, you know what, whatever the intermediate level is, so to speak, where I actually opened a conversation where somebody had said something that didn't feel comfortable to me, and this person's a family member. So it, it feels a little bit sensitive and to be able to, you know, there are certain people that you don't really care so much and.

It doesn't really matter if they're mad at you or they don't like you or what have you. Yeah. But when it's in your inner sanctum and the ability to state clearly that there's, there's an uncomfortable conversation I would like to have with you. Is this a good time? Or there's a clearing I would like to have with you.

So I found that having, like from my coaching perspective, having that kind of a opening line to allow you to, to create that clean, clear portal into a conversation, and then using some of those techniques that you manage to stay in. The conversation that you're moment by moment creating safety. And I love what you said earlier too, that it doesn't mean you're doing anything wrong if lots of feelings are coming up whilst you're in that and lots of voices like, oh, this is going badly, the relationship is gonna crash and burn, and like all of that is perfectly normal.

As you're collecting new data points and creating what safety feels like, that's at least been my experience.

Meg: Absolutely. And this I, this is reminding me of what I like to distinguish as reassurance versus validation in conflict when we're having a hard conversation with someone and we're feeling triggered.

And we start seeking, do you are, are we okay? Do you still love me? And are you mad at me? We get into this anxious, insecure framework that's reassurance. Are you mad at me? Did I do something wrong? Do you still love me? Do you think I'm pretty? That's reassurance seeking and it's about the content of what we're speaking about.

And so the other person might say, I'm not mad at you. I still love you. And maybe for a second we Okay. Phew. Good. I'm so glad to hear that. But we're not really addressing the underlying. Thing. We're not having that hard conversation because we're just kind of scraping the surface versus validation. It's about the emotion beneath it.

It's so, it might include some reassurance. I'm not mad at you, but asking for validation or seeking validation. Um, seeking's not the right word. Inviting in validation is exactly what you were describing of it's having an honest, spacious, open conversation for people to express their emotions. So instead of, are you mad at me, it might be, Hey, I've been feeling, or it might be starting with what you were saying.

I have, I've been thinking about something. Do you have a sec to to chat? And it would maybe say. I've been feeling kind of distant from you recently. I feel like we haven't spent too much one-on-one time together. I'm, I'm noticing just feeling quite far from you in our relationship. I'm wondering if you've been feeling that too, that is getting to the emotion beneath.

The need to ask for reassurance. It's really getting to the root anxiety. And so it's, it's an opening, it's a deeper conversation so that both people can see and understand each other. And again, it might include, oh my gosh, of course I'm not mad at you. Of course I still love you. But there's an, there's slowness there.

You're sitting down together and seeing each other, and I think that is really what leads to more closeness. That's how conflict. Can lead to more closeness in the relationship. I think for some people, listeners may be feeling like, well, I'm thinking of someone that I'd love to have a conversation with, but I can't because they won't listen or they'll get defensive or it's not safe for me to do that.

Mandy: I always like to say conflict leads to either more closeness or more clarity in the relationship and my around the world dropped down. Wow. Yeah. That's really powerful.

Meg: Clarity on, okay, I'm not able to have these conversations. I'm not able to, I, I need to lower my expectations and maybe grieve something in this relationship because this isn't possible and that is uncomfortable and healing at the same time.

And so those are sort of the pathways I think of with conflict.

Mandy: What's something that you've recently said enough to and been better for it?

Meg: I have said enough to working on Sunday mornings and trying and giving myself this pocket of time to. Just half. And I noticed this guilt in me. I noticed this, uh, feeling of deficiency of, because it's like Sunday's kind of that, that quiet day where I could get a lot done.

But kind of questioning that of when I was writing my book and when I was seeing full-time private practice at the same time, I, I was working on sun and I had to, and that made sense for me. But book is out. Things are feeling a little bit more balanced. And so I noticed this sort of habit come up and so I'm like, am I, do I need to or is this coming from a place of habit for me?

But it speaks to a greater thing of I'm saying enough to never feeling like I'm doing enough. And that's, that's a constant practice for me, but, and I think it'll be a lifelong one, but that's been sort of how it's been showing up tangibly.

Mandy: Conflict leads to more closeness or more clarity. Wow. I have been sitting with that one since Meg said it, and honestly, I think it's one of the most useful things I have heard in a long time. It's not comfortable, but it's. Meg is amongst the clearest, most generous thinkers I've encountered on this stuff.

Warm, real, approachable, but she doesn't let you off the hook, and I love that about her. If this conversation got under your skin, her book, are You Mad At Me is the next natural step. You're gonna love it. And if you recognized yourself in this conversation, you're not alone. That's precisely why this show exists.

We're all to varying degrees, still figuring out how to say the thing. Maybe someone in your life is too, send this episode to them. You know who they are. You were probably thinking about them during the whole conversation. I am Dr. Mandy Leto. This is enough, the podcast. See you next time.