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Rebecca Ogle, LCSW, is a queer, white, cisgender woman who has been working in the clinical social work field for nearly ten years. Her clients would describe her as warm and easy to talk to with a good sense of humor. Rebecca gravitates towards working with trauma and abuse survivors, 'black sheep,' cycle disruptors, and folks working on boundaries and self-esteem. Rebecca is dedicated to serving the LGBTQ+ community, and providing and critiquing therapy through an abolitionist, anti-oppressive lens.

Allison Puryear (she/her): Welcome back to Not Boring CEs, I'm your host, Allison Puryear, and I am here with Rebecca. We're gonna be talking about trauma-informed mindfulness today, and I'm super stoked to get into it. So thanks so much for being here.

Rebecca: Thank you for having me, Allison. Yeah, absolutely. So

Allison Puryear (she/her): let's I feel like as therapist. We have an idea of what trauma is. We have an idea what mindfulness is, but sometimes our ideas about each of these things are not actually accurate. Sometimes they just got like mashed together through our own experience or through things our supervisors told us. So can we just start with like.

Allison Puryear (she/her): just really basic mindfulness, what it is, what it isn't.

Rebecca: Yeah, for sure. And actually, I'm wondering if we could, even before that, start with a little like experiential exercise. So let me preface this by saying, like, if you're driving cause, I know this is gonna be available, podcast right, like don't do this while you're driving like, maybe just listen, but don't actually participate. But, like

Rebecca: other than that if you want to participate, I think that would be awesome.

Rebecca: So let's start by just like making a couple of adjustments or movements to get comfortable, whether it's like adjusting your clothes or your posture, or something.

Rebecca: maybe dropping in and noticing. If your thoughts are coming at you really, really fast and furious, like monkey mind, or if they're all coming a little bit slower. and knowing that there's no right or wrong, right? It's just our thoughts are doing what they're doing right now.

Rebecca: So then, I'm gonna invite you to focus your attention on something that can give you some support. And I'm gonna give, you know, 3 or 4 options. So maybe you're gonna look at a familiar object in the room.

Rebecca: Maybe you're gonna focus on the feeling of your feet in your shoes or against the floor.

Rebecca: Maybe you're gonna observe your breath.

Rebecca: or maybe you're gonna focus your attention on sound that you hear in your environment.

Rebecca: So because we're gonna be discussing trauma today, I want you to.

Rebecca: whichever you know, one or 2 of those is feeling really good and resonating and supportive right now, like as we're talking about trauma, and some of these things can be really triggering. Right? I want you to just keep those 2, one or 2 resources in mind as something that can come back to at any point during this podcast while we're going through

Rebecca: awesome, does it?

Rebecca: I love it. Thank you. It's funny. Because, before we hit record, I was just that I'm like

Allison Puryear (she/her): scattered today, like my brain is all over the place, and even just those few seconds like that, that didn't take us very much time at all. Even those few seconds I feel much more grounded. So thank you.

Rebecca: Awesome. Awesome. Yeah. And that exercise came from David Trevino

Who is like there's a bunch of people that I'm gonna cite throughout this thing and that maybe you can link somewhere. But but he's a practitioner who himself has trauma and

Rebecca: was a mindfulness practitioner for years and years, and then had an experience where he was re-traumatized with practicing. And so he's created like a whole program around how to help trauma survivors so definitely check him out. If you're looking for more resources. Wonderful. Thank you.

Allison Puryear (she/her): So we just had an example of mindfulness.

Rebecca: Can we? Can we talk about what it is and what it isn't? Yeah, absolutely

Rebecca: so. My favorite definition of mindfulness comes from Jon Kabat-Zinn who says that mindfulness is

Rebecca: paying attention on purpose in the present moment, non judgmentally.

Rebecca: So if we just like can break those down for a second. So paying attention. So we're focusing our attention on something right? So if you were, you know, kind of spacing out. And your thoughts are going everywhere like that's great. And that might actually be useful for you. But it might not necessarily be mindfulness, right? Because we're focusing on one thing.

Rebecca: So then, on purpose, we're doing it intentionally. We don't suddenly just go.

Rebecca: Oh, I'm practicing mindfulness right now, like it's something we decide to do, and that we do right.

Rebecca: And then, in the present moment is really talking about like. So it could be, what's happening in your body in the present moment it could be what's happening so internal versus external, but really like what's happening in the here and now, right

Rebecca: and then not judgmentally kind of points to the way that we do it. So the way that we do it is we're trying not to criticize or judge ourselves or our experience. We're kind of just accepting it for what it is. And

Rebecca: having this attitude of

Rebecca: you know, however, things are unfolding right now in this moment is how they're supposed to be unfolding. So that's kind of breaking it down. I think some really common things that

Rebecca: come up with clients who maybe are new to mindfulness or or not familiar as familiar with it is that they're thinking. Okay, mindfulness means I have to relax now.

Allison Puryear (she/her): And that's certainly not the case right? And sometimes that that thing of telling ourselves. Okay, I have to relax. I have to calm down like actually activates us more cause it feels almost invalidating to what we're really feeling. Right? Yeah. And it feels inaccessible sometimes when that's the expectation.

Rebecca: right? Right? So there's definitely no expectation that you're supposed to be relaxed or calm during mindfulness and trying to go into with that attitude or that mindset of like we're just gonna see what happens. And it doesn't have to be any specific way, can actually take the pressure off a little bit, so that it feels better right.

Rebecca: And then the other thing I hear a lot is. Well, it's just hard for me to not have any thoughts.

Rebecca: And mindfulness also isn't about not thinking right, because if you've ever tried to not think before, it just doesn't work like we can't minds are just built to think that's what they do. And so so that's part of why, in the beginning, I said, you know, you might notice. Your thoughts are really slow or really fast, and there's not a right or wrong and certainly there's no expectation that you have to not think about anything, because that would be

Rebecca: outside of the realm of human experience.

Allison Puryear (she/her): Yeah.

Allison Puryear (she/her): So when you take the pressure off of those 2 things, and you can just and you can be non-judgmental with it, because I think that inherently makes it easier. Everything easier. We can try something in a non judgmental way. Then mindfulness all of a sudden becomes

Allison Puryear (she/her): a lot less difficult to tackle. That it's it's an easing into it instead of a forcing.

Rebecca: Yeah. And I think if we're gonna get even more precise, right? We're not even saying don't have judgments, because, again, you're just gonna have judgments. That's part of being a person. So it's almost like

Rebecca: like your mind's gonna do what it does, just notice what it's doing, and if it's helpful to label it as like, oh, that was a judgment right there. Oh, that was a and and trying to do that in a way where you're not judging. your judging right? You're just saying, Oh, yeah, that's another thing that happened that makes sense. Because that's what mind's do you know?

Rebecca: Yeah, I also feel like before we move on from mindfulness, definition. It's important to say that, like mindfulness is a practice that is rooted in Eastern religion and philosophy like Buddhism, it's been practiced for thousands and thousands of years.

Rebecca: It's sort of migrated over to the West in like the late, I wanna say, like the late sixties seventies with transcendental meditation.

And now it's sort of been

Rebecca: co-opted by us as clinicians, and we have a lot of I've heard people refer to it as like, make mindfulness where you know it's being used by all these huge corporations, all these things, these ways, that

Rebecca: kind of separate it from the spirituality aspect, and like the the parts that really feed our soul. And so

Rebecca: I think it's just important to name that. And just like sort of remember and honor the roots of of where this practice comes from, you know.

Allison Puryear (she/her): Yeah. And I think there's when we stay when we keep it, Llala, when we keep it true to where it came from. It might bring up some things for people.

Rebecca: You know, who might be like. Oh, well, that's against my religion, or something like that when

Allison Puryear (she/her): it might not be and I practice here in the Bible belt, and have lived much of my life in the Bible belt, and being able to kind of discern spirituality from religion, connection to higher power, or to yourself, or to your breath. Like. There are numerous ways in which

Allison Puryear (she/her): we can approach mindfulness

Allison Puryear (she/her): that can make it feel more accessible for people who might feel initially a little daunted or afraid of it, or like they're doing something wrong if they're diving into it. So

Rebecca: that's a really good point, Alison. Thank you for saying that. And I think that really speaks to the way that, like

Rebecca: part of how we adapt, mindfulness practice with trauma survivors, is

Rebecca: taking in the whole picture of

Rebecca: like who this person is, and making it kind of tailoring it to them. So I think what said is really in the spirit of that, you know, like, maybe the way that we.

Rebecca: you know, explain or present what mindfulness is. It's gonna vary a little bit with each client and what we know about them. Absolutely. Yeah.

Allison Puryear (she/her): So shall we move to trauma.

Allison Puryear (she/her): Yeah. So let's figure out defining it, which is a big task. And identifying those symptoms we may be seeing in our clients.

Rebecca: for sure, for sure. So

Rebecca: The definition of trauma I use I to be honest, I don't know where it comes from, but is any distressing experience that overwhelms your nervous system's usual abilities to cope.

Rebecca: Now, this is not the definition that personally, I was taught in school. This is something that I've had to, you know. Learn as I've moved forward in my career. You know the way that I was taught about trauma, which, granted, was also like 10 years ago. So maybe programs have evolved since then. I was really taught about trauma. As you know.

Rebecca: people have post traumatic stress disorder, or they don't. And usually, if they have, it's because they're a war veteran, or they've been, you know, in some sort of

Rebecca: very violent, physically abusive relationship. And like that, was it. There was no.

Rebecca: And so what I have learned from people with trauma, often from my clients themselves, right is that there's there's so many different experiences that can cause trauma. And with that being said, there's also a lot of people who experience some really intense things, who don't have a traumatic reaction from it. So that's why it's so hard to define. Because once again, it's like so specific to the person in the context, right?

Allison Puryear (she/her): Yeah. And that's where a lot of like comparison that our clients may come in with of like well, so and so went through the same experience. But like she's fine, and I'm not which.

Allison Puryear (she/her): like the difference in how we handle things, the difference in resilience, the difference in the support we had around us immediately after, like. There are so many different

Allison Puryear (she/her): pieces of our own personal experiences that can make our reactions night and day from someone else's.

Allison Puryear (she/her): And just thinking about that comparison piece, and the idea of like nobody's like trauma's trauma, it's not. There's not like better or worse trauma. Trauma's trauma.

Rebecca: Right and and just knowing that, like

Rebecca: so many that, like like yes, of course, like people, can be very traumatized by physical abuse. They can also be traumatized by emotional abuse. They can also have traumatic grief. They can also be traumatized by emotional like there's so many

Rebecca: and then there's vicarious trauma right, which some of us ourselves may experience. And so

Rebecca: you know. So there's we can go to the DSM. For their, you know, definition of post traumatic stress disorder. I also like to reference this book "Complex PTSD" by Pete Walker, and

Rebecca: so complex PTSD is not in the DSM.

Rebecca: not by many therapists not considered a quote real diagnosis. But when I read this book I see a lot of my clients and myself in it, and so he defines it as it's it's PTSD. But then it's also characterized by these 5 additional things which are emotional flashbacks, toxic shame, self abandonment, a vicious inner critic and social anxiety.

Rebecca: So I mean.

Rebecca: I think I'll kind of leave it there, because truly, we could go on about that forever. But

Rebecca: But I will say, like in my experience in private practice, like some of the things that like

Rebecca: are observable to me about clients with trauma is like. Sometimes they present, as

Rebecca: you know, having difficulty making eye contact sort of physically presenting sort of like, small or hunched over. They might experience like emotional bluntness where

Rebecca: they they're talking about really intense traumatic things like they're

Rebecca: drinking coffee. Do you want a coffee clutch on a Tuesday? Right? So it might be like that. They could experience like really excessive crying. On the other hand, or really intense emotional dysregulation, so kind of falling into

Rebecca: one or the other end of that spectrum is sometimes a a clue.

Rebecca: And then, as far as like some of the non observable science would be like not wanting to talk about specific things. Maybe avoiding talking about their childhood, or just saying, I don't remember. I don't remember a lot of stuff about my childhood, or about this specific part of my life.

Rebecca: and then I also notice

Rebecca: sometimes trauma survivors, not always, but sometimes trauma survivors have more difficulty being consistent in therapy, and I think, like with showing up and coming on time, and I think there's a lot of reasons for that.

Rebecca: but certainly, like a lot of them, have a lot of brain fog. It's hard to remember when things are happening right? A lot of them. It's challenging to show up and talk about these things that they have been avoiding for so many years for their own survival. And so

Rebecca: But again, what's hard about all this is that

Rebecca: all of these could be signs of differential diagnosis like, there's so much overlap with these signs. And like ADHD and major depression and generalized anxiety. So so that's why like the context is so important in using your own clinical judgment so important. And I would also add.

Rebecca: there's not really any harm in adapting mindfulness for trauma survivors, no matter who's sitting in front of you like. If anything, it might just add to the experience, even if the person hasn't experienced trauma. So ultimately, I kind of like the stuff I'm gonna be talking about today. I kind of do everybody just because

Rebecca: it's not gonna hurt right? And and if anything

Rebecca: using these adaptations may prevent somebody from being re-traumatized or having a panic attack or something like that. So to me, it really just feels like

Allison Puryear (she/her): we might as well do it, even if I'm not 100% sure, this person has trauma, you know. Yeah.

Allison Puryear (she/her): So can we dive into some of how you adapt mindfulness for folks with trauma.

Rebecca: Yeah, absolutely. So. One of the big things is offering choices.

And

Rebecca: so when you first start doing this, it might be kind of funny, because the other funny thing is that a lot of trauma survivors also have difficulty making decisions. And so you might present them with choices. And then, Oooh, wow, I don't know, and what I would recommend is is

Rebecca: like sitting with that for a beat and seeing if they can come up with something, or sometimes I'll say.

Rebecca: if you don't think about it too hard.

which one do. You just feel more drawn to.

Rebecca: and a lot of times people will be able to come up with.

Rebecca: you know, with that but part of the reason why choice is so important is because so there. So there's this mindfulness exercise from dialectical behavioral therapy that I

Rebecca: have used with people a lot where you're like visualizing yourself as a stone like circling to the bottom of the lake, and I did it for myself. I loved it. I was like, yeah.

Rebecca: And so I started to do it with a client. And they they stopped me. And they said, I actually have a lot of trauma around like water. And I'm really terrified of drowning. So like this is not gonna work for me. Oh, my gosh! Of course like! And so I am so

Rebecca: grateful to that person for Number One, trusting me enough to stop me and tell me that. And number 2, like kind of opening my eyes to okay, like, what's gonna work well for me or for one person isn't gonna work well for every person.

Rebecca: and so like, that's part of what choice allows us to do it. It first of all allows us to make sure that clients are going to choose something that feels better for them. And then it also sort of

models that we wanna have a more. So like

Rebecca: a lot of trauma survivors have had difficulty. Had have not maybe had a lot of choice in their life right? Or when they have choices they haven't felt like they could speak up because it might put them at risk of, you know, more trauma or more abuse.

Rebecca: And so, when we offer choice, the the very act of doing that

Rebecca: is, you know, really giving them the opportunity to have this corrective experience of oh, what I think and feel is important, and

Rebecca: you know, I think that's something that to people without trauma they go. Well, yeah, of course, I could tell my therapist, if. but but for trauma survivors it may not even occur to them that they can stop us and say, Wait, wait! This isn't working for me. Or actually, I have a question about this right? And so when we really invite it to be this collaborative experience with people? That in itself can be really healing.

Allison Puryear (she/her): Yeah, what might that sound like like, How do you invite your clients to stop you or give you feedback in the moment?

Rebecca: Yeah. Well.

Rebecca: I might start at the beginning by saying, you know, if at any point

Rebecca: during this exercise like

Rebecca: you want to make a change, so let's say at the beginning you decide to keep your eyes open. and then halfway through you go. You know what. Actually, I want to close my eyes like you can change

Rebecca: any choice that you make at any point in time

Rebecca: which, again, is modeling this

Allison Puryear (she/her): this experience of consent as being something that can be given or retracted at any time. Right? Yeah.

Rebecca: Oh, let's go. Sorry to go back to your question. I also. The other thing that I do a lot is I'll start by asking people like. what's been your experience with mindfulness in the past? Because a lot of times people are not coming to us with like 0 information about it, right? A lot of

times they've downloaded the calm app, or they've done like some Youtube kind of. And so they might be able to tell us like like. And I'll ask specific questions like.

Rebecca: How do you feel about breathwork? Because while some people really might like that for some people, it feels very triggering, and they kind of start focusing and thinking about their breath, and then it can lead to more anxiety. And so I like to ask that in the beginning I like to ask, like.

Rebecca: what kind of are you the kind of person who can visualize things in your like as images in your mind? Are you the kind of person that thinks more of words.

Rebecca: Cause. And this is another thing. I didn't know, Allison. I thought everybody

Rebecca: could visualize things like pictures in their mind, because that's what I do. It wasn't until I really started talking to my clients and asking them a bunch of them like, Oh, my brain doesn't work like that. I was like, oh, well, then, maybe we shouldn't be doing, you know.

Rebecca: so it really is about having those conversations with them beforehand. And I think also talking about? Why am I recommending this intervention? What's the research around it? Why do I think it's gonna be helpful for you? How's it gonna help you towards your therapy goals and

Rebecca: because again, like

Rebecca: a lot of times, our our clients with trauma

Rebecca: have been taught like don't ask questions. It's it is what it is. I told you, this is how it's gonna be. So this is how it's gonna be. And so that's how we can really open up these conversations and allow it to, you know, be collaborative.

Allison Puryear (she/her): Yeah. And what an incredible opportunity to model and create safety and relationship for people.

That might not have a lot of

Allison Puryear (she/her): examples of that in their lives.

Rebecca: Right? Right?

Allison Puryear (she/her): Yeah. So

Allison Puryear (she/her): I'm thinking, too, about like the autonomy and choice being

Allison Puryear (she/her): I used to work at a sexual assault center.

Allison Puryear (she/her): and

Rebecca: there was a lot of pressure on us to always have everyone report, for instance, like report their abuse; not within the sexual assault center, but with our community partners.

Allison Puryear (she/her): and I was a part of the when I was at the university counseling Center. I was a part of the start. This was later, like the sexual assault response team, where I was told by the chief of police at that university that he looked forward to taking me to jail one day.

Allison Puryear (she/her): for not forcing my clients to report, and that all the all the subsequent assaults that happened by these perpetrators that I didn't report were that was on me. It was. It was a very moment I was. It was.

Allison Puryear (she/her): I was wearing a button-down shirt, and my heart was beating so hard, and it was not a tight shirt, but my heart was beating so hard you could see it because I was like.

Allison Puryear (she/her): Don't break this man, which is what I wanted to do. Luckily I had a lot of really amazing colleagues on the team who were like Whoa, so

Allison Puryear (she/her): I am so sorry that happened to you. That's horrible. It was. It's it's one of those stories that was not funny in the moment. But it's funny now where I'm like, talk about clueless, you know, and also coming from very different mindsets like it's his job to keep it safe. Right? So to him that means taking the people out of the space that can cause harm. So I can see from his perspective where he was coming from. He was just

Rebecca: a little hot about it. And didn't want to see the perspective of all the medical professionals in the room. So

Allison Puryear (she/her): thinking about how.

Allison Puryear (she/her): in the sexual assault center and and in my position there at the University, like that choice is sacred.

Rebecca: like giving choice to survivors of any kind of trauma is sacred because they have had this experience of their choice being taken away

Allison Puryear (she/her): and being able to

Allison Puryear (she/her): provide that space and true non attachment to what choice they make as a clinician is when they can feel that, I think is so important.

Rebecca: so important. And like.

I'm just

Rebecca: sorry. I'm just like processing everything, buffering, buffering,

Rebecca: well, and it's also striking me that like there are really good reasons why people choose not to report a lot of times for their own immediate safety survival. And that's really the same way that I think about some of our trauma responses right? Like.

Rebecca: So when we're practicing mindfulness, we're asking people to

do something that none of us spend a lot of time doing, which is

Rebecca: being present in the moment with ourselves, and just observing what's going on for somebody with trauma that can be really potentially re traumatizing and triggering because their nervous system has been.

Rebecca: you know, developing all of these defenses like dissociation and avoidance to keep them from having to be with themselves. And so part of where I'm coming from with this training, too, is really honoring that and being like it's not a bad thing like the nervous system is doing that cause. That might be your. The reason that you're alive right now, you know.

Rebecca: So

Rebecca: I think that's part of it, too, is kind of accepting that like you may try adapting mindfulness for your client, and they may ultimately still say

Rebecca: it's not for me. I don't want to do it, and I think when that happens, we have to go. Okay, yeah.

Rebecca: I trust your judgment, like you know yourself better than I am ever ever going to know you. And so if this isn't working for you, even with the adaptations that's fine. There's so many ways that we can go about addressing these things in therapy right?

Allison Puryear (she/her): Right? So mindfulness, like the choice. To be mindful is a choice as well.

Rebecca: totally totally.

Rebecca: And oh, that reminds me. Sorry. I just thought of the more ways we can adapt. So so another is. And this is something I hear from clients a lot to of like.

Rebecca: Well, I can't meditate for 30 min. That's too long, and if somebody said that to me, I would say, Yeah, I can't do that either.

Rebecca: So so what I will often tell people is as little as 5 min a day can really, really make a huge difference in your life. And also, if it's 5 min a week like. So

Rebecca: you really have a lot of choice and empowerment in terms of like, how long are we gonna do this? And how often? And and you know, really understanding that even in these short sessions there's a lot of like, remember, you said in the beginning. Oh, even just from that. And that was probably what like a minute like. Even from that I feel more grounded. I feel more. And so that's something to think about. To internally emphasize to our clients is like

Rebecca: nobody is expecting you to be like cross legged on a pillow for an hour, unless that's what you want to do. But that feels really good. Yes, yeah.

Allison Puryear (she/her): And I think there's so much in life like that.

Allison Puryear (she/her): Where like, it doesn't have to be the like. Quote unquote therapeutic dose

Rebecca: to have some positive effect right like I do all these Mini walks throughout the day, where, if I've got 5 min, I may just go out and like walk half the block and walk back and

Allison Puryear (she/her): just being outdoors with some fresh air and some sunshine, and moving my body, the teeniest tiniest little bit. It's a little bit like that's not gonna get me Buff. That's not gonna give me like some sort of a new level way of looking at things. But it it helps. It's just like a little tiny help throughout the day.

Allison Puryear (she/her): And our clients with trauma need all the little tiny bits of help that feel doable that they can get.

Rebecca: Yeah, well, and I think you know a lot of times people really get black and white with these things and go well, what's what's a 5 min walk to do? Well, it actually could do a lot. And especially if you're collecting a lot of those little moments, a lot of those little glimmers. A lot of those little brief.

Rebecca: you know, coping skills like that can add up and actually do that for you, you know, absolutely. Yeah. Yeah. And it's also funny you mentioned walking cause. That is another thing

Rebecca: for people who do not like seated meditation. I love walking meditation, and really, all it can be is, you know, the intention of going on a short walk. And instead of like having my air pods in, I'm just gonna walk. And I'm just gonna either observe, like you know the nature around me. Observe how the wind or the sun feels on my skin.

Rebecca: and or I'm gonna observe, like, you know what my footfalls feel like on the pavement, or

Rebecca: I'm gonna notice what my mind is doing and where my mind is going, and be really attuned to that, and

Rebecca: that's that's mindfulness, practice. It might not look like what we think of as mindfulness practice. But it is, you know.

Allison Puryear (she/her): absolutely. Are there other adaptations that we haven't talked about that could be helpful for people to know.

Rebecca: Yeah, let me go. Hold on. I actually pulled a list.

Rebecca: I think you know things like. So again, if you're a person that you don't like.

Rebecca: necessarily want to sit and do it like you want your body to be moving and doing something. I have a lot of like

Rebecca: folks with ADHD who kind of feel that way and things like that.

Rebecca: I would also recommend, you know, Yoga, stretching I've been doing this thing lately where I go to my gym, and I don't even work out. I just get in the hot tub, and I just sit there.

feel the jets feel like. And I just like.

Rebecca: think about how I'm doing. And then I get out and I go home. That's it like. So you know, anything that engages you could do that in the shower, too. Right? So. But just going into it with the intention of this is the thing I'm gonna pay attention to. Where these are the things I'm gonna pay attention to. And when my mind wanders off I'm gonna bring it back to these things.

Rebecca: so all those I think, are really good.

Rebecca: you know, Thich Nhat Hanh actually recently died. But he is like one of my all time favorite favorite mindfulness, teachers and practitioners. He talks about

Rebecca: eating meditation.

Rebecca: so eating mindfully, again, proceed with caution. If you have an eating disorder that one might be a little tricky dishes meditation, doing the dishes and just focusing on the feeling of like, what's the temperature of the water. How does this plate feel in my hands? Right?

Rebecca: So so again, for people who are like, I do not wanna just sit and do this. But you need to be moving your body like those are all really good ones.

Rebecca: I also think

Rebecca: meditations that focus on external things can be more helpful for trauma survivors. So maybe like

Rebecca: listening to music and really focusing all of your attention on the music right? Or

Rebecca: looking at an object in the room, and really like describing it and looking at it almost as though like you're an alien, seeing it as the first time, and don't even know what it does right, I think really interesting.

Rebecca: so all of those things right? All of those things are still mindfulness, even though.

Allison Puryear (she/her): we may not think of them. First, yeah, yeah.

Allison Puryear (she/her): And so for people to be able to like

Allison Puryear (she/her): tap into one of these just in their day to day life when they need it right like it doesn't have to be. You don't need to have your perfect meditation pillow, you know. You can literally be walking from home to work it can be, and you can turn that into like a meditative or a mindfulness experience to help ground you if you need it.

Allison Puryear (she/her): These are, I think the adaptations make it inherently more accessible, not just from a

Allison Puryear (she/her): nervous system, overwhelmed perspective, but it doesn't have to look one way. There's a freedom in that that makes it easier for people to do

Rebecca: right. And I and I really like the idea, too, of just like fitting it into the things that you already do every day, because let's be honest, like most of us already, are doing 2 meetings every day. So it's more just like we get it where you can fit it like, where can you fit it in already

Rebecca: like? And when you said that I just had this memory of, I used to do this thing when I was still working in community mental health of

Rebecca: like my mindfulness at community mental health, while else was coming out of the door

Rebecca: and walking to my car, and just like looking up at the sky, and just like being outside for like 30 s. That was what I did for my mindfulness, and like

Allison Puryear (she/her): it did make a difference for me, you know.

Allison Puryear (she/her): Yeah, absolutely.

Allison Puryear (she/her): So we talked some, I think, about how mindfulness may be challenging for some trauma survivors like just this idea of

Allison Puryear (she/her): having to be in their body when it has not been a safe place recently or ever are there other ways that

Allison Puryear (she/her): mindfulness may be inherently more difficult for someone with trauma than someone without trauma.

Rebecca: Well, I think that for somebody with trauma their nervous system is often attuned to threats

right? And so

Rebecca: what you would hear kind of a traditional mindfulness practitioner say is, you know. Oh, if you have a

Rebecca: distressing thought, or you know I'm upsetting feeling or like, just keep going. Just just keep noticing it. Keep going. Eventually it'll kind of fade that might not be true for survivors, and actually, by continuing to sit with it.

their reaction may really escalate

Rebecca: and that's where we get into the risk of, you know, potential re-traumatization. And so

Rebecca: and you know I kind of think about it as it would be like if you were trying to meditate. And

Rebecca: there was like a polar bear like 20 feet away from you. And if the meditation instructor was saying like.

Rebecca: Well, you know just, you know. Just observe the polar bear with your eyes, and just come back to your breath. And it's like.

Rebecca: well, yeah, that's a great idea, theoretically. But like also, I can't stop thinking about how I'm gonna be maimed by this polar bear right now, and what I've learned from trauma experts is that our nervous systems don't differentiate between an actual threat and a perceived threat. And so, when you're meditating, and your nervous system is starting to really attune to this

Rebecca: negative or scary, you know, thought or feeling in your body, whatever it is like. That's where we can really run this risk.

Rebecca: and so and that's also why it's important to give clients that option of consent to either, you know. Wave and say, Hey.

Rebecca: can can we do something else? Or actually, I wanna stop, or or that's where they can go into, you know. Maybe if they've had their eyes closed and that's feeling really intense, they can try opening them and see if that helps. Maybe they can reattune to one of those, you know, supportive things, something that feels really good to them that's still in the present moment, but also that feels better like if that's you know, like

Allison Puryear (she/her): looking at a beloved object or focusing on the feeling of your feet on the floor, like kind of going back to those things we would more consider like grounding skills, right?

Allison Puryear (she/her): But I'm thinking, too, about how effective all of these adaptations can be for people who are highly anxious also for whom, like they sit down to meditate or be mindful. And it is like, Oh, you just wanna put a microphone on all my thoughts. You want them to speed up.

Allison Puryear (she/her): I don't wanna do this. And how like, maybe it's not a good fit for them, or maybe one of these like alternative ways of coming at it is gonna be a better fit.

Rebecca: Yeah, a hundred percent 100%.

I'm trying to think if there were any other adaptations I wanted to mention.

Rebecca: Oh, this is another thing I like to do with people. I like to have them rate. This is also anybody that's trauma servers. But I like to have them rate like on a 0 to 10 scale. You know how

Rebecca: anxious or activated, or whatever they are before and after the exercise.

Rebecca: And so what that does now I will say.

Rebecca: I know sometimes people might feel pressured a little to lower their scoring, even if it isn't really, I guess that's like one thing we have to consider, but

Rebecca: I think it gives us some really good information, because if our if we're not sure if mindfulness is a good fit for somebody, because again.

Rebecca: a lot of people with trauma have people pleasing tendencies, they can go into fawning mode. They they want us to to feel like we're helping and doing a good job. And so they'll say what they need to say to to make us feel that way. So if you're like, I'm I'm not sure. I'm not sure if this is working for this person having that rating is really helpful, because then they can. You know, any information we get from that is good, because if they start at a 6 and they end at it

Rebecca: 10

Rebecca: with 10 being the most anxious. It's like, Oh, okay. Well, that wasn't helpful. What else can we do? And then we can open the dialogue about like.

Rebecca: why do you think it went up, and what else would be helpful instead of what we did. You know what I mean? Yeah, absolutely.

Allison Puryear (she/her): Yeah. And I think about how it also could be kind of an an entry point to helping people speak up about their needs in a way like if you've rolled out this red carpet of like.

Allison Puryear (she/her): you know, you can let me know if any of this is not a fit for you. It doesn't, you know, if they're still in

Allison Puryear (she/her): kind of the beginner stages of being able to use their voice and feel like their opinions or their experiences are valid. Then this is a great way for them to be able to use it if something's not working for them, and

Rebecca: to be able to support that and and then later expand it. Reference it you're like, remember, when we were

Allison Puryear (she/her): doing the stone down in the pond, and how like you very

Allison Puryear (she/her): confidently, or you very you were nervous, too, but you did, anyway, and you let me know it didn't fit like you've got. There's precedent of you speaking up

Allison Puryear (she/her): and helping bolster their confidence for future conversations they may need to have.

Rebecca: Yeah, totally totally. And then on the flip side.

Rebecca: I also feel like.

Rebecca: I hear from a lot of people like, yeah, okay, I'll practice mindfulness. It doesn't really do anything, though. And so if they end up actually bringing it lower, it's like, Oh, wait. Maybe it did do something like, it's sort of like

Allison Puryear (she/her): giving that data to them of like, Oh, maybe this is more effective than I thought, you know. Yeah. And that speaks to something I think most people feel around mindfulness or meditation of like this is like, Oh, I noticed that there is a benefit.

Allison Puryear (she/her): and yet I don't do it.

Allison Puryear (she/her): Like. How many people have started meditation or mindfulness practices lasted a week, and then it fizzles, even though we know how effective it is. Yeah, right? So many times.

Allison Puryear (she/her): Is this something you end up helping clients with in terms of bringing it into their life more frequently or more intentionally.

Rebecca: Yeah, you know, I think that.

Rebecca: the oh, my God! You know what! When I started this app, it was free. And now I don't think it is anymore. But I use the insight timer app. And so every time it has like a timer, and then it has, like a million guys, meditations on it. And so then, every time you meditate, it'll sort of mark that off in your calendar. So if you have a goal like, I want to do it once a week, or I wanna do it once a day like some sort of tracking like that is helpful.

Rebecca: maybe using a timer, maybe again, like integrating it into your schedule sort of like tying it to another thing that you do every day like

after I brushed my teeth, or something like that

Rebecca: And again, I also just think normalizing the fact that

Rebecca: it's hard. It's hard to integrate a new.

Rebecca: have it, and especially because the other thing that I find so interesting about mindfulness, and I think my people struggle with it is it's not something that you necessarily get better at.

Rebecca: like. I think most things in life we have this thing of oh, we practice it. And then we like reach these milestones. And then that gives us these little like dopamine hints of Yeah, I'm I'm doing better. And I'm making.

Rebecca: I still sometimes sit down to meditate and like, have a lot of trouble focusing on what I'm doing, because it's it's not a thing that you and that's also part of the the mindfulness philosophy of non striving right. We're not striving for any specific thing.

Rebecca: We're just doing it for the purpose of doing it. And that's like a a big thing to like. Wrap your head around and make a hard thing to wrap your head around as people who are.

Allison Puryear (she/her): you know, in a capitalist society that really values like these sort of external markers of success. You know what I mean? Yeah, it's interesting, because I was most consistent with meditation when I used use. Are you familiar with that band type thing? So it it goes around your head, and it's attached to an app, and it measures your brainwaves.

Allison Puryear (she/her): And when your brain is quieter, like the storm calms that you're listening to, and you can start getting birds to chirp.

Allison Puryear (she/her): And as you start thinking the storm rolls in, and it's louder, and you can't hear the birds anymore. And so the like type A, I've gotta win this person inside me really like getting those birds to chirp. I would always, not always, but often be like

Allison Puryear (she/her): it was like 10 birds. Yes, and then it would be like storm, because I was like I did it. I won. It was having kind of immediate feedback here. Sometimes you don't even notice when you start to trail off into thought, but I would hear the storm coming in right and so cool. App to use, to like.

Allison Puryear (she/her): accommodate the way I needed. I needed it at the time, which was gamified, and, like all those kinds of things

Rebecca: totally. That's totally happened to me, too, where I have that thought like, yes, I'm nailing this. Oh, wait, you know

Rebecca: again, we can look at that, as it's all just information, it's all just like, Oh, isn't that interesting that my brain does that?

Allison Puryear (she/her): Yeah, it's interesting. How like

Allison Puryear (she/her): meditation and mindfulness give us the opportunity to speak to ourselves in the way. I wish we all spoke to ourselves all the time. Right? It's just like when we can bring that gentleness to like. Oh, yeah, I'm having a thought, because I'm a person like that's fine. That's fine. Instead of like, oh, that's not a helpful thought at all. And, like some of the more negative slant we can have in the ways that we talk to ourselves. It really does

Allison Puryear (she/her): create this opportunity to practice a different way

Rebecca: right well. And man, that just made me realize I meant to say this at the beginning, and then I forgot. But

Rebecca: like. So the other thing that I think people get confused about with mindfulness is it's a practice and a philosophy so like the practice is meditation, I guess. But then, people, I also hear people say my mindfulness practice right. But then the philosophy part is like the non judgment, non-striving, acceptance. And so I think another thing that's really good to keep in mind is that even if you have a client who is like.

Rebecca: I hate my voice. I'm like doing it. Okay, but we can still integrate

Rebecca: so much of the philosophy, part of it into talking to them about like their mindset and the way they talk to themselves. And so there's so many, even if you're not like explicitly doing it, there's so many ways you can still like.

Rebecca: work it in there in a way that feels better and more aligned for them. Yeah, absolutely. Absolutely.

Allison Puryear (she/her): Yeah. It's interesting. How like the philosophy informs the way that we support our clients with trauma around the practice.

Rebecca: Like, it's

Allison Puryear (she/her): almost cyclical in that way.

Rebecca: It's like, Meta, yeah, yeah, absolutely.

Allison Puryear (she/her): And so, how do you know that meditation or mindfulness is not for a particular client like are there like versus like? Let's try this adaptation. Let's try this adaptation. How do you know when it's like, let's just bail on this and do something else.

Rebecca: Yeah, I mean, first, if they tell us. Secondly, if

they hmm. I think there's a lot of sort of like

Rebecca: non verbal queues, right? Like, if you're like

Rebecca: noticing when you're doing it, that they're they don't look comfortable like they're sort of like

Rebecca: scrunching up their shoulders or their way, or they're like visibly getting more restless when you're doing it like that might be a sign.

Rebecca: I think, if if they for my clients who really like it, they will say, Oh, can we do mindfulness exercise today? Yes.

Rebecca: if if they're never, ever saying that, then, like maybe that tells us, you know. So again, you have to like, look at all these things in the context. But

Allison Puryear (she/her): yeah, yeah, and I think about like the benefit of doing it in session, too, like. even if that's the only time all week long that they have any mindfulness.

That's right.

Allison Puryear (she/her): that's fantastic like they got it in that day

Allison Puryear (she/her): for that week. That's right.

Rebecca: And I think there's benefits to doing it at any point in session, because at the beginning, if you do it at the beginning, and often I'll offer it to my clients who are like just coming from work like if they're coming to my session from work, and they look really frazzled. I'll be like, why don't we start with this? And there'll be a little palette, cleanser, and then we can get it to.

Rebecca: But I think there's also benefit to doing it at the end. And sort of because I think, taking that moment just to, you know, focus on the present moment helps you kind of integrate all the information you just went through. Right?

Rebecca: and then also, I think there's benefits using it in the middle. If it's beneficial for somebody, and they're feeling particularly triggered or activated by the point that you're at in therapy, I think it could be useful, too.

Allison Puryear (she/her): Yeah, absolutely.

Allison Puryear (she/her): What are some things you see? Clinicians

Allison Puryear (she/her): kind of get hung up on or get wrong when they're trying to use mindfulness in session with their or with therapy clients.

Rebecca: Oh, that's a great question.

Rebecca: well.

Rebecca: what I actually see clinicians get hung up on the most is making sure we're doing it the right way, like. So, for example, part of the reason I said, this stuff, I just said, is because I used to think

Rebecca: and I don't know where I got this, probably from agency work like I used to think that

Rebecca: the right way to do it was to do mindfulness at the beginning of session. But then, again, when I sort of apply those principles of acceptance and non judgment to myself, I'm like.

Rebecca: no. Why does it have to be a session, you know, and

Rebecca: or like thinking that like, I think we often get like we often do it one way ourselves. And so we get into the habit of. And actually, I've talked about this the whole the whole time to like I was doing it one way, and so I was like, oh, sort of assuming that this is the way it's gonna work for everybody

Rebecca: or like this is the right way, because it's the way I'm doing it. And that's not necessarily true, right? Right? So I think, like also seeing it through this lens kind of helps us see?

Rebecca: Oh, there's so many different ways to do this right, or to do this well and like, let's explore what works best for each person and not just it just sort of opens up

Rebecca: the possibilities rather than us kind of being stuck in our own sort of lane about like what this is supposed to be like or look like. Yeah.

Allison Puryear (she/her): I'm thinking about some of the black and white thinking that goes on.

Allison Puryear (she/her): Not just for our clients, but like you just gave a great example of how like as therapist, sometimes we have some black and white thinking around it.

Allison Puryear (she/her): Are there ways that you like? How did you remind yourself of what you just said, essentially, that, like, it doesn't have to be one way. How did it

Allison Puryear (she/her): come to you that you could be more flexible with that?

Rebecca: You know. I have no idea. That's a great question.

Allison Puryear (she/her): I think I'm gonna have to sit with that a little bit more.

I think.

Rebecca: Well, you know what it is is.

Rebecca: So I think, like when we're in school as therapists right like, there is a lot of

Rebecca: like the way that we're taught about. Therapy is very black and white, and I sort of think about it in the way of like, you know how like artists have to learn how to do the like technique first, and they learn how to do the technique. They can sort of experiment it, and bend the rules a little bit. And like.

Rebecca: and I feel like that's the same thing with us, right? And so I think the farther I've gotten into my career, the more I'm able to sort of trust, my own intuition, and my clients intuition, and let go of some of these things that, like I was taught in the beginning, or told

Rebecca: which often now I see in retrospect.

Rebecca: Were also coming from

Rebecca: flawed people who were like, well, this is just what I know, or this is just what works for me, and like, that's great for you. But as we grow in our careers and become more experienced, like, we start to figure out what works for us as clinicians. Right? Yeah.

Allison Puryear (she/her): what is what does your current mindfulness practice look like?

Rebecca: So currently, I do a lot of sort of on the fly going on a walk.

Allison Puryear (she/her): you know, type of meditation, hot tub meditation really not very structured.

Allison Puryear (she/her): And I love that because it's like you're fitting it in without having to be rigid about it. Right? Like, just continuing to move away from that black and white thinking about like

Allison Puryear (she/her): how it gets done.

Rebecca: Yeah. And I have, like, I've gone through phases in my life where I'm like, I'm gonna do it every day. And like

Rebecca: I have done that, it's been beneficial just at this season in my life. This is sort of what's working for me, and I think too when I when I start to get rigid about it. I actually don't enjoy it as much so. And you know, again, like it doesn't have to be enjoyable, because it doesn't have to be any particular way. But

Rebecca: I think this is just what's feeling resonant for me at this point.

Allison Puryear (she/her): Is there any like data or research that says like a minimum amount of mindfulness. like X number of minutes or hours per week, or days per week, is

Allison Puryear (she/her): what moves clients or moves us into a better state of being

Rebecca: the the tidbit I heard about that

Rebecca: was from a planner. I used to have a planner that was like a mindful esteemed planner, and it said 5 min.

Rebecca: I don't know what study that came from. I don't. My guess is, if you dug into the research, they're probably a lot of free answers.

Rebecca: But again, I think because I'm coming at it from the perspective of

Rebecca: like even one mindfulness practice one time for 1 min can be useful like. That's kind of the the attitude I take with it, because.

Rebecca: although we know there are really positive long term benefits to it, as far as, like your like improving neuroplasticity. And you know they've studied it. But all kinds of different things. It's good for anxiety to skip that like.

Rebecca: Like. And that is true. And we know that. And also, it's not just about those long term outcomes. It's also about the benefit of

Rebecca: what's happening right here. Now, you know. Yeah.

Allison Puryear (she/her): yeah, it's interesting, because it can just be such a great reset.

Allison Puryear (she/her): In general, we used to do nightly meditations with our kids when they were younger

Allison Puryear (she/her): and using insight, timer and they were not like quote unquote, doing it right. You know they would. They weren't trying to sit still. They weren't trying to keep their eyes closed the whole time, but we just kept introducing it to them to see if it was beneficial, and if it helped, and it was a nightly thing every night, 7 nights a week, because that was just part of their bedtime routine.

Allison Puryear (she/her): And it's interesting how at a time. I mean, they were really young. And dysregulation is so high at that age, cause

Allison Puryear (she/her): you can get set off really easily, and you don't have a lot of things to cope with it. It did seem to help

Allison Puryear (she/her): even just being exposed to it, not even, you know, doing it right, but being exposed to it. They were much more likely to kind of like. Take a breath

Allison Puryear (she/her): and sit there before reacting like it was almost like it gave them a little bit less impulsivity.

Allison Puryear (she/her): just by having this practice of listening to people guide you through being less impulsive, basically

Allison Puryear (she/her): which is interesting, and we don't do it anymore, cause they're older and don't have like the bedtime routine that takes 40 min like it used to. But it's

Allison Puryear (she/her): it's interesting. How like my oldest daughter has asked when she's felt really scattered. And she has pretty severe ADHD. She has asked to like, do some mindfulness stuff together, which is really cool just because she was exposed to it when she was younger.

Rebecca: So, yeah. And you know, I often think about like how different the world would be if we were all exposed to it. Younger, you know, because

it's often one. It's also one of those things where like.

Rebecca: unless that that is presented to you as like, oh, this is a thing you could do. You actually don't have to

Rebecca: activities under impulses you can't actually slow down like

Rebecca: like it makes it real, and it makes it so that you can learn how to do that. Whereas if you never get that information like

Allison Puryear (she/her): you just never even know. That's a thing that you can do.

Allison Puryear (she/her): Yeah. So it's interesting. And like, I do find myself wanting to push it more. But also like.

Allison Puryear (she/her): I think that's my idea of doing it right as a parent, and is like, well, we should just get back to mindfulness every day instead of

Allison Puryear (she/her): like when she asks for it will do it. And then it's not like eating your vegetables, you know, like it's like it's not. It doesn't feel is forced. And it can be a tool that she opts in for instead of one that I'm shoving at her like. Here, fix this behavior with this thing

Rebecca: so right? Because, again, if you were doing that, who knows if she would actually be asked, or if or if she would see it as a chore. Exactly. Yeah. And I suspect very strongly, that's what it would be like just knowing just knowing her. Well, you know, it would just be like on the list of shoulds, and I would I have definitely had it as a should in my adult life.

Allison Puryear (she/her): and I would love for it to just be a tool. She can access in her life.

Allison Puryear (she/her): instead of something that comes with the baggage of not doing it right, or doing it well enough, or doing it often enough.

Rebecca: Hmm. yeah.

Allison Puryear (she/her): that makes me think of that old therapist. Yes, yeah, there we go. I'll just trust it absolutely. Well, thank you so much for talking with us about this. I feel like these like alterations or alternative ways of of adapting.

Allison Puryear (she/her): can make it feel more accessible and less intense for our clients in a way that can be really beneficial. So thank you.

Rebecca: Yeah. Can I

Rebecca: go through some people and resources I recommend. Or do you want me to just get that to you later? Then you can put it in the comments or.

Allison Puryear (she/her): Yeah, give it to us, and we'll put it on the on the web page. And that way people can access it. If you'll just like email it to us.

Rebecca: Okay, cool. Alright. So IA couple of, as I mentioned earlier, David Treleavin. Who is the

Rebecca: person who had practice mindfulness for years and years and then had trauma. And so he, he created a program for clinicians. And then he also has a free sort of

Rebecca: briefer tutorial on his website, which I did around trauma informed mindfulness.

Rebecca: Thich Nhat Hanh. It's so much writing like prolific writer on the topic of mindfulness, and I love anything by him. It's THIC h.

Rebecca: and then different word NAHT. Different word HAHN. I believe he's Vietnamese.

Rebecca: I just read Dr. Jennifer Mullins book "Decolonizing Therapy." I really cannot recommend it enough, and it's such a good example of how

Rebecca: like you know how we were kind of talking about. How like

Rebecca: even the way we talk about and think about mindfulness is informed by mindfulness like that's how. Also describe her book like even the way she

Rebecca: like her book, is decolonial in the way it's written, and it's so cool, and it talks a lot about trauma, and it has so many different adaptations for for people who've been traumatized so truly can't recommend that enough.

Rebecca: Resmaa Menakem, is a huge, huge influence of mine, he wrote "My Grandmother's Hands", which is about healing racialized trauma.

Rebecca: Jon Kabat-Zinn also has a million books, and I believe also was the originator of mindfulness based stress reduction. Which is like a research based program that's helped people with all like chronic illnesses, anxiety, depression, all different sorts of things. So anything by him is great.

Rebecca: I think that's it. Awesome, amazing. Thank you. Probably more. But that's if you're if you're wanting to dive deeper, though all those people have good resources to start awesome. Yay, thank you so much, Rebecca. I appreciate it. And yeah, I'll see you soon.

Rebecca: Okay, bye.

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