

“I Wish You Weren’t Such An Anxious Mom”



Full Episode Transcript

With Your Host

Natalie Bacon

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Welcome to Mom On Purpose, where it's all about helping moms overcome challenges and live their best lives. My hope is by being here, you are more inspired to become the mom you are made to be. I'm Natalie, your host, a wife, boy, mom, dog, mama, Chicagoan, and former lawyer turned professionally certified coach. If you're here to grow, I can help. Let's go.

What's happening my beautiful friends? Welcome back to the podcast. How you doing? I hope you're doing well. It is June, my third boy is almost seven months old. Like where does the time go? It's so crazy. I'm having such a good time and I'm feeling energized and happy and motivated and it's just a beautiful season of life. I'm really loving this time with my family and we live in the suburbs of Chicago. If you don't already know that. And I have to say that summertime in Chicago is just the best.

If you ever wanna visit Chicago, come in the summer and connect with me, hit me up, send me a message, I'm here. I love it. It's really a great place to, you know, raise kids and be and just enjoy the weather. So we are in it, we are loving it and it's of course not all perfect, but I choose my thoughts intentionally and these are the thoughts that feel so true and empowering to me. So that's what we're going with. How are you doing? How is your summer transition going? How is your marriage and your work and your life and balancing all the things? I hope it's going well. You have to get on my email list if you are not on it because on Thursdays I am sending a resource roundup, shall we call it, with a specific list of tools and blog posts and podcasts for any given topic.

So if you want to make this summer just amplified and better and more on purpose and intentional, you need this every week there's a different topic, time management, marriage, motherhood, mom, guilt, parenting, all of the things. And in that specific email you will get a list of resources of tools that go along with that topic. 10 outta 10, recommend it. It's the email out of all the emails I send every month that I put the most time and effort into. And you may, you may have missed it, you may not be on the email list and it's not something that I promoted, it's just something that I've been getting a ton of feedback on that you all are loving it. I also include a life lately

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section in it. So if you want updates on my life and what's going on personally as well, I think that is another reason to get on it.

So you can get on that email list over at momonpurpose.com/subscribe and you will get this Thursday's message sent directly to you. Okay, with that I want to dive into today's topic, which is anxiety, specifically mom anxiety. One of my private clients shared with me that her 17-year-old son recently told her "I wish you weren't such an anxious mom." My client got it. She knew exactly what he meant. She admitted I am just kind of an anxious mom. And she saw how her anxiety was impacting her kids and I told her what I am going to share with you, which is, there is no reason to live your life like that. I am a fan of all of the tools, whatever works for you. I always like to say whenever I coach and teach on anxiety that I'm talking about the run of the mill anxiety and worry that we experience as part of normal healthy humans.

If you have a diagnosis or generalized anxiety disorder, this is not targeted at that. There are other types of tools and methodologies and resources. I 10 outta 10 recommend those whether it's therapy or something else. But this type of anxiety where your brain is doing what good healthy human brains do, which is try to predict the future and doing that from a fear-based perspective in order to secure your survival is where I come in. I can help you manage that so that anxiety isn't in the driver's seat, it's actually in the backseat and it's not that big of a deal. So I am going to walk you through what's really going on in those challenging moments and exactly how you can start separating yourself out from the anxiety. So it's not impacting your kids in the way that you know it typically would without these tools.

My client shared with me that she specifically feels anxious when her kids are driving at night. Here's what she said to me, "I text, I call, I send find my iPhone alerts. I track their location constantly. If their phone pings in the middle of the road for too long, I assume the worst. And I call to make sure they're okay. I won't go to bed until everyone's home, even if I'm exhausted because I have a fear of finding out they've died." I want to dissect this using the thought feeling action cycle that's going to help you get a handle

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on your anxiety. Whether it's a similar example like this or something else. So let's start off with defining what anxiety is. Anxiety is a feeling, it's a feeling, which means it is something you experience in your body. Maybe there's a tightness in your chest, maybe there's a buzzing.

Maybe it feels warm and tingly. I mean, have you ever just paused and noticed the sensation of anxiety in your body? That in and of itself can be extraordinarily helpful. The cause of anxiety is your brain. It is what you are thinking. Your thoughts create your feelings. So it's never your circumstances, it's never what's happening with your kids. It's never what's happening in your home. It's never what's happening in the world that is causing anxiety. What's happening in your mind causes the anxiety, your thoughts create the feeling of anxiety. Why do you ever think about this? It's because part of the brain's job is to predict what it thinks is most likely to happen in the future. This is really helpful. So you don't have to wake up every day and think about things for the first time. I mean, we would be non-functioning. So for example, if you're thinking about this upcoming weekend, you can most likely make some pretty accurate predictions.

You're gonna take your kids to some sort of activity, maybe go to lunch together, and then maybe you have an appointment or an errand. Whatever you have planned is most likely going to happen. Now that's not always the case, right? People get sick, plans get canceled. We know there are lots of examples of how our plans don't work out, but with respect to anxiety, your brain cares most about its likelihood of making a prediction that feels familiar and certain your brain loves certainty. So we actually don't ever know what's gonna happen this weekend. We can't predict the future, but because most of the time, let's say seven, eight times out of 10 our predictions are accurate, your brain thinks that it always can predict the future even though it can't. So with anxiety, it's coming from the brain trying to make predictions in situations that it perceives as unpredictable or unfamiliar.

So said more simply, when your brain fears the unknown, it creates very fear-based anxiety producing thoughts that then create that anxiety in your

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body. So your brain is just doing what it is designed to do, which is ensure your survival, your brain is wired for survival, it's not wired for happiness. So when you know this, you then can rewire it for happiness, for your sake. And in this case, as we're seeing also for the people who you interact with on a daily basis for their sake as well, if your kids are feeling the impact of your anxiety, it's because you're acting out that fear and they are experiencing that in a way that probably isn't helpful for them, nor is it helpful for you. Your brain thinks it's so helpful. And what I really want to emphasize here is that with tools and practice, you can rewire your brain.

So this is not that big of a deal. I am someone who experiences a lot of anxiety from the perspective that we're talking about. A lot of that buzzing in my body and I manage my brain so well that it's just in the backseat, meaning I don't take action from it. And this is a skill that you can get so good at. So going back to the example of having, kids driving at night and my client feeling a lot of anxiety and then acting that out, I wanna separate out the facts from her thoughts, her feelings, and her actions. So this is how you create real change, is you separate out all of the elements the facts are that her child was driving, her brain was telling her thoughts that were rooted in fear. Like what if there's a car crash? What if something's wrong?

What if they're dead? These catastrophic fear-based thoughts that the default brain is always going to prioritize over positive thoughts. And guess what? The more practiced you are in this, the more rapid fire it is and that's why you want to change the channel. We'll get to that in a little bit, but I just wanna emphasize here that they, these thoughts feel so real because you have like a high of thoughts in your brain that you're just practicing over and over and over. So of course they feel real and I love to draw a parallel between, these types of thoughts and someone else. So for example, I'm just making this up, I don't know for sure, but let's just say her husband, right? He's got the exact same circumstance as 17 year old's driving. He's not feeling anxious, he's not doing any of these things.

And it's the same exact fact. Why is that? Because of the sentences in his head. His brain is not thinking these thoughts, his brain is thinking

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something else, like I'm sure they're probably fine. So the quality of your thoughts determines how you feel and how you feel determines how you act. So the thought feeling, action cycle is your thoughts create your feelings and your feelings drive all of your actions. And then facts, circumstances are separated out. So the circumstance in this case, the child is driving the thoughts, my client's brain is saying, what if there's been a car crash? What if something's really wrong? What if they're dead? Your brain cannot accurately predict what's going on because it's your kids and it wants to think the worst. And then what you feel is anxiety in your body. And there's actually nothing wrong with just being with the feeling and feeling it, but we are not taught to do that.

We are taught to respond to feelings in a way that is unhelpful. This is where overeating comes in over scrolling incessantly, checking their location, acting out that feeling, and then spiraling in more thoughts, texting, calling, trying to create certainty outside of us. And that my friends will leave you feeling miserable and drive you crazy. It really will. And it's all because fear and anxiety are in the driver's seat running the show. You've got to start paying attention to this cycle and the impact of it on yourself and your experience and also on your life. And I'm telling you, this will significantly reduce how often you're feeling anxious and the intensity of it and how you act it out because you'll probably stop acting it out. You can interrupt that cycle and just be with yourself and your feelings. You can also change your thoughts. There's so many different ways to approach working on this, and that's really what I do with my clients.

But for purposes of this episode, I wanna empower you with the information to know the real root cause of this. It's not because you're just a "anxious mom", but you know, there's no such thing as being an anxious mom. We attach feelings to our identity and then we act that out because if you identify as an anxious mom, guess what your brain is going to do? It's going to prove that true. Whatever you tell yourself about yourself is what your brain will do more of. So the very thing that you don't want is what you will create more of because you are validating that. You are reinforcing it with the stories that you're telling yourself. So very simple way out of this,

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you may have heard me say this before with respect to overwhelm, is to add in that feeling word to separate yourself out from the feeling.

You are not an overwhelmed mom. You are not an anxious mom. You are a mom who feels overwhelmed. You are a mom who feels anxious. So instead of saying, I'm such an anxious mom, you say, I'm a mom who's feeling anxious, you know, or you could just say, I feel anxious right now. I feel anxiety in my body and say it intentionally. And if anyone says it to you, I wish you weren't such an anxious mom, correct them. Say, oh no, I'm not an anxious mom. I'm a mom who feels the feeling of anxiety in my body a lot and I'm working on how I process that and I am sorry I have acted that out in the future. I am going to do my best to not do that. Or you don't have to say that, but my point is that you don't just accept that because other people are giving you that identity.

You've got to take your own identities that you adopt really seriously because what you believe about yourself is what you prove true. I spend so much time telling myself I am someone who has a lot of time and I'm intentional with my time and I don't feel overwhelmed. I feel calm and I feel really on purpose. And because of that, when someone assumes I must be so busy or so overwhelmed 'cause I have three kids under four years old, I'm like, Nope, I'm not buying into that narrative. Absolutely not. I am not someone who identifies as an anxious mom either, even though I feel anxiety all the time, not a problem because I put it in the backseat. So the way that you start to do this is you separate out your thoughts from your feelings, from your actions, all of that is about you.

What you can control, your thoughts, your feelings, and your actions. And right now we're not even trying to control it, we're just trying to pay attention to it. Because again, this is what you do on default. So you didn't have to direct your brain to create these fear-based anxiety producing thoughts. It did that automatically. And the first step to changing that is to become aware that that's what's happening. I'm having thoughts that are creating this feeling of anxiety in my body, and when I think and feel anxious, then I act that out. Okay, that's good to know. And that has nothing to do with

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what's happening in the world or with my kids or in my home. I want to go through another example that this client gave me. She said, "my boys are good kids, never been in trouble, but in my mind I've already decided they're doing all the worst things. I read into everything. I ask questions, trying to get confirmation of my fears. I give lots of reminders like, Hey, remember we don't do X, Y, z, and I bring up hard conversations they don't want to have because I feel like I have to say it, even when they do open up, I get physically sick, shaky stomach knots, jello legs. It's not fun."

Okay? So after my client told me this, I asked her like, what was her worst fear there? Right? So it's, it's not really clear what's going on there. So when you are thinking about this for yourself, it's often that we notice how we act and how we show up, what we say, what we do. But you might not be as aware of what's going on internally and anxiety and solving for it is all internal. It's about what's going on in your brain and what that narrative is creating for you in your life.

So I asked my client a follow up question. I said, what's your main thought driving a lot of these actions? And she said, she's trying to save herself the heartache later. And I asked her a follow up to that and she said, it's the heartache of disappointment in my kids being hurt, being proven that kids aren't as great as I had thought. So I think we can all relate to this. We want our kids to be good kids, okay? But what I wanna break down here is how unhelpful that thought is. Doesn't it sound like such a good thought? And we've all been conditioned to think this, and so I wanna break some of that conditioning for your sake and for the sake of your kids. And it will really help increase connection with your kids, open up, more honest, vulnerable conversations, and also it will help you calm down and not feel so anxious.

Where I wanna start with this is separating out actions from internal goodness. This will change your life. Okay? So live it up. Kids are good inside. All humans are good inside. We have inherent goodness. We are 100% worthy just by being here. There is nothing that your kids have to do to be good kids. So you have kids who are human beings, and their goodness is untouchable. I believe that, you know, it's, it's from God. They

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are children of God. We are all here with spirits and souls that are 100% worthy and good. And kids, just like adults make mistakes and they take actions that are messy and complicated. And, sometimes they follow the rules and sometimes they break the rules. The point is that you separate out actions from internal goodness. It's so important that you do this. Why? Because otherwise it creates this sense that kids have to perform and "be good" in order to make mom happy and in order to get mom's love, they know that if they make a mistake or they mess up, mom is going to not be able to handle it.

And that puts this unnecessary pressure on them. It also prevents them from wanting to open up. But even more than that, it's just not a helpful frame to think about kids. If kids are always having to prove that they are good based on their actions, it turns them into people pleasers, it turns them into people who are going to be constantly trying to, to impress each other and their parents even when it means they're not going to be authentic. So kids will always choose attachment over authenticity. Meaning if they make a mistake and they're afraid that you're gonna be upset if they open up to you, they're not going to open up to you about it because they fear that you will withdraw love from them. And so it's, it's a nuanced shift, but it has a tremendously important impact on the relationship you have with your kids.

And it comes back to the relationship you have with yourself. You are good inside too, my friend. You are good and there's nothing that you could ever do that would impact your internal goodness. And the same is true with every single human being that exists, especially, and I think we can see it more easily with children. So to my client and to everyone listening, your kids are good not because they behave in accordance with whatever rules you gave them. They are good because they are human beings and they are good inside and they take actions and some of those actions are within the rules that you set, and some of those actions aren't. And that's the way of it. I mean, think about your own actions just from growing up and being alive for several decades. It's like, of course we all make mistakes.

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We all get it wrong. It doesn't mean we're good or bad. It means that, oh yeah, I made a mistake, I messed that up. Interestingly, when you know your goodness is intact and untouchable, you are so much more likely to apologize and to repair when you make mistakes because you will not have the added layer of shame when you think that by making a mistake or by getting it all wrong or doing a "bad thing" then makes you bad. You are gonna try to cover that up and hide it and do whatever you can to avoid coming forward with that, because then you will make it mean that you are bad. And so you actually struggle more with, telling the truth and vulnerability and repairing and saying sorry, because of the layer of shame. And so we have to remove that layer of shame in order to make space for our humanness.

Okay, I hope I haven't lost you here. It gets kind of deep, right? This could be a whole book, but, I think for purposes of anxiety, it's so important to just see that what's happening here that's making the anxiety so much worse is conflating who her kids are with what they do. Those things are separate. Your kids are good kids just because they're kids, of course, they're good kids, they're not good kids because they got all a's. They're not good kids because they, have good sportsmanship. They're not good kids because they follow the rules. They're good kids because they're kids. And when you start to see kids this way, everything changes. So when a child breaks a rule or when a child does something that you know is out of alignment with your own personal family values, it makes it so much easier to have conversations with them because you're not all of a sudden calling them, labels that are unhelpful and that attached to their identity.

So for example, if your teenager does something that is against one of your family values, I don't know, like they stole something instead of you are a bad kid, you are bad. It's okay, this is this action, this behavior is out of alignment with, the expectations I have for you, and I wanna talk with you about it and I wanna see what's going on. And it's, it's all about the actions. You still see them as good no matter what I'm telling you, this will change your life. And then guess what? You start seeing yourself and the people around you as good. And it's more like there's a curiosity around behavior

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that doesn't align with that. I've coached a lot of moms with kids who exhibit like disrespectful behavior, and I'm always very intentional about helping them describe the behavior as disrespectful, not the kid.

Because guess what, when you label a kid as a bad kid or a disrespectful kid, they take that on as their identity and then they prove that true. Okay, now this is not a parenting episode, so I'm gonna bring it back to anxiety. So important that you separate out your kids' goodness from their actions. And I'm telling you, this is gonna alleviate so much of the anxiety because right now, your happiness, your wellbeing is so attached to your kids' outcomes, to their happiness, to their performance. If your kids do right by you, if your kids follow the rules, if your kids do whatever you believe is good, then you feel good, that creates so much unnecessary pressure on them and it also makes it such a miserable experience for you. Why? Because your wellbeing, I'm talking, talking about your internal wellbeing, the peace that you can have within you is negatively impacted by something outside of you.

At least that's what your brain's telling you. So now, instead of your brain intentionally choosing thoughts that are available to you, that will feel like peace and connection and confidence or whatever else you wanna feel, your brain is looking to your kids' behavior and your kids and, and what they do or don't do in order to determine how you should feel. So it's it's emotional delegation to your teenagers. It's like the last group of people we want to make responsible for our feelings. It's not fair to them, but it's definitely also not fair to you. And the way that you untangle this is you tell yourself, okay, it's not my kid's job to perform in a certain way to make me happy or feel at peace. It's my job to create peace for myself. You can still have expectations, of course, you're still gonna wanna have expectations and rules for your kids, just like my client said, Hey, remember we don't do X, Y, Z in our family.

Okay? Definitely still have that, but you do not hang your emotions on whether or not they do X, y, and Z. And part of the way that you make that possible is by managing your mind. In large part, that's what you do. You

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know that kids are from time to time going to break the rules. And how do you want to feel? Probably not gonna feel happy about it, but you certainly don't have to have debilitating anxiety about it making it mean that you know they're bad kids. And you know what's at the root of this, which we didn't even get to today, is, is what you're making that mean about you, right? So you are a bad mom or you failed in some way. When you set up standards for yourself about whether you're a good mom based on things outside of your control, like your kids being teenagers and making mistakes or doing something that's out of alignment with your values, you set yourself up for failure.

So again, have the rules, have the guidelines, but manage your mind and how you want to feel. That is how you eliminate or radically reduce the anxiety. Now, it does take practice. This is why it's so important that you come inside the Mom On Purpose Membership and you get coached so that you're not struggling with this. Because as you're rewiring your brain, you need to come up with new next believable thoughts. You need to be training your brain and running models and doing all of the tools that I teach in that program with ongoing accountability and support because your brain needs new neural pathways to go to, and those have to become highways like the current anxiety highway that you've created is, and the way that you do that is by starting with a dirt road and then a paved road. And then it's a highway, which means practice.

You have to practice thinking different thoughts and feeling a different way, and that is for your benefit. And it will decrease anxiety drastically my friend. And even when anxiety still comes up, because from time to time it's going to, it's not gonna be debilitating. Like for me, it's just in the backseat. I'm like, oh yeah, there it is. There's the anxiety, my brain is freaking out. It's, you know, trying to predict the future and, in a way that it's, it's afraid and it's scared and it, it very much feels scary. But because I'm so aware of it, I never take action from it. I never let it shoot me and I never take like that unhelpful, scared action that is not who I want to be. So for example, I remember when I quit practicing law and I was so scared about all of the

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unknowns, but I had made the decision really thoughtfully from my prefrontal brain.

And so I just let the anxiety be there and I didn't make it mean that I should remake the decision because I understand how the brain works. And because I am an exceptional coach and coach myself, I am able to keep anxiety in the backseat, not in the driver's seat. Now, we didn't even touch on in this episode how to feel your feelings and process the anxiety, which is also really important and helpful. But as you know from my work and what I believe and teach, that's 20% of it. 80% is doing the mindset management. It's understanding what anxiety is, it's understanding the root cause, which is always what's happening in your brain. It's rewiring your brain intentionally with next believable thoughts that feel true and purposeful and in alignment with who you want to be. And then practicing them. So for example, you might decide, okay, I wanna precoach myself on this to really get a handle on rewiring my brain so I can reduce anxiety so that I am not feeling so anxious every time my kids are driving or you know, with whatever else is happening that I'm worried about.

And so you think about how you want to think about your kids making a mistake and how you can still love them unconditionally. And that doesn't mean you don't have boundaries. That's okay. It doesn't mean you don't have consequences. You can do whatever you want with parenting, but you're not hanging your emotions on whether they behave in alignment with the rules that you have. And so what does that look like for you? How do you want to think? How do you want to feel? You might want to think thoughts like this is a normal part of childhood and being teenagers and this is the consequence that I want for this. And it's okay, it's all okay. I still love my kids unconditionally and here's what we're gonna do to move forward. It might be that when they're driving at night, you decide you are going to text them one time and make sure that they are okay and not text them again for at least one more hour or whatever you decide ahead of time, who you want to be and what thoughts and feelings you want fueling you.

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Thoughts like, okay brain, it's possible that something bad may have happened to them, but it's also way more possible that something bad didn't happen. Not at all. So you have to be careful what channel your brain is on right now. Your brain is on the channel of something terrible is happening to my kids. Turn that channel. You've got to give equal airtime to the good. And this will, again, change your life, but you have to practice it. At first it feels unbelievable to do. It feels like you can't believe this because you're so practiced on this channel, but it's sort of like if you watch the news all day long and you would think all these horrible thoughts about the world, it's like if you stop watching the news, it's so much easier. And so you have to switch the channel that your brain is on a very real practical way.

This is what we do inside the Mom On Purpose Membership. I really wanna encourage you to join so that I can coach you on this and help you reduce this mom anxiety that is just unhelpful. And um, and you can get a lot of relief from, I remember when I first did work on this specifically with worrying and a little bit with anxiety, was when I first got pregnant with my first son. And I realized there was no end to the worry, to the anxiety. You could worry about the genetic testing about labor and delivery about the first, you know, three months postpartum, fourth trimester about the first year. And I went through it in my mind and I was like, oh my gosh, I could have anxiety and mom worries for the rest of my life because so much of being a mom is caring deeply about something outside of you that you have no control over.

And that's the way of it. That's, that's how it's supposed to be. So I'm not saying that there aren't real things that could happen, there definitely are, but the upside to worrying about them forever, ever, I just don't see, I don't see it at all. I trust myself and I know that when and if something bad happens, I will be able to work through it worrying ahead of time. Creating all this anxiety ahead of time actually makes the problem happen right now in my mind. I can't create connection. I can't show up in my life. It impacts the relationship I have with my kids and my family negatively when I could be at peace and feel content and feel capable and love and connection and

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all of the wonderful emotions that are available with brain management. So just remember my friends, your brain is wired for survival.

It's not wired for happiness. So part of its job is to make predictions. And when it can't accurately make predictions or think that it can't accurately make predictions, it produces anxiety. And if you don't know how to manage it, that anxiety will create more negative fear fueled thoughts that will compound and just make everything so much worse and feel really out of your control. Start managing, your mind. my friend and you will reduce anxiety in your life and it will change your life and have a really positive impact, not just on you, but on those around you. Keep doing this work, my friends. It is work worth doing. Until next week, take care.

Thank you for being here and listening Now, head on over to momonpurpose.com/coaching to learn more about the Mom On Purpose Membership, where we take all of this work to the next level.