

Why Calm Is A Skill-Not A Personality Trait



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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, boymom, dog mama, Chicagoan, and former lawyer turned professionally certified coach. If you're here to grow, I can help. Let's go.

Hello, my beautiful friends. Welcome back to the podcast. If you're new here, welcome. So happy to be here with you today talking about calm and calm being a skill, not a personality trait. I, oh gosh, oh my goodness, I have so much to say. But I want to start off with just talking about how whenever I think I know something about myself and I'm like certain that I am a certain way, I know that there's a gap in my awareness somewhere, because I will think something and I will think it like it's a fact, like as if you could have a blood test taken and it's proven that I'm this certain way, and of course that's never the case.

So for years, decades, literally decades, most of my adult life I used to identify as having a sweet tooth. I just thought that was a fact. I would have said, this is just how I am. Now, we could argue kind of semantics here, why does this even matter? It matters because if you are calling yourself something that you don't want to be, you are reinforcing that identity and it's creating more of what you don't want. So, you know, just going off the example that's completely unrelated here of having a sweet tooth. It's like, if I stopped thinking that and I did, and started to think that I could just be someone who actually didn't really care about sugar and had sugar from time to time, but it wasn't a big deal, then that's who I became. Even if maybe compared to some other people, I have a natural tendency to desire sweets more, and we could argue whether that's like conditioned or not, but it doesn't really matter.

I know as a result that I actually eat less sugar when I stop having the identity. I have a sweet tooth. And so I think that most moms in this community, most high achieving moms, we are so self-aware that we go too far to the other end of the spectrum. So I always, I love a good spectrum. First of all. It's like, just a great visual for me. So on one side of

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the spectrum, I think we have a lack of awareness. We don't even realize how we are. This is like rarely. The moms who I'm working with, the moms who I'm working with, they love a good podcast, a good audio book, a good course, you know, it's like me where we, we love to learn and grow and we're good at school. And so naturally it follows that we pay attention to people and to ourselves and we would likely identify as being pretty self-aware.

And yet on the other end of the spectrum, which is where I was and where I find like most of my high achieving mom clients to be, it's like we've learned something about ourselves. We notice a pattern from our past, and then we turn it into a limiting belief. So much so that we think it's like, you know, a fact we could take a blood test. Like I'm just this way. Like I am just an intense person. Let's go with that. So someone who has like no reflection, no kind of self-awareness. They're not, paying attention to themselves. They don't care about growth and personal development and all the things, right? They're not even going to probably say that and they're not going to have a lot of reflections about just how they are because they're not going to spend a lot of time thinking about that.

But on the other end of the spectrum, it's like where you take awareness and you turn it into a limiting belief. You just kind of, pigeonhole yourself in an unhelpful way. So if you learn a lot about yourself and you think you are very self-aware and you don't do any of the thought work kind of that I'm talking about, or inside the Mom On Purpose Membership, it is likely that you have a lot of limiting beliefs that are keeping you where you are. Like, I'm intense, right? There's no blood tests for that. And you could say, Natalie, trust me, if you ask my husband, if you ask my family, like everyone, my coworkers, everyone agrees, I'm just intense. And it's not that you're not intense, it's just that what does that even mean, right? It's a thought. It's always a thought. So when we identify as a certain way, we're always playing in thought land and thoughts are optional.

So here's the kicker. If you don't want to be intense, then we gotta work on moving you inward in the spectrum into the middle, so that you're stopping

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using that identity as part of you as like a personality trait. And you start looking for the skills that you want to kind of cultivate and work on in order to change that. And you can, I, this like broke my brain. Can we just pause here for a minute this is such a broad thing to say, but it's, it's so true for me. Like, I used to think that I just was a certain way, so I was just like, good at dance and, not good at history and like fill in the blank. Like good at some things, not good at other things. Like it's very black and white thinking. And you know, when we're really little, this is like kind of helpful, just compartmentalize.

Like I was trying to explain to my son, consequences of eating certain foods instead of using the words like good and bad. And he just looking at me like, this is good. Like, please mom, stop. I'm four kind of thing. And so what, like, it comes from I think simplified language and then your brain loves that. Your brain loves to be efficient. And so what happens is over time though, we don't evolve that thinking. And so I for a long time thought, oh, I'm just a certain level of good at like each, I don't know, class topic or, each extracurricular that I was in, like I'm better at this and I'm not as good at that. And what I learned through doing kind of my own, I would say work and just experience work on myself. Like, obviously my professional training helped with that.

But the last like decade, one of the most life changing beliefs that I have adopted is that if there's anything that you want to change about yourself or about your life, there's like a missing skill or like a skill that you're, you know, level two at and you need to be a level 10 to get where you want to be or something like that. Like thinking about, developing, thinking about different actions or different results as skills instead of personality traits is life-changing. It's sort of like being like, I don't know how to ski. It's like, that might be true, but there's no like blood test for that. Actually, if you just go, to a ski resort, you can take some lessons and you can actually learn the skill of skiing and you're going to be terrible at first, but if you keep practicing, then you will get better at that, right?

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We all understand that. Or, any sort of lessons that our kids take, like we understand that it takes practice and we also understand that, in a class of 30 kids who have never done that activity before, there are going to be some kids who naturally are, better, right at the skill right away. But what we miss is that that doesn't really matter at all. And my goodness, my dad was so good at instilling this in me at a young age, he would just tell me, if you just keep going, you will get there. Like, most people just quit. And he'd be like, and I would be like, but they're so smart. You know? 'cause it always took me like so much longer and harder. Like, I was definitely the person who had to like, work super, super hard just for like B pluses or a minuses compared to just, you know, all the really brilliant people and all the AP classes.

And he would say, it doesn't matter. They're, they're going to quit. They're not going to keep going. Like, you just have to keep going if that's what you want. Most people will just quit. And he was so right, like just in life, right? And I'm not saying that, like there's no morality to that. Like, quit all the things you want to, but don't limit yourself because you're naturally like good at something. So if you're naturally more intense, like who cares, right? If you want to, and I'm, I'm coming back to the point, my friends, if you want to be calm, if you want to, stay like regulated in the chaos, that's how I kind of think about it. It's like being the Buddha in the city, as my coach would say, that is a skill. It's a skill. And you can be just like me, type a firstborn, high achiever, kind of extroverted, grew up in a family kind of, of yellers, you know, more or less, and still be the calm regulated parent when you have three toddlers, my friends.

It is, it is like a super hero, trait, it is so awesome to have this. It's like, it literally is being a superhero, putting on my superhero costume. My son, my oldest son's super into, Spider-Man right now and all the superheroes. So I'm thinking of that analogy. It's like they all have their, their spidey powers. And I think about calm as truly a super power like a superhero would have. So what you might not know is that every time you snap or yell, you reinforce that behavior. Even if you don't want to, even if you're like telling yourself, okay, I'm not going to yell today. I've done my

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affirmations, I've exercised, I've meditated, I'm grateful. I'm not going to yell today, right? It's like, will powering it without really understanding what's happening underneath you. And then of course what happens, maybe you don't yell, but eventually you will yell even if it's not that day the next day or something like that because you haven't done the inner work to change how you're thinking and feeling.

You haven't worked on the skill, right? Calm and staying regulated are skills. And when you continue to just kind of white knuckle it, you will reinforce that reactivity. How So.. Your brain rehearses everything. Like everything you're thinking about right now, it's rehearsing in your mind, everything you've done in the past, it kind of can predict what kind of outcome. So for example, if you try to ask your kids to get their pajamas on and do their nighttime routine really nicely multiple times, and you continue to do that, but you know, your brain knows your brain's so smart that if they continue not to do it, that one of the ways that actually will get them to do the thing is by yelling. It's really hard to condition your brain not to do that on your own without understanding kind of what's going on there. Said differently.

You yell because it works right? And of course, what do we mean by work? That's not who we want to be as moms. And so of course I'm not like advocating, yelling, but I'm trying to explain to you why sometimes it can feel like, oh, I'm just this way. I'm just reactive, I'm just intense. I'm, you know, working on my yelling. I'm trying not to snap, but like I haven't been able to do it. Or like, this is just the way that I am or my kids are just crazy like that calm parenting works for, calm kids, but it doesn't work for my kids. I promise you, my friends, I have three boys at the time of recording this. They're all under five years old. Actually, if you haven't taken my Tantrum Mini Course, 10 outta 10, recommend it over at momonpurpose.com/tantrums.

That is with an S on the N-T-A-N-T-R-U-M-S because sometimes it can just be powerful to hear someone else's exact experience. And in this mini course, that's exactly what I walk you through, like how I navigate tantrums,

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tantrums, tongue twister there, tantrums with three under five years old. As someone who's not naturally calm, you might say, I always tell the joke that, and I had just mentioned this before, but really quick, it's like my husband and I joke because I'm the calm one, and he would just never guess that. And that is really a testament to doing this work. And what do we mean doing this work? Well, inside the Mom On Purpose Membership, actually I taught a brand new masterclass called Calm at Heart. I taught it this month, in the month of March. And I break down exactly how to use thought work to expand your zone of safety to say regulated in chaotic circumstances.

So that's part one. That's like walking into a super chaotic, stressful situation. You know what I'm talking about? Dinner dogs, kids, door knocking alerts, inundated with input, all the things, and you're not, your nervous system isn't activated. That is a skill that you can train for 1000%. Okay? So that's a huge part of it and then the part where you actually want to generate the emotion that you want to feel, I go into that as well. That's in the Mom On Purpose Membership, not in the mini course. So if you want weekly mom group coaching and a monthly masterclass like this, it's over at momonpurpose.com/coaching because there is not a day that goes by that I don't use these tools. And like our kids don't really remember everything that happens on a daily basis, but they do remember how it feels to be at home.

And when they grow up, they will remember mostly how it felt to be at home. I mean, just think of your own childhood. Of course we remember, you know, some activities and some school stuff and some vacations and some of the daily life, but it's very generalized because it's so repetitive and because our brains are so small and developing, right? We're young, but you remember how it feels, your body always remembers how it felt to be at home. And you as mom are a huge contributor to that. And that is simply because of survival. That's not because you're creating their feelings, but because all of our brains, it has nothing to do with iq, right? All of our brains are actually pretty dang good at picking up on other people's cues. This is why we have to do so much work in the membership on not to mirror our spouses, right?

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Because we can pick up when something's wrong, we can pick up on that. And that's because the, the primitive brain is actually really good at scanning for like being included in the pack. And evolutionarily it was really important for that for you to make sure, oh my gosh, what is she thinking? What is she thinking? I gotta make sure that I fit in because exclusion meant death. Totally makes sense. So what happens in your home is that if you are tense, if you are a little manic sometimes if you are really harsh and critical and judgmental, even if you're not having like big outbursts, right? It's subtle, but it's not like subtle one day. That's the thing that I really want to sell you on, is how important this is like long term because it's subtle every day. And so they will pick up on that.

And you know, this is why I'm such a proponent of like my connected parenting framework because it really bases kind of the parent child relationship on connection. So that's the foundation because a lot of the control based parenting that authoritarian based parenting creates a lot of fear. So you do get more compliance, but the feeling in the home is like control and fear. And so I just want you to think about the feelings. I don't know, top three, top one, top five, somewhere in there. Just a few that you are bringing to your home environment. And do not judge yourself, my friends, I have been there, I've been there so much, I'm so proud of this work that I have done, and that's why I just feel so called to share it because, it's never too late and you are with you wherever you go and you're never not feeling a feeling.

So you're always feeling a feeling. And that feeling is something other people will pick up on just because of the survival based brain. And so for you, if like your main feelings are hurried, busy, fast, intense, you know, harsh, critical, and any of them, it could be anything. If they're feelings that you don't want to be your top feelings, I want to invite you to do the inner work because it's, it's work worth doing. And a result of that is that you will stop yelling, you will be able to feel calm and steady and grounded. And I go through it in the Calm at Heart Masterclass, which by the way, come on, calm at heart. Such a beautiful name. I feel like it's my, one of my core new

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frameworks that I'm just loving so much right now. I just want every mom to have it.

And again, you get that in the membership, but it is something that teaches you how to expand your capacity for staying regulated in the chaos. Like, I'm really proud of that work that I've done. I really am for myself. And then on top of that, what feelings do you want to generate? So I talk about this more in the course, but for me, a lot of times it's not actually calm. So I think that generally speaking, we confuse being grounded and regulated with calm. Not hugely problematic when you're just kind of talking to your friends or something. But, with coaching and these tools, it is helpful to differentiate because if what you mean is grounded, then you're not going to actually create calm. What you're going to do is you're going to work on expanding your capacity to like, teach your nervous system that the daily barrage of inputs and chaos at home is not a fire drill, that it has to be shooting off alarm bells for, which is in the habit of doing and will continue to do unless you do this work.

And that is part of it. And then you can decide, okay, how do you want to feel? So for me, for example, if I need to like hold the boundary, if my kids are fighting, I don't necessarily choose the feeling of calm, even though, you know, if I was talking to a friend, I might say like, yeah, I stayed calm. What we really mean there is like, I didn't lose my cool, I didn't yell again. For me though, the actual emotions that I was feeling typically or am feeling or want to choose in those moments of holding a boundary when it's very chaotic, I like to use the words warm and firm. So I want to feel very warm and connected to my kids and firm in my boundaries. I don't always use the word calm, but I am always expanding my capacity and showing my brain, okay, it's safe to not, not have the, the alarm bells going off and go into reactivity.

It's just a skill. It's like the best news ever. And so my friend, if you are highly aware, highly conscientious, if you are very self-aware, again, I start off by saying, and I want to say it here again, that like I am someone who definitely fell into that camp and yet now having done this work for over 10

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years and been a coach for eight, now I know that if I am so sure about something for myself, like really certain about how I am a certain way, then that means that's like a cue to my brain. Oh, there's probably a gap somewhere that I'm missing because I know that I'm holding onto it too tightly and I know that it's just a thought. And I know that the way that we describe ourselves, if it's not how we want to be, then it is a limiting belief, meaning it's unhelpful.

So why would I ever choose that? Right? And so then I kind of do the thought work and poke holes in it so that I can choose how I want to think about myself. So let me give you an example. Let's say I have the belief I'm just not good at cooking. That's just how I am. I'm just not a good cook. That is a limiting belief, right? That's a thought and I'm making it true about myself. Like, is there a blood test for that? Is it a fact? No, of course it's not a fact. Now again, your brain is really smart, it has lots of evidence for why it is saying that. And yet, like what I'm not trying to do or say is for you to gaslight yourself and just think the opposite end of the spectrum of like, oh, I'm this amazing cook.

It's like, no, of course not. I cook food. This is how I would break this thought apart. I cook food and the way that I think about myself as a cook is that I'm not very good at it. Oh, that's interesting. Why am I choosing to think that about myself? If I actually want to create all of this food for my family every single day, huh? How else might I think about it? And then I'm like, okay, well maybe I could think about it in terms of the type of cook that I would want to be and what else is true about my cooking and how much more I cook than I used to cook. And actually this is a skill that people learn and might some people naturally be pretty good at it, sure, but who cares? Maybe I just don't have a ton of experience with cooking and I want to get better at cooking.

Like just playing around with those thoughts so that it goes from being this limiting belief to something that I'm working on. Because I promise you my friends, calm is closer than you think it is. It really is. So you have to let go of the limiting beliefs that you have that are preventing you from calm. It'll

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like break your brain. And I think the reason this can take so long for most moms is like they'll work on the wrong things and you can work on the wrong things for decades, my friend. And it will do nothing. You can meditate daily, you can journal daily, you can exercise daily, and you can still be super tense and yelling. Why is that? Do you ever think about that? I know people like that. It's just because they haven't done the inner work to practice the skill of calm.

And really it's two skills, right? That skill of expanding your zone of safety and the chaos as, and that's more of like, the grounded nervous system work as well as practicing generating the feeling of calm. That's it. You don't have to do the patient's work, the gratitude work, the journaling work, the meditation work. Nothing wrong with any of those practices. Huge fan of them. Just totally unrelated. And I think, I think that with a lot of things, I think we can spend so much time, it's, it's kind of like dating. Like if you're like me, I dated the wrong type of guy for decades. Huge waste of time. Now, it's okay. I'm not like mad about that or mad at myself for that. But like you can literally just date unavailable men for decades. It doesn't get you closer. Or you could just, you know, right away in early adulthood date men who are emotionally available and get married right away.

And so I got married at age 35 and I wanted to get married literally since I was like 18. Okay, that's a long time, but that's okay. Again, there like certain things just take longer for us to figure out. And I think what I want to encourage you to see here with calm is that it is a skill. It is not a personality trait. Anytime you're labeling yourself as something that prevents you from creating calm, it's a limiting belief working against you. Reactivity is practice, even if you don't realize it, because your brain's just going to reinforce that reactivity. Like, you know, every time you react, your brain gets more evidence for reacting again in the future. Even if you are consciously saying to yourself, you don't want to do that again, you will feel on edge. Your brain practices emotions, it's always practicing emotions. And so if you're not consciously practicing grounded and calm, then you are not getting anywhere closer to calm.

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Does that make sense my friend? So lots of resources for you. The Tantrum mini course. Again, easy wins for you to just see my, kind of process for staying calm with three under five momonpurpose.com/tantrums. And then also if you want weekly group coaching, the Mom On Purpose Membership is a no-brainer momonpurpose.com/coaching, I also want to invite you to check out the bundle. For some of you who are like newer and you want the frameworks, you do get the Calm At Heart framework in this bundle. It's just like a one time fee. You get 67% off. If you go to this link that I'm going to tell you about right now, don't tell anyone, it's momonpurpose.com/bundle. And this is like my lifetime access bundle again, it's like, it just has a bunch of frameworks in there that will help you no coaching, but if you just want the, those tools, that can be a way for you to dive in and get like real results on your own.

Like it's an on demand course. So lots of options for you. Again, I just feel so passionate about this because of my own work and transformations in it. I was just talking to a private client today and she was like, you know, it took me some time to get it and to like do it, but once I did it has been just like life changing. I'm like, right. Like there's just like a moment of connection there. And for those of you listening who do this work, you know what I mean? It's like once you, once you see the other side, you can't go back because of how, impactful it is literally in everyday life, especially with motherhood because your default brain is crazy in motherhood.

It cares so much about your kids that at least mine, my default brain is, that it would really be fueled by worry and tension and control and frustration and overwhelm and it doesn't have to be like that. So come on in, join me in all the things and I'll talk with you next week. Take care.