

423: Encore: Mirroring Emotions



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With Your Host

Jody Moore

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I'm Jody Moore and this is *Better Than Happy*, episode 423, Encore: Mirroring Emotions.

This is *Better Than Happy*, the podcast where we study what the healthiest, most successful people in today's world think, feel and do. And we leverage this knowledge to create our best lives. Are you ready, little bird? Let's fly.

Hello everybody. So we have another Encore episode this week as I am recording these little intros prior to just a couple of weeks. I want to take off from the podcast to be with my family, to serve in my church calling and just clear my mind a little bit. So I picked a couple episodes that I know are really powerful that are from a pretty long time ago. So you may have forgotten what I say there. My guess is that even if you remember, hearing it a second time and knowing what you know now is going to be a totally different experience. And for many of you, there are going to be brand new episodes.

This one is called Mirroring Emotions and mirroring emotions is a tool that I created years ago, the episode originally aired in 2017. As I was coaching people over and over again, I started noticing and then I actually even did a little research to see, is this a phenomenon that psychologists have studied before? And of course they had. They use more technical terms like mirroring neurons and things like that.

But the way I use it is just a really simple practical way to identify when we are delegating the control of our emotions to other people, which is something we want to avoid, something we all do at times. I still do it at times, but having this tool brings a level of awareness that then gives me some leverage over myself again. And so I wanted to share it with you here today. Please enjoy Mirroring Emotions.

Alright, let's talk about mirroring emotions. This is a tool, if you're in my *Be Bold* coaching program, then you've heard me talk about this. This is a tool I use with a lot of my clients. And the way it works is that we notice that it's natural human behavior to in many cases, not always, but in many cases to mirror the emotions of the people around us. And this is something that we

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do because we are unaware of what's going on. We're emotionally unaware, but we're even cerebrally, I would say, unaware of what's happening.

So if we just operate on default with that lower brain driving like the lower brain is supposed to do 80% of the time, then we tend to mirror or take on the emotions of the people around us. So, for example, perhaps my child is really worried about something. Then as a mother, I am likely in my natural unconscious human state to be really worried about my child. Maybe I'm worried about the thing that they're worried about or maybe I'm just worried about them or both. But many times when our children are worried, we worry. So do you see how we're mirroring their emotions?

I have many clients who tell me that their husband gets mad. And when they talk about what happens then, typically when my husband is mad then I get mad at my husband for being mad. Now, we all show up differently when we're mad. Some people get really loud and yell and are argumentative when they're mad and others shut down and retreat and get silent when they're mad. But if your husband or somebody in your life is mad, do you get mad, do you mirror their emotions?

What about sister-in-laws, we always joke in *Be bold* about how we do so much coaching around sister-in-laws. There are a lot of 'difficult' sister-in-laws out there. So if your sister-in-law is really judgmental then are you judgmental of her and her judgment? See how that works? It's a tricky one. But this is what happens, I noticed myself doing this just recently.

I think I talked last week about the email that I got in response to the school bus email, which, by the way, thank you to all of you who posted so many kind comments and emailed me saying that you love the school bus email. But anyway some people didn't and some people were judgmental and then I proceeded to judge them for being judgmental of me. So I mirrored their emotions, this is what we do. I hear this a lot.

There's somebody in your life who's really negative and then as they're telling me about it, I say, "Now, why are you so negative about his

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negativity?” See, we mirror them, they’re negative. Now I’m negative about them. They shouldn’t be so negative.

Now, this can work with positive emotions too, which is a beautiful thing. If my friend is so excited about something, I might be so excited for her. That’s a great thing. I don’t need to change that then. If my son is so happy, now I can be happy, but I still like you to keep the awareness, I’m just mirroring him because that’s easy for my brain to do. She’s thinking thoughts that are making her happy and excited, and then I am thinking thoughts that are making me happy and excited about her or for her. And they’re not the same thoughts. Isn’t that fascinating?

If my friend is really excited, let’s say about a cruise that she’s going to go on and I’m really excited for her. Then it’s because I’m thinking I’m so happy for her, she deserves that, good for her, I hope she has a beautiful time. But her excitement is coming from thoughts like this is going to be so much fun. I can’t wait to get away. It’s been so long since I had a break. I’m going to get a beautiful tan, whatever she’s thinking.

Now, here’s the other thing I want you to notice. I think again in my observation and in my coaching, that mirroring positive emotions is harder, is more challenging for us than mirroring negative emotions. Because sometimes when my friend tells me she’s going on a cruise and she’s so excited, my brain wants to feel jealous, wants to go to scarcity, it wants to go to that’s not fair. Why don’t I get to go on a cruise? Why is her life so perfect and wonderful and my life is not? Or why is she so successful and what’s wrong with me? And go to shame and guilt.

So the mirroring of positive emotions is great when it happens, but I think it’s harder for our brains, whereas mirroring negative emotions, very easy to do. Tricky little brains we have. Can we give one other example of where I see this happen a lot?

Along with sister-in-laws, I coach a lot on mother-in-laws or mothers. So if you’re telling me about how your mother is just all up in your business and she has all these opinions about how you should keep your house and how

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you should raise your children and she's so judgmental of you. Then what I would point out is that you are all up in her business about how she should be and how she should stay away from your life and how she shouldn't have opinions and she shouldn't judge you. And you're again judging her for judging you.

So she's all up in your business and now you're all up in her business. Do you see it? You see where the mirror's coming in? Of course the problem with doing this is we are putting ourselves at the effect of these other people in our lives. So their mood or their behavior is determining our mood and our behavior and therefore our result. So this is also a concept known as emotional childhood, it's a piece of emotional childhood anyway, is assigning our emotions to things outside of us, believing that they're the reason.

So when we just naturally mirror, we think that that thing outside of us, that other person, their emotion, their bad mood, their worry is the reason that I feel bad, which is not true. It's always our brains creating it. It's just very easy for our brains to have thoughts about what other people are doing that will generate the same emotion or at least a very similar emotion.

So the first step that I like and the reason this is such a powerful tool to use in coaching is because when you just notice it, automatically you get some leverage over it. Like I said, when I noticed, I'm just judging those people for judging me. That's what's going on here. Immediately that doesn't mean I could drop it all together or that I did. It just means I get a little bit of leverage over it. I'm not operating at the effect of it anymore. I'm taking back the ownership and the responsibility for myself of what I'm creating and what's going on.

And again, I don't do it with judgment for myself, I do it with curiosity and compassion because I'm a human. This is natural human behavior. It makes sense that I would do this but let me notice it and remember that it is optional. So you step back and you watch yourself as though you're watching a movie. This is such a powerful thing to do, you guys, not only to

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notice when you're mirroring emotions, but also to create more gratitude in your life and more abundance and to really appreciate your life.

If you really step back and watch your life like a movie, it's full of so much goodness that you don't notice when you're not watching your life that way. Do this in small moments. I don't mean that you have to live from that place, but if you do it periodically throughout your day you will notice some pretty cool stuff.

I had a moment this evening to myself when I went to pick my oldest son up from soccer and I had a few minutes alone in the car. And my husband had just returned home from playing golf all day with my dad and my brother. I just kind of stepped back for a moment to watch my life, and I realized you know what's awesome? I have a husband who gets along with my dad. And I have a dad who likes and in fact, loves my husband and I have a brother who also loves my dad and my husband and they all love golf and they love to golf together. That is awesome.

Do you know how often that doesn't happen? And it was just one of those moments when I had this little glimpse of how amazing my life is because I step back and I watch it and I can always find something when I do that. So again, back to mirroring emotions. When you step back and you notice it, then you become an object to act and not to be acted upon, just what we are supposed to do, it's what we're here to do. It's what will evolve us and strengthen us.

So again, it requires consciousness, it requires observation, it requires using the higher brain and you don't have to do it all the time. Because if you're mirroring positive emotions or even neutral ones, it's fine. It's the negative ones when you don't want to show up that way that I want you to step back. So let's dig a little deeper into what to do instead.

Many times when I teach people concepts like this, they think that I'm saying you should just always be positive, you should choose the opposite. If your husband is mad, you should be happy. If your child is worried, you should be joyful. And that's not what I'm saying. I'm not saying you should

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always be positive. You probably don't want to. I don't want to always be positive, not necessarily. I just want to choose intentionally what I'm going to feel. I want to be aware of it and choose it. I don't want to be at the effect of just mirroring other people's emotions.

So when your son or daughter is hurting, you may want to hurt for them, I often do, but I try not to just make it be an automatic default reaction. I try to think about, is this how I want to feel right now? And I know that sounds weird to say, "Why would I want to feel hurt?" But many times I do, that is to me, just a natural, appropriate response, at least for a little while. I may not keep the hurt, even as long as they do, but for a moment I want to hurt for them.

But when they're really worried about something I don't want to be worried. I don't find that to be useful. I don't think that worry ever serves us, it really doesn't. It's one of those tricky things our brains offer us because our brains think that it's going to prevent a problem, but it absolutely does not. So it's okay for my child to be worried. I don't tell them that they can't or try to talk them out of it. I just don't want to be worried about the thing they're worried about or about my child. I don't think either one of those is useful.

Instead, I might want to feel compassion. I might even want to feel a little bit sad for them that they're having to worry, but I also know it's completely normal, many people worry on occasion, I even worry. And so I'm not worried about them. This is part of the human experience. Overcoming this and getting through this could strengthen them and help them to evolve to the next level.

When your husband is angry, do you want to be angry? I hear this many times with the women I coach. My husband comes home and he's angry or he's saying mean things to the children or to me, or however he shows up, or he's not speaking to us. And I'll say, "How do you feel about that?" And they'll say, "Angry." Or maybe they say irritated, but it's usually some version of, I'm so angry that he's mad, why is he mad about this? This is ridiculous. You don't need to be so mad.

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So I love what Byron Katie teaches about anger. She says that defense is the first act of war. So if your husband comes along and lets say he's angry at you, he's yelling at you. If you choose to get angry back, now you're defending yourself, now we have a little war going on. But if you decide instead to just allow him to be angry and you don't mirror his emotions, instead you choose to think he can be angry if he wants to and I'm so sorry that he feels that way but I'm not going to be angry. Then that's when you stop mirroring and you gain all your power back.

When my friend is excited about something, then yes, I totally do want to be excited for her. So again, I don't have to use the higher brain, I can just rely on my lower brain and get excited, but so many times it's so useful to notice that you're mirroring emotions and choose what you want to feel instead.

I had a client I worked with in the past who came to me wanting help with her marriage. Her husband had left the church several years prior to this woman coming to me for help, so she'd been through the shock of it all. She'd kind of gotten over the initial shock, but several years had gone by and their marriage was really struggling and the main problem was the different religious beliefs that they now had. And she would describe him as he is not supportive of me. He's so judgmental of me and my beliefs and the way I want to live and in fact, he's disrespectful about it.

I'll be leaving the house to go to mutual because she served in the young women's and he will have comments like, "Oh my gosh, your church expects so much of you and it's all volunteer. And meanwhile you're away from your family and this is ridiculous." And she said that he would make all these negative comments about what she was doing. And she would say things to him like, "We will not have alcohol in this house, I won't tolerate that and our children will go to primary. These are the things that I expect."

And so she would describe their relationship that they would argue over a lot of things and not just about the church but they would even kind of argue or make fun of one another's TV shows that they would watch. So as she described different scenarios and the dynamic in their relationship. I

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said to her, “Well, it sounds to me like your dynamic is sort of like teenage siblings.” And she said, “Yes, I can’t tell you how many times I’ve said to someone it’s like he’s my teenage brother and we just fight over everything.”

And so what I did is I pointed out to her that she was actually mirroring his emotions. And because she is a beautiful, brilliant human being, she got it right away. She had this light bulb moment when I pointed out to her, I said, “Sounds to me like when you say that he’s not supportive, he’s so judgmental, he’s so disrespectful. The same could be said about you, that you’re not supportive of him and his beliefs and his lifestyle and you’re judgmental of how he wants to live and you’re disrespectful of his desires as well.”

And when she saw it, it was amazing. She had this light bulb moment. She got emotional on the phone. She said, “I have never thought of it that way before.” And as we talked about what would happen if she were genuinely supportive and loving and respectful and open, she said, “I feel hopeful for the first time in years.” And we talked about her having a conversation with him, and she did. She went to him with genuine curiosity, not like a teenage sibling, but like a loving wife.

And she said, “I just really want to know what you believe. What do you think our home should be like? What do you want it to look like? How do you think? Let’s just have a discussion.” She wasn’t turning over everything. She wasn’t saying she was going to agree with anything he wanted. She just said, “I genuinely want to know what you think it should look like.” And do you know what he said? He said, “I have no idea.” He was so taken back, he’d never even thought about what he wanted. He was just fighting this war.

It felt like there was a war, and so we should fight but he didn’t even know what he was fighting for. I am so proud of this client. They had huge breakthroughs in their marriage and of course, it’s not perfect. I’m sure they still argue over even this topic and many other things, but huge progress. I was so proud of her when she recognized how she was mirroring emotions.

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So the good news is that most people will mirror you, at some point anyway they will mirror you. So if I'm upset, my kids tend to get upset, when I calm down, they calm down, they mirror me, and so do many other people. And so this is why we have this belief that we can control other people's emotions or that other people's emotions can affect us so much because it's not that they're affecting us, it's just human nature to mirror one another.

I think it's so fascinating, too, that we even use that term, 'she's mad at me. I think she might be mad at me'. How could we be mad at someone? You're just mad. Maybe they're the object of your anger but we make it sound like it's a dart that they're throwing, she's shooting mad at me. When really, it's not, it's just that humans mirror other humans. So if she's mad, I get mad or at least I get worried. And then we start to build an army.

Have you noticed this when you get into an argument with somebody in your life you start to build an army? Let me talk to our mutual friends or the other people in our family, if it's family and let's talk about what's going on here. And let me just share my side and see if they see it my way to make sure I'm not crazy. But what we're doing is, we're building loyal followers. We're building an army, because we may have to go to war.

So it feels so powerful to be mad and it feels powerful to build this army and it feels justified that people see it our way. But true power comes in not mirroring others. True power comes in just allowing someone to be mad and staying peaceful, I'm telling you this is how it works. Choose something more empowering or more peaceful. So my friends, please remember to be conscious to watch out for when you're mirroring emotions and to choose otherwise when it's going to serve you.

Coaching changed my life and I've watched it change the lives of thousands of men and women since, but is it right for you? You'll only know by giving it a try. Try it out today at jodymoore.com/trial.