

## 471: Navigating the World as an Empath



### Full Episode Transcript

With Your Host

**Jody Moore**

[Better Than Happy](#) with Jody Moore

## 471: Navigating the World as an Empath

If you would describe yourself as someone who feels the feelings of other people around you or an empath, you might notice that this can be exhausting and overwhelming and leave you feeling at the effect of how the people around you are feeling. This is a powerless way to feel. So, while I believe that being an empath or a highly intuitive and emotional person can be a huge strength, it can also create problems, especially for you if you are this person.

Today I'm going to give you some practical strategies you can implement right away to help you take back control of your feelings and keep your energy up without losing the benefits of this part of your spirit. Welcome to *Better Than Happy* episode 471, Navigating the World as an Empath.

Welcome to *Better Than Happy*, I'm Jody Moore and I'll be your coach today. Hello everybody, welcome to the podcast. I'm so excited to talk to you today. I am just coming off of teaching a three day workshop to some fellow coaches. We do this workshop called Get 12 Clients in 12 Weeks and it was so amazing. I am still reeling from just the energy and excitement that was in that room and all the things that we learned and discovered and the work that everybody there did, and the progress.

I love seeing that group at the beginning of the three days and at the end and how different they are in terms of the direction that they are going in their business and the way they feel about their ability to do it. And I just can't wait to go see what they all do next. So, to all my friends who were there, you know who you are, I'm thinking of you and gosh, what a fun three days that was.

Alright, so I got a question that came in through the podcast hotline. We have a bunch of questions that I need to get to, but I'm trying to pull what I think are the most relevant ones to the most people. If you have a question, you can always call it in to 888 hi Jody M and leave me your question. But today I want to play a question that somebody sent in that I think will be really useful.

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Before I play it and we get into the content I want to mention that since school is right around the corner. And back to school tends to be a time when a lot of our kiddos' anxiety starts to flare up again. I'm going to be doing a free webinar that you're invited to that's called How to Help Your Anxious Kid and I'm going to give you some really concrete tools.

Most importantly, there are three mistakes that most people make. With the best of intentions, nobody's doing these things intentionally wrong, they actually think these things are helping. And I've noticed that these things create more problems. So, make sure you sign up at [jodymoore.com/anxiouskid](http://jodymoore.com/anxiouskid) to come and learn about how to help your anxious kid, totally free. We will send you the replay if you can't come live, but try to come live because that is how we make the most progress when I can interact with you, really answer your specific questions.

It's a great opportunity for you to come and see what it's like to work a little bit more intimately with me. And by intimately I mean not just on a podcast where it's a one way conversation. So [jodymoore.com/anxiouskid](http://jodymoore.com/anxiouskid). I do not know that I will ever teach this again, at least not for a long time if I do. So, just go sign up for it and don't miss it.

Okay, so let's listen to this caller's question and then we will dive into how I would answer it. Here we go.

Hey, Jody, I have a question for you. I'm pretty young. I'm just in my early 20s, but I've started noticing a pattern in my emotions that I wanted some advice on. I'm sure I'm not the only one that this happens to you, but I've noticed that I tend to absorb the emotions of other people and it affects how I perceive other people and perceive the world.

For example, if I have a family member who complains about a sibling to me. Sometimes I absorb their negative feelings about that sibling, and I start thinking negative thoughts about the sibling, even though before that call with that family member, I didn't feel those feelings at all. And this has caused me to sometimes do things that I regret or say things I regret. And a

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few days later I realized I didn't actually feel that way, that was my family member feeling that way and I kind of bled off of that.

So, my question is, how can I identify when feelings aren't my own? And how do I deal with them in a way that is true to me? Yeah. Thank you.

Okay, what a great question. Thanks so much to the young lady who called in and asked this question. I agree with her that a lot of people can relate to this and feel this way about their interactions with others. So, we're talking about the word empathy here today. And empathy basically is just the ability to truly understand other people's feelings and it's a really useful thing to be able to do, to be empathetic. It's a useful trait or skill we might say. In fact, it's necessary, I think, to have true intimacy in your relationships, in other words, true connections.

Sometimes we have relationships that aren't very deeply connected and that's okay as well. But we all have a need for at least a couple of relationships, one or two in our lives at any given time that are more intimate, meaning we feel seen and heard and validated. And that requires that somebody can really understand our feelings. So, it's useful to the person doing the understanding of the feelings, it makes them feel closer to that person, and it's useful for the other person as well, they tend to prefer it.

So, empathy is a beautiful thing. Now, there are different levels of skill or ability or even sort of natural tendencies in this area. Some people are highly attuned to the emotions of others just naturally, without even intending to be, whereas for other people it's much harder to tune into the emotions of others and they might have to focus on it more intentionally, because it just doesn't come as naturally to them. And sometimes people who we would say are maybe highly attuned call themselves empaths.

So, the term empath just means someone that's very highly attuned. It is not an official psychology term or diagnosis, but it is a term that people commonly use. It can be helpful sometimes and this is true, I believe with any diagnosis or any official psychology term or unofficial language that we

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use to label our behaviors or our tendencies or our traits. Can be really useful to help us understand what's going on and that we're not the only one who operates this way. And then understand how to manage ourselves to get what we really want out of our interactions with others.

But they can also become limiting beliefs, if we just believe that's just the way we are. And therefore, we have certain problems or challenges that we can't do anything about. So, I want to be careful about, well, specifically, we're talking about the term empath. I don't want you to think that I'm saying to the young woman that asked this question or anybody that can relate, "You're an empath." What I'm saying is, if it helps you to identify yourself as an empath, great.

It sounds like at times at least, you have some of the tendencies or patterns or behaviors of an empath, and that is both a beautiful thing and can be a challenge. So, one of the things I believe is that our strengths, overused, can become our weaknesses. In fact, I believe that pretty much all of our weaknesses are just our strengths overused or not managed correctly.

So, for example, let's say I'm a planner, and maybe that can be a huge strength to me. Planning can be very useful and help me live a certain kind of life. But if I overuse that strength then I may not be able to be flexible. I may not be able to navigate myself or handle changes or unexpected things or impulsive, spontaneous things that weren't planned, can become a challenge if I overuse that planning strength. So, I believe that, like I said, empathy's a very useful skill, it's necessary and it's a strength, but overused it can become a challenge.

How is it a challenge? Well, that's what this young lady just described to us. Often people who are empaths, I'm just going to say by way of shortcut here, might find themselves very exhausted, very drained, they may feel very sensitive overall. It can be overwhelming feeling this way. On the other hand, they're also often good listeners and like I said, good at intimacy and good at honesty, although many of them struggle with people who they think aren't being as honest.

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Their ability to read people and get down to the real nitty gritty of things like emotions can cause them to struggle sometimes with people who aren't as comfortable going to a more intimate, vulnerable space. So how do we navigate this? I guess the reason I'm starting out with this is a strength and there are many pros to it, overused, it becomes a weakness is because I don't want you to think, oh, no, this is a challenge, this is a bummer, this is a difficult thing I have to deal with, it's not.

It's a beautiful thing and it can help you in so many ways, not only in your personal relationships, but even in your professional life and in the way you interact with people in general. So, I think it's a beautiful thing. I just want to help you manage this part of yourself so that it doesn't create exhaustion and overwhelm and all of these things that you just described. So how do we do that?

The first thing I would recommend is, you specifically said that you feel other people's feelings. And that sometimes you, I love the example you gave of, I'm talking to a family member. They talk about a sibling and they're feeling negative about that sibling. Next thing you know, I'm feeling negative about the sibling who I wasn't feeling that way about to begin with. So, what you're telling me is that that person's negative feeling made you feel the same negative feelings.

So, what I recommend is let's just get clear about what creates feelings. This is the way I like to think about it. You are not feeling your sibling's feelings, you're feeling your own feelings, even though you're feeling maybe similar feelings to what they were feeling. So maybe they're angry or frustrated with your sister and they tell you a story, and now you're angry or frustrated with your sister. You're still feeling your own anger and frustration, and your sibling is feeling theirs.

Feelings are literally chemicals and hormones that get released in the body. Different chemicals like adrenaline and cortisol and dopamine, they all have scientific names. Those things get released by our internal organs in our brains, in our bodies and then that's what we feel. So, your sibling's

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cortisol doesn't jump out of their body into your body. You feel your own version of it.

Now, there is some debate about this. I just want to acknowledge. I'm personally a real believer in energy and unseen or unmeasurable forces and emotions can fall into that bucket. So, I do believe there is some truth to there's things we can't see or measure, that emotions are a part of that world. I wouldn't deny that. But for the most part, what you're feeling is your own emotions. Especially if you're talking to them on the phone, you're not in the room to be able to feel that energy.

Again, I just want to be clear that I don't disagree that there is some of that, what I call the woo woo space that we don't clearly understand because we can't see it or measure it. I think there is some of that happening, but most of it is coming from your own thinking and then chemicals being released in your own body. That is where the majority of your feelings are coming from.

So, your sibling is frustrated, to make this easier, let's just say your brother is frustrated with your sister. And your brother calls you and tells you a story about your sister and he is frustrated. Now, you're reading that, you're understanding that, you're sensing that, but you are now thinking your own thoughts that are causing you to be frustrated. Brother's frustrated because of what he's thinking about your sister. You're frustrated now because of what you're thinking about your sister. It just so happens that he gave you a bunch of thoughts to think.

And when you thought the same thoughts that he's thinking or believed the same thing he's believing or entertained the same story, watched the same movie in your head about your sister that he's watching in his head about your sister. Then you felt the same emotions he's feeling about your sister, but your sister didn't cause him to feel anything and he's not causing you to feel anything. Are you with me?

So, if we get clear about that, then we start to gain a little bit of leverage over ourselves because we can't control what your brother's feeling or thinking or even what he's going to say to you. But you can control what

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you're thinking and feeling and what you're going to say back to him. Now, I want to be clear that you might also be thinking some slightly different thoughts than your brother. So you might be thinking, I feel so bad for my brother that he's experiencing this.

So, you have maybe some thoughts about your sister that you got from him. And now you have some thoughts about your brother that caused you to feel some empathy or some concern or maybe you have some thoughts of, oh no, I don't want to get in the middle of this. And so now you feel conflicted, but I still want to support my brother, so you feel confused. So, you might even be experiencing more intense or a slightly different variety or flavor of emotions than your brother because you are coming from a slightly different perspective.

Another thing that we tend to do is, let's say my friend starts telling me about something going on with her child. And I'm going to start feeling whatever emotions I feel based on what I think as she tells me. But if I sort of put myself in her place of, if that were my child, I think I would feel this way. Then I'm going to start to feel similar emotions. But again, it's not my friend's feelings that I'm feeling. It's my own feelings based on my own thinking.

So, this is important to begin with because it gives you back your own control, your own authority over the majority of your emotions. There can be some other factors like I said, there's some woo woo things we can't even understand or measure. And there is biology at play here in terms of just your own hormones, how much you slept, things like that. But we're going to give most of the credit because the majority of the credit does go to what you're thinking and believing.

So now what then, what do we do? Do we need to think something different? My answer is maybe yes, but also maybe no. I want to give you three practical strategies that you can practice. So, the first thing I want you to know is that you've got to be very kind to yourself. Sometimes when I teach people this, then they go from thinking that their brother created their



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feelings to feeling really bad about the feelings they're creating for themselves, and that is not what I want you to do.

But the first thing I want you to try out is processing and allowing feelings. So, when you get off the phone with your sibling, that was the example you gave me. Obviously, you can use this in other settings, but you get off the phone with your sibling and you notice you're feeling frustrated or angry with your sister. What I want you to do is just take deep breaths and feel the frustration, breathe in and out. Try relaxing your shoulders and your neck and your back and whatever other muscles might be tight. Relax, breathe, and be frustrated.

Normally when we're frustrated or angry or really any other negative emotion, we tend to tighten up and tense up. That's the natural default reaction physically. So, if you relax into it without telling yourself, I shouldn't feel this way because telling yourself I don't want to feel this way, I shouldn't feel this way, actually causes you to tense up even more. So now we're tense on top of being tense.

Instead of that, I want you to just relax and go, "Okay, I'm just going to be frustrated now. I'm going to be angry. I'm going to be irritated or I'm going to be confused or I'm going to be sad for my friend that I just talked to." And allow yourself to feel whatever you're feeling, it's totally fine. Now, I talk about this a lot, but it's really important and it takes trying it out a time or two before you will totally understand the power of it, but feelings happen in your body, not in your brain.

So instead of running away in your head with, oh, my gosh, I can't believe my sister did that. What was she thinking? And whatever other chatter wants to happen in your head or even I shouldn't feel this way, I wasn't even mad at her before I talked to my brother. I hate how I always feel other people's feelings. All of that is brain chatter. All of that's happening up in your head.

I want you to get down into your body, drop into your chest and into your stomach. How do you do that? How do you get into your body? Well, I

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literally, again, breathing helps a lot, relaxing my muscles. And I try to picture the inside of my body. I imagine it's pretty dark in there. So, I picture it being pretty dark, but I try to picture the inside of my chest cavity or inside of my gut because that's where most emotions tend to happen right there in the core. And I try to be in there, I picture it. I might need to close my eyes for a second.

Again, I'm taking deep breaths. I'm saying things like, "It's okay to be frustrated. I just need to be frustrated for a minute here. I just need to be sad." I just need to be, whatever you're feeling. So just feel what you're feeling. Now, the add on I want to give you is to know that it's because of what you're thinking, this is because of stories in my head, this is because of sentences in my head. And it's okay that I have those stories. It's okay that I have those sentences. There's nothing wrong with them. I don't need to change them. I don't even need to know what they are.

I just need to get in my body and feel some feelings right now. Because that will prevent some of the exhaustion and overwhelm that you've been feeling, that comes from resisting emotions. Resisting and tightening up and trying to push away emotions is exhausting. It will wear you down and it will cause you to have to withdraw from certain social settings. It's just a lot. You'll feel tired. But if you relax and allow and process feelings and again, some feelings are really intense, which might cause you to cry, alright, then cry. Let it out.

You may need to excuse yourself if you're with a group of people and maybe you need to go for a walk around the block if you're at work. You might need a minute if possible to grab a minute to feel your feelings. But majority of the time, you don't even need to do that. You can just relax and feel whatever you're feeling. And remember that it's just because of sentences in your mind, stories in your mind, movies in your mind. That's why you're feeling this. That's skill number one.

Skill number two, this will be a skill that you'll choose to use on occasion, and you'll have to practice it. All of these require practice, but this one especially is going to be a little bit tricky until you try it out a few times and

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then it will be available to you from time to time when you choose it. And this skill is what I call not mirroring one another. It is our natural default tendency to mirror one another. Now, this doesn't necessarily mean that we always agree with brother when he calls and tells us about how he's mad at sister.

I'm not talking necessarily about agreeing. Mirroring is not the same. It just means we take on a similar feel or a similar emotional state to the people around us. That is actually human nature on default. And the reason I say default is because I mean without you consciously choosing it, most likely you will just pick up the same vibration or energy as the people around you.

So, for example if somebody is really angry with me and they start yelling at me, my natural default tendency is to either become angry back at them or at least defensive. Those are both kind of similar feelings, defensiveness and anger. One is maybe more of an offense, and one is more of a defense, but both of them feel like being at war. And they both feel kind of dangerous and intense and energized. And it's our default if somebody comes at us to put our guard up, which makes sense and so we take on that similar energy.

Just like if somebody is super sweet and complimentary and kind, we tend to be very kind and generous and complimentary right back. Because it is our default without consciously choosing it, our brains, our bodies, our spirits will mirror the energy or feelings of the people around us. So, the good news is, that works really well most of the time. We want to just let ourselves do that. It protects us when we need protecting, it just works really well, but occasionally it doesn't.

Occasionally, especially if I'm a more highly attuned person to the emotions of others, then it may be exhausting, and it may cause me to feel like I'm just being at the whim of people around me. So how do you not mirror? You simply become aware. You're going to say something like, "My brother is upset, but I don't have to be upset. He can be upset, and I don't have to be." And again, like I said, this is a when you want to kind of tool.

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If your brother's upset and you don't want to be upset, maybe he's mad at your sister, and you don't want to be mad at your sister. Then you say to yourself over and over again in your mind, "He's going to be mad and I'm not mad at my sister, but I'm also not mad at my brother for being mad at my sister." That's the real work. That's our tendency is to get upset at the person for being upset at someone else, and then we're doing the exact same thing. We judge people for judging other people, that's still mirroring.

So, whether you don't want to take on his exact story about your sister is fine, but also, if you don't want to be mad at him for having that story, that's going to require a little work. And it really for me is just as simple as saying that, "Okay, he's mad, but I'm not mad that he's mad. Or he's shocked, but I'm not going to be shocked about his shock. And I'm also not shocked about sister."

So, I'll tell you what, this is, again, something that you'll have to try out and practice, but a lot of times, people don't know how to behave if they're not going to mirror. Because it's not, we don't want to have some empathy. We don't want to lose all empathy. We don't want to be like, "Well, forget you. I'm not mad at sister. I don't know what you're talking about." And then your brother's not going to feel heard and validated.

So, to me, it sounds more like, gosh, I can see that you're really upset and that's valid. It's totally okay for you to be upset like that. It sounds like you're justified in being upset and I'm so sorry that you're upset. Is there anything I can do to support you? So, you can still validate, give him some feedback, let him know he's being heard and seen without going all in on the story, if it's not a story you want to go all in on. So you're going to have to practice that one. Bring it to me in The Lab, I can coach you through specific situations if you're in The Lab if that happens regularly.

The third and final skill I want you to practice is, boundaries/telling the truth. And the reason I'm making it two parts like that is because sometimes a boundary might be necessary, but sometimes you don't need something as strict as a boundary, you just need to tell the truth, just be honest. So, here's the difference. Telling the truth might be, hey, I'm so sorry that

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you're upset, and I want to be here for you to support you, but honestly, I'm probably not the best one to talk to.

Because I love our sister and I know you do too, but I'm probably just not going to be able to validate what you want to hear, probably not going to be able to say exactly what you want. Maybe we should find somebody who's not in our family for you to talk to about this.

Or another way to tell the truth might be, hey, listen, I love you so much and I support you, but I can't keep listening to your stories about this situation because it wears me out. I love you. I'm so sorry you're struggling. It's totally valid. I hear it, and it's real, but I can't be the place anymore. It's just too exhausting for me. I feel a lot of emotions when I listen to what you're telling me because I love you and I care about you and it's complicated and I have lots of thoughts about it, so I can't be the one. Let's talk about something different.

That's just telling the truth. And that helps a lot in you taking care of your own emotional needs and your own mental state. And it is your responsibility to take care of your own mental and emotional needs my friend. So, tell people the truth. Sometimes something more strict, like a boundary is necessary.

I've coached many people who have parents, now that they're adults, their parents are struggling in their marriages and they're telling my client about their dad and all the terrible things their dad is doing and saying and how hard it is. And that's a tough position sometimes for my clients to be in. So sometimes they have to set a boundary, like, hey, mom, listen, I love you and I'm so sorry you're struggling with dad. Let's find you a coach that you can talk to about this or don't forget about your friend Julia, you should call her.

I can't be the one because he's my dad, and I, frankly, don't want to hear those stories and I'm not going to be able to support and validate you the way that I know you need and want. So please don't call and tell me about your problems with dad anymore, if you do, here's the boundary. If you

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start talking about dad, I'm going to remind you that we're not talking about that. And if you don't honor that, I'm going to hang up the phone. It's not because I'm trying to hang up on you because I'm mad, it's because I need to protect myself emotionally.

This is a boundary I need to set because I want to just keep loving you, not because I'm mad at you, not because I'm trying to punish you, just because I want to do right by our relationship. So, you may need to have boundaries/tell the truth. Start with just telling the truth and see if that does it. And if it doesn't, you might need to have a boundary.

So, listen my friends, being highly empathic is a beautiful thing. It makes you able to read people and therefore serve people, create value for people, connect with people. It's a beautiful thing. It makes you a beautiful person. The people I know who are highly empathic are some of my most favorite people. I love to be around them because they can be so fun and playful and creative, and they are sweet and tender, and I can just feel the goodness of their hearts.

If that is you, I would imagine that's what you're like to be around, but you can wear yourself out. You can scare yourself. You could become an anxious person easily. You can become someone who takes those strengths and they become weaknesses for you, and I don't want to see that happen for you. So beautiful thing that you have, just rein it in. Just process your feelings, practice not mirroring when you can, and you want to and set boundaries or at least tell the truth.

Thanks for joining me today, everybody, have a beautiful rest of your week and I'll see you next time.

If you like the podcast, don't forget, I would love so much for you to share it. Please post it on your social, tell a friend about it, tag me somewhere, make a reel or a quick video. Don't be scared by the word reel, just make a quick video, and tell me one thing you got out of today and tag me so I can reshare it. I would love to get the word out to more of the people about all

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the things we're doing here at *Better Than Happy*. Thanks for joining me today, I'll see you next time, bye bye.

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