

Ep #103: Emotional Self-Care



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With Your Host

Angela Kelly

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Hello, Empowered Principals, welcome to episode 103.

Welcome to *The Empowered Principal Podcast*, a not-so-typical educational resource that will teach you how to gain control of your career and get emotionally fit to lead your school and your life with joy, by refining your most powerful tool: your mind. Here's your host, Certified Life Coach, Angela Kelly Robeck.

Hello my friends, Happy Tuesday. I hope that you are embracing the chaos that December is in a school. I've been thinking about you guys this week. And especially if you are an elementary or a primary principal, the kids are all about the holidays. They got a taste of vacation over Thanksgiving, and now they are revved up for the extended holiday break.

You know, December brings about other challenges as well. For example, there are a lot of absences due to illness. I can remember one December my kindergarten class got a really bad case of the flu, and at least half of the class was out at a time, for the entire month. It was like, one kid would get sick, then another, then another, and eventually, half my class was out and some kids would come back, other kids would get it.

So for the entire month, the kids were not in school. They had to stay home for at least a week. It was a really bad flu, and they came down with it. And as soon as someone would come back, another round of kids went out. So, not a lot of instruction happening that month.

And the same is true with the staff, as a principal, right? The teachers catch the illnesses from the kids, which for you, as the principal, means you're scrambling around for subs, or you might even have to be a sub for the day. It can be a very interesting month.

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So just know that all the chaos in December, it's normal. And I invite you to limit the number of tasks that you plan to get done in a day, knowing that additional interruptions or sub time might be a part of your day. And just allow the space on your calendar for having to sub, just in the event that you do, so you don't freak out when it happens.

And have fun with the kids. I loved subbing, actually. Like once I got over that little temper tantrum of having to sub, and not getting to my tasks, I actually had a blast with the kids. So, see if you can enjoy the last-minute subbing job.

Expect to get less done this month. And you do that so that your head's really in a space of acceptance, and it slows down, and it just understands that this is how December goes. Break is almost here. You're going to get some relief in a few weeks. So hang in there guys, you can do this.

When the reality of our workday doesn't meet our expectations, when we expect to get so much done in a day and then a sub is out, or you have to scramble for some reason and our expectations get derailed, that is when we really experience a lot of stress and frustration. So matching your expectations with the reality of the situations that this season brings will help you self-care for yourself emotionally.

Which is, by the way, the topic of today's podcast, emotional self-care. I've spent some time talking about what self-care is this month and what it isn't, and how to create some self-care discipline into your schedule and set boundaries with yourself and other people, so that you can honor your body's self-care needs.

We focus primarily on our physical wellbeing, which is really important, as you know. But this time, today, I want to talk about and focus on our emotional and our mental wellbeing. This topic seems to be less talked about because it feels very vulnerable. The thought of exposing our mental

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and emotional health to other people feels about as vulnerable as being naked in public.

People are so uncomfortable with talking about their thoughts and their feelings, their emotions, but I absolutely love talking about it. That's why I'm a coach. I listen to people's emotions all day long and it's awesome.

I feel like it's the topic that is the least touched in our industry as educators. We'll talk about the students' emotional wellbeing, and we might even touch on the wellbeing of our teachers, but few of us administrators are willing to be very open about our own emotional self-care. Most likely because expressing emotions, other than, like, the emotions of maybe confidence and happiness and pulled togetherness, are considered to be weakness in a leader.

Well, we are going to open up Pandora's Box on this topic, folks, and we're going to talk candidly about our own emotional self-care as a school leader. So, what do I mean when I say emotional self-care? Emotional self-care is the ability to allow emotion to be present in our body without resisting it, avoiding it, buffering it, or unintentionally reacting to it. It's taking care of your emotions versus ignoring them.

It's being aware of what you're feeling, and allowing yourself to acknowledge the emotion, and to know that the emotion was triggered by a thought that you are currently having. It's having the tools and the knowledge to know how to process and feel your emotions, and the ability to choose a response to the emotion that serves you for the better.

Knowing how to feel emotion, it's not an innate skill. We're all wired with emotion from the day we are born, but we are not skilled at using our emotions or managing them. You've seen this in children, especially if you've ever been around a toddler. And might I add, you've also seen this in adults.

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The children are not yet emotionally mature, so they react very physically and verbally to the emotional vibration that they are experiencing in their body. You see this with students all the time. And at school, we call this learning self-regulation. But really what we're saying is that they are learning how to regulate the way that they respond to their emotions.

When we were kids, we learned emotional management from the adults around us in our life, and pretty much by observation. We watched the way our parents or other people in our life handled their own emotions, and then we would emulate a similar response.

Most parents, especially back when we were growing up, did not directly teach us what our emotions are and how to process them. We observe how the adults in our life handled their emotions, and we just react accordingly. So it's not our fault that we don't know how emotions work, and how they impact us, and how to manage them maturely, because no one's ever taught us how.

In school, we might teach students that they have different emotions, but we don't really spend a great deal of time teaching them how to process an emotion and what to do with themselves, with their bodies, with their thoughts, with their words, when they're experiencing really intense emotions, because we as adults aren't really sure what to do with our own emotions at times.

We ourselves react to our emotions, because most adults don't realize that our emotions are triggered by our thoughts. We're taught that people and circumstances outside of ourselves are what create our feelings. We believe that "Sally hurt my feelings." Or, "Joey kicked me and that made me mad."

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And when we believe that these things outside of us have control over our emotional state, that makes us feel like we have a loss in control in our ability to take care of ourselves emotionally.

As emotional beings, we experience emotions all day long. Emotions are simply a vibration in the body, which has a wide range of intensity, from highly negative, to neutral, to highly positive. It's a spectrum. And while each of us experiences our emotions in the body a little bit differently, there are some kind of universal or commonalities when we refer to certain emotions.

Most of us can describe the way it feels when we are scared, or sad, or angry. We can identify the places in our body that feel those vibrations. Fear tends to be in the pit of our stomach. Anger tends to be tense muscles, like in the jaw, like your jaw gets really tense. Love tends to feel very tingly and floaty.

When we experience an emotion, it helps us to remember that it is a vibration in the body. And when we acknowledge that it's just a vibration, even though it's extremely uncomfortable, when we take the time to acknowledge it's a vibration and we describe where we feel it, and what it feels like, it can reduce our fear of feeling intense emotion.

So what is emotional maturity? Emotional maturity is the owning of our ability to handle emotions. It's about taking responsibility for the way we feel, and not expecting others to make us feel a certain way. It's owning that we are in charge of the way that we feel. And it's also about being intentional in the way that we respond to the emotion, the way that we act when we're feeling a certain way.

So when we experience negative emotions, we typically choose one of three approaches. So if you think of the stair cycle, a situation occurs, you have a thought about it, that thought, whatever you're making that situation

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mean, triggers an emotion. The way that you're feeling is going to impact how you choose to act or approach that given situation.

And we typically choose one of three. We either stall in inaction, we kind of just don't do anything. We indulge in reaction, which is the most common way people react to their emotions. Or, there's a third way, and that is to be very cognizant and aware and create and choose an intentional action.

When we stall in inaction or we indulge in reacting, we are letting our emotions take the wheel. We deflect, blame, resist, justify, avoid, disconnect, and numb ourselves. We also avoid having the discussion and we blame the situation, or others, or we blame ourselves and we disagree with what happens.

And sometimes we hash it over in our minds time and time again. Sometimes we lash out at other people, and we spend time trying to explain or justify our thinking. We might avoid situations, or we avoid people or the painful situation in our mind. And we can disconnect and numb ourselves in an attempt to wash out the pain.

When we allow negative emotions to select our approach to a situation, we're going to experience inconsistent results. The actions we take or don't take when we let anger, frustration, disappointment, sadness, resentment, vengeance, whatever, decide for us are vastly different than when we consciously choose to act.

When we consciously choose to act, we are intentionally allowing the emotion to be present and we're making a conscious decision on how we want to act, given the circumstances. So, we can feel a feeling. And we can choose to act however we want. We can be angry, but not act on that anger. We can say to ourselves, "I'm feeling really angry right now." And we can sit with that anger and we can notice it in the body and where it's vibrating, without having to punch somebody out or verbally attack them.

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And here's a little secret that most people don't know. You don't have to feel happy or positive emotion in order to choose positive, intentional actions. You can acknowledge that you feel negatively about something and then you can go and do it anyway.

For example, taxes. I consciously choose to do my taxes, even though I vibrationally do not like doing them. I don't like doing taxes, I feel the resistance, but I'm choosing to do it anyway. I'm taking a positive action, even though I'm feeling a negative emotion.

And Tony Robbins, if you guys know him, he says that we can do one of three things. We can blame ourselves, or other people, or we can blame the situation at hand. We can change our life circumstances, so we can change our situation. Or, a third choice is that we can decide to change our expectations. He calls them a blueprint.

And you can decide to change your expectations. So for example, if you're miserable in your job, or there's something about your job you don't like, you can blame the job and say it's the job's fault, or it's the people in the job that are bothering you. And you can be miserable and stew in that.

Number two, you can say "You know what? I'm out of here, I'm going to go get another job." And you can change your circumstances. Or, you can say, "Wait a minute. The way that I'm looking at this job, the way I'm thinking about this job, my thoughts and my story about my job, and what I'm making my job mean, is what's causing me my pain. I'm going to take a look at that story. I'm going to notice how I'm causing my own pain, and I'm going to adjust the way that I'm thinking, so that I can feel better."

I want to share a concept that came to me one morning when I was processing a consult call that ended in the client not signing. I'd spent two hours on the consult call, and I normally spend like 45 minutes to an hour.

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But this client was really processing a lot of thoughts, a lot of stories, and a lot of ideas, and I wanted to stick with her through the entire process.

So, we ended the call and she said to me, she wanted to run her decision by somebody else, which I could do a whole podcast on that. It's a really bad idea if you want to be a leader and a strong, decisive person. Because when you invite people's ideas into your ideas, it gets muddy.

But anyway, she said she wanted to ask another person for the opinion, and I was really upset with myself. Because, I as her coach did not help her 100% see the long-term and the short-term benefits of self-investment. And I felt so disturbed by this, because I felt like I had failed her, that I didn't help her see the benefit, and that I didn't empower her enough to make a decision on her own, and start to become the woman who's decisive and who values self-investment.

And I found myself having to coach my own emotions on this whole situation about not being able to serve her. And during the process of managing my own thoughts and emotions about what happened, it occurred to me that the most important thing we can ever do as humans is to invest in our own emotional self-care.

If emotions are the driving factor behind every decision we make, every action we take, and everything else that we do, don't we want to deeply understand our emotions, and how to take emotional care of ourselves, and be in control of those emotions? Isn't the goal of education, at its very essence, to develop awareness?

Think about this. We educate children so that they can become aware. They become aware of the world, aware of how things work, aware of people, places and things. Aware of ideas, aware of theories, aware of skills. Like, our entire existence for being is to grow and create awareness, and to evolve the human mind. That is what education is.

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And we evolve our mind by using mindset tools and building up our stamina to tolerate emotions. And without negative emotions, there can be no positive emotions. Because if we just felt happy all the time, we wouldn't feel anything because there would be no contrast.

So think about this. When you think about how we invest in education in this country, we invest millions of dollars into our schools, our teachers, our students, our community. We buy curriculum, we buy programs, resources, technology, books, and trainings, in an attempt to improve our results.

We also invest hours each day, of our own time and energy, teaching and supporting others to teach. We support our teachers, we support our parents, we support the kids. As teachers and school leaders, we also invest a great deal of our own emotions into our work.

So it fascinates me how much we invest, number one, without much thought as to the cost and benefit of our investment. We just kind of blindly keep investing money, time, resources, energy, emotion, and effort. And two, that we readily invest all of these resources without a guarantee. We put all this time and energy, money, and resources into what we think is going to work, but we don't really know. We don't have a full guarantee.

Yet, when it comes to investing into ourselves and our own mental and emotional wellbeing and growth, which is the driving factor of everything that we do, we don't want to invest without a guarantee. So many people who schedule consults with me will say that they're really committed to solving their problem. But when we get to the point where they're asked to invest time and money, they back away.

They want a guarantee that they're going to achieve the result. And when I suggest to them that part of evolving as a leader, and as a person, involves believing in your result, believing that it's possible to achieve it ahead of time, their brain totally freaks out.

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But you guys, we do this all the time in every other area of our life. We invest in our college degree before we have a job and earn an income. We get into cars every day and drive without the guarantee that we won't be involved in an accident or that we'll even be killed or hurt somebody.

We have children. We give birth and have children and bring children into the world with no guarantees of who they'll be or how they'll turn out, or what their health conditions will be, or whether the experience of parenthood is going to be amazing or terrible or somewhere in the middle.

We fall in love and we get married without the guarantee that we won't experience the pain of divorce. We do all kinds of things without 100% guarantee.

And as humans, we invest in our lives and we take these risks, because we want to experience the feelings and emotions that come with being alive. Everything we do is to experience emotion. That is the gift of being human. So why would we not prioritize our emotional self-care and invest in learning and practicing the skill of navigating and managing our emotions?

Furthermore, why are we not prioritizing this skill set in our schools, with our kids? If children can learn from a young age that the worst thing they'll ever experience is an emotion, and that they can do hard things and that they'll still be okay, even when they fail.

And that failing, by the way, is the path. It is the natural part of the learning process. And, by the way, that there are tools to help them process painful emotions, and as educators, we are going to be there 100% for them as they process these emotions, there will be no stopping their potential. And isn't that what we want for our students, and our teachers, and ourselves?

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I think about the Ron Clark Academy. Ron Clark Academy is an excellent example of this. They teach the children how to feel the discomfort that comes with growth. They hold them to really high expectations, but they also provide the tools and the skills and the support required to meet those expectations. You cannot hold students highly accountable without high levels of support. Same with your teachers. High level of accountability, high level of support.

We must bring emotional self-care into our schools. And you guys, we don't have to build a Ron Clark Academy to bring that emotional self-care into our schools. We can do it today. Right now, in one instant. All it takes is for one person, that's you, the leader of your school, to make a decision that you will learn how to take care of your own emotional needs, and that you'll commit to the daily practice of self-care.

And, that you will bring these tools to your staff, who can then teach them to their students. You can be the person, in this instant, who changes the face of education, and who inspires your teachers and your students into new action, that allows them to become the higher version of themselves than they even currently believe is possible.

You can be that light. You can be that inspiration. That is why you went into leadership. You can hold people highly accountable and you can love them fiercely. You can take amazing care of yourself by investing in your greatest asset, which is you, your brain, your emotions.

Now is the time to begin. This is your moment. Inspiring people into action requires you to be inspired into action, and I hope that I have inspired you into action today. Have an amazing week. Can't wait to see you on the inside.

Hey there, my fellow educator. Are you yearning to go a little further with these concepts and learn how to apply them in your everyday work

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situations? Do you want to feel understood and more connected with likeminded school leaders? If so, I'm super excited to offer you, for the very first time ever, the Empowered Principal Mastermind.

It's a safe space where we can talk about the real issues that you face on a daily basis and support you in evolving your leadership and your life to the next level. For more information, simply go to angelakellycoaching.com and click on, "EP Mastermind." We start this January. I can't wait to see you on the inside.

Thanks for listening to this episode of *The Empowered Principal Podcast*. If you enjoyed this episode and want to learn more, please visit www.angelakellycoaching.com where you can sign up for weekly updates and learn more about the tools that will help you become an emotionally fit school leader.