

# Aprilia West: What You Feel Is Not All There Is

**Aprilia West:** [00:00:00] Unplugging from your emotional matrix, ends up helping to shatter your conception, that your emotions are always true. Um, and, and I, I make the point that sometimes emotions aren't always telling you what matters most. They they're always telling you what you're experiencing. You know, everything we experience is valid, but if if you just tend to believe all of your feelings and your choices are naturally going to come from whatever you happen to be feeling in the moment, even if that comes from something that, that doesn't move you toward, what really matters to you.

**Debbie Sorensen:** That was Dr. Aprilia West on Psychologists Off the Clock. We are three clinical psychologists here to bring you cutting edge and science-based ideas from psychology to help you flourish in your relationships, work, and health.

I'm Dr. Debbie Sorensen, practicing in mile high, Denver, [00:01:00] Colorado, and coauthor of ACT Daily Journal.

**Yael Schonbrun:** I'm Dr. Yael Schonbrun, a Boston based clinical psychologist, assistant professor at Brown University, and author of the upcoming book Work, Parent, Thrive.

**Jill Stoddard:** And from sunny San Diego, I'm Dr. Jill Stoddard author of be mighty and the big book of act metaphors.

**Debbie Sorensen:** We hope you take what you learn here to build a rich and meaningful life.

**Jill Stoddard:** you for listening to Psychologists Off the Clock.

**Yael Schonbrun:** Psychologists off the clock is proud to be partnered with Praxis Continuing Education Praxis is the premier provider of evidence-based training for mental health professionals.

**Jill Stoddard:** And here at psychologists off the clock, we are huge fans of Praxis. One of the things I love most about Praxis is they offer both live. And on

demand courses. So if you're really looking for that, live interaction with other people who are taking the course, you can get that.

Or if you have a busy schedule and you need something that you can just kind of click onto whenever you have time, they offer that as well, and every course I have ever taken from [00:02:00] Praxis has really been of such value to me.

**Debbie Sorensen:** I get questions a lot from clinicians who are looking for act training or other types of trainings, and Praxis my go-to place that I send people no matter what level they are, because they have really good beginner trainings for people who have no experience.

And they also have terrific advanced trainings on different topics and just people who want to keep building their skills.

**Yael Schonbrun:** You can go to our website and get a coupon for the live trainings, by going to our offers page at off the clock, [psych.com/sponsors](https://psych.com/sponsors). Hey psychologist off the clock listeners. I'm going to guess that if you are listening to this episode, that you love to geek out about books in psychology.

**Katy Rothfelder:** So if you are a fellow book, nerd like Yael and I, and all of the people around you are tired of you talking about books. Then you can join us once a month to really take a deep dive into the books that we're going to be [00:03:00] reading to you.

**Yael Schonbrun:** And even though books themselves are not therapy. many books offer huge therapeutic value. So join Katie and I with our background in acceptance and commitment therapy and other evidence-based psychotherapies. to explore together how we can apply some of these ideas from great books in psychology to our everyday lives.

Bring your questions, bring your insights and join us for deep conversations. Once a month, starting May 5th at 12:00 PM Eastern standard time in the U S and if you're interested in joining us and we hope you are. Just send us an email at, off the clock, [psych@gmail.com](mailto:psych@gmail.com) and we'll send you the zoom link.

We hope to see you. there.

**Debbie Sorensen:** Hi everyone. It's Debbie and Jill and I are here today to introduce my episode with Dr. Aprilia West, who has a terrific new book called What You Feel Is Not All There Is and Aprilia's approach. It's a really

interesting one because she draws from different [00:04:00] evidence-based treatments like acceptance and commitment therapy, dialectical behavior therapy, positive psychology, the emotional intelligence research world to help people handle their emotions in a really thoughtful way to sometimes regulate their emotions when that's helpful to choose values-based actions, even when emotions run high.

Right. I mean, which can be difficult for all of us when we're feeling hot and emotional. Sometimes that's, that's a challenge. And I really love thinking about this, both for my clients, for myself, for my kids, because I think that emotional intelligence, I mean, there's all this research about how, if you're good at understanding your own emotions, if you're good at understanding the emotions of others, and you can use your emotions really wisely, it's correlated with all kinds of wonderful things.

You know, people tend to be more successful with their work and they tend to have better relationships. And the thing is that it really is a skill you can [00:05:00] build. It's not like you have it or you don't have it. And I think as a psychologist, you know, this is our bread and butter and we get the extra side benefits of being able to really understand our own emotions.

And it's really. It's really helpful. And I think that's what this interview provides is just some techniques for doing that for building that skillset. So, Jill, what did you think about the episode? Was there anything that really stood out for you?

**Jill Stoddard:** um, there were lots of different things that stood out to me and, you know, I think. Maybe two in particular is the fact that you guys really focused on the importance of recognizing choice and that no matter what, you know, emotions can feel really compelling. And yet we always have a choice about how we show up to that moment, not just irrespective of how we feel, but that we can like pay attention to what those emotions.

Might be telling us that are really important. So, um, uh, Aprilia says something about, we [00:06:00] tend to do this like emotional bypass where we don't listen to what are our emotions might be teaching us. And I think Debbie, you quoted from her book, curiosity is the antidote to emotional reactivity. And I just loved that.

And I think it speaks to what you're saying. Um, emotional intelligence is like, when we get curious, when we look at our emotions, when we try to understand

what might this be telling me about, what's important to me in this moment and this situation with these people, and then, you know, what do I want to create?

Choose based on that. And my favorite moment, this was maybe about halfway through the episode is she kind of called you out on something you didn't even notice. So you, you talked about how, you know, sometimes you just can't stop and take a break. I don't even remember what it was you were talking about, but she said, well, hold on a second, you know, can I just point out that even when you say I can't take a break.

That's not the language of choice. And it was like this really cool moment [00:07:00] between you that she recognizes. And I just, you know, I love, well, we can let the listeners, um,

hear it for themselves, but I really liked that moment and how the two of you unpacked that I, found it really helpful to, to see that modeled.

**Debbie Sorensen:** yeah, I love that too, because I had never really thought about that as a choice. I thought, well, if I have a client scheduled, I can't cancel it. And you're like, well, actually you could. It's like, oh, actually, you know, that's true. I mean, I don't typically, and I probably, you know, that's not going to become a thing I do on a regular basis this, but I am making a choice there.

Right. Show up, even if I'm tired, busy, stressed, kind of an eye-opener for me. Yeah.

**Jill Stoddard:** Right. I know. I thought the same thing. It was a really, really cool moment for sure.

**Debbie Sorensen:** And one of the things that I loved is that she has a list of some self-soothing activities that you can do to kind of like soothe your nervous system and regulate your emotions.

And I've been [00:08:00] trying to incorporate some of these more since I did the interview, because I don't think I'm always good at that. I get a little bit of a like, okay, I can handle difficult emotions and kind of power through. And so I found that really lovely to hear that. Suggestions for some of those ideas.

**Jill Stoddard:** I agree because we often think about, you know, riding the wave and sort of like, you know, the only what's that phrase, the only way out is through, but sometimes that can end up looking sort of like, all right, I'm just

going to white knuckle till, till I get through this. And we don't have to do that. You know, like we can actually engage in practices that help regulate the nervous system.

And as long as that doesn't come at some other costs, You know, that, that it's great to, to really utilize some of those strategies,

**Debbie Sorensen:** Right. I mean, you were talking about choice earlier and I think that is a choice we can make is I could choose to do one of these things that is going to be self-soothing. And sometimes that's a really, you know, can be a really values, consistent choice to make.

**Jill Stoddard:** especially if being self-soothe to makes it more likely that you'll engage in other kinds of [00:09:00] values-based activities to.

**Debbie Sorensen:** That's right. Well, we hope that this episode gives you some skills that you'll find helpful in your own emotions My guest today, Dr. Aprilia West is a psychologist, executive leadership and teams, team, coach, organizational consultant, trainer, and author. She has two books, emotional efficacy therapy and her new book. What you feel is not all there is which we're going to be talking about a lot today. Um, she's also the co-author of a chapter on acceptance and commitment coaching in the workplace, and Aprilia welcome it's so good to see you.

**Aprilia West:** Ah, thanks, Debbie. I'm really glad to be here with you.

**Debbie Sorensen:** Well, I wonder if we could actually start, I want to dive into your book, but I want to actually start a little bit by unpacking what I just said about your career, that you both do some things on more of the therapy end and clearly are very well-trained and have even developed your own therapy. Um, but you also do a lot of coaching and you work with some.[00:10:00]

People from different industries and coaching. I was wondering if you could tell the listeners a little bit about what that looks like for you.

So, you know, what's the difference between coaching and therapy and what are some of the kinds of issues that you work with in your practice?

**Aprilia West:** Sure. Well, it's a good question. The difference between therapy and coaching and it, you know, if you ask five people, you'll probably get five different answers. Um, you know, I could, I could tell you that, um, legally or

what my insurance provider would say is that, uh, coaching. Doesn't address any clinical issues, anything that could, um, could, could be diagnosed as you know, uh, in the DSM basically, um, would not be something that would be appropriate for coaching.

However, as someone who approaches therapy from a process-based place and as a positive psychologist, I'm always looking at. For the [00:11:00] processes that interfere with people's wellbeing, their ability to thrive and perform. So it doesn't hold up very well. Inside of that conceptualization, I'm always looking, you know, at people on a continuum of wellbeing and some people are better at doing the things that lead to more wellbeing and flourishing than others.

And, uh, at some point that. Uh, meet criteria for a clinical diagnosis. If you are looking at people through the lens of, you know, disease and disorders. Uh, but, but for me, the way I approach my work, uh, doesn't actually change that much. It just might be that the people I'm doing coaching with are higher functioning, um, and may not actually need professional help, but want it to be able to have a higher level of wellbeing and perform.

**Debbie Sorensen:** Yeah, that's so interesting. It's like there's so much overlap probably in the content and everything's on such a spectrum anyway, that [00:12:00] in practicality it can probably be. Somewhat artificial sometimes, but there is, there are also some differences and tell the listeners a little bit about some of the different industries you work with and some of the types of coaching.

I'm just very curious about that. Like what I think you have such a fascinating career. Would you write about a bit in your book? Um, but what are some of the kinds of things you would.

**Aprilia West:** Yeah. So I, um, you know, in my coaching practice, I work with leaders and teams, um, in both the tech and entertainment industries primarily. And, uh, you know, that looks like anything from helping people learn how to communicate effectively to create higher levels of psychological safety, um, in their teams or in the workplace, which as we know, leads to way more.

Um, positive outcomes and results, whether it's, you know, people feeling more free to be creative or being able to, uh, collaborate in more effective ways. [00:13:00] Uh, and then in my therapy practice, you know, I work with people,

um, pretty much all over what we might think of as the diagnostic, you know, sort of spectrum.

and, uh, I especially have, um, not by. Any, uh, intention on my part, uh, ended up working a lot with people who are high functioning on the autism spectrum, which has been incredibly rewarding for me over the past few years. And a lot of, uh, has, has drawn a lot on my, uh, my training and acceptance and commitment therapy around, you know, helping them figure out, you know, how do I add meaning to my life, even if maybe I'm more neurodiverse than other people.

**Debbie Sorensen:** Yeah. You have some man anecdotes about that in your book about yeah. The, those types of issues. Um, so, and you developed the construct of emotional efficacy and you developed a therapy around that, and we've actually, for those who are interested, [00:14:00] we've had you on the podcast before it was episode 85, then talked about emotional efficacy. Therapy. And so people who are interested can take a listen to that and learn a little bit more.

We'll talk about it today. I think what I love about it is it's a mix of some of the great ideas that are out there from acceptance and commitment therapy.

dialectical behavior therapy, emotional intelligence, positive psychology. You sort of pull like the creme de LA creme together into one, one really nice package for helping people navigate their emotions effectively. So, can you just give us a little orientation? What does it mean to have high emotional efficacy? What, what do you work on

**Aprilia West:** you know, so the, the. Broader answer to that is when you have high emotional efficacy, you're able to maximize what matters most to you in moments of choice. So it's really about becoming what I call in the book, a boss level choice maker, where in any [00:15:00] moment, you're able to decode your emotional signals and figure out what really matters so that whatever you do reflects your inner most desires, interests, or yearnings in whatever situation you are.

**Debbie Sorensen:** Yeah. So just like the name, it's like you take those emotions, you understand them and you use them effectively depending on the situation.

**Aprilia West:** Exactly.

**Debbie Sorensen:** Book that just came out, which is terrific because it's, it really does integrate some great ideas in a very engaging and readable and fun way. Um, so I think it's a worth a read for sure.

If you're listening, you want to check that out. Um, and the title of the book is what you feel is not all there is. And so you write about how we have these emotion systems and they can be so strong that sometimes we almost. That's all there is, right? Like our emotions are so strong. We think we have to act on them.

We think it's almost like that's all we're perceiving sometimes. Um, so I'm curious if you could talk a little bit about [00:16:00] that. Like, why are we this way? And then what else is there? Right. If that's not all there is, what else is there?

**Aprilia West:** It's a great question. So why are we this way? Well, essentially because our primary motivational system is our emotions and our emotions haven't evolved to help us make the more nuanced choices that we need to thrive, you know, and our emotions include. That come from our biology and biases and beliefs that are higher hardwired and learned.

Um, and they're working on our choices in any moment. Uh, but here's the thing they might have helped us survive in the olden days. And they might even help us, our egos survive today, but they don't always help us thrive. So, uh, this book in this book, the reader learns what else is possible for their life.

What else is there to do? Um, and, and I've, I it's intentionally wrote the book to try to make it accessible full to everyone by, uh, loosely framing it [00:17:00] inside this metaphor of the matrix where, you know, unplugging from your emotional matrix, ends up helping to shatter your conception, that your emotions.

Are always true. Um, and, and I, I make the point that sometimes emotions can be fake news. They aren't always telling you what matters most. They they're always telling you what you're experiencing. You know, everything we experience is valid, but if if you just tend to believe all of your feelings and your choices are naturally going to come from whatever you happen to be feeling in the moment, even if that comes from something that, that doesn't move you toward, what really matters to you.

**Debbie Sorensen:** So that might look like being very reactive to your emotions or having urges or being avoidant. Right.

**Aprilia West:** Yeah. And in the book I talk about something, I call the three BS and the three BS are, you know, the forces that work on our choices, uh, that may not move us [00:18:00] toward what really matters. And that can be biology. You know, we all come wired from birth genetically with different, um, sensitivities or tendencies to react in different ways.

And on the spectrum of emotional, uh, expression that can look like being really under controlled and impulsive and just sort of, you know, acting on anything that comes up that you feel, but it can also look like being over controlled and disconnected from your feelings and not at all clear on what you want or desire in any moment.

**Debbie Sorensen:** Oh, I'm going to actually just give a brief plug to, um, I guess we had on before who talked about radically open DBT, which

**Aprilia West:** Oh, yes,

**Debbie Sorensen:** with it. Brilliant, but which is specifically. With core, very strongly over controlled with their emotions. And it's very interesting. Cause I think sometimes that end of the spectrum gets a little overlooked, you know, because there's some [00:19:00] advantages to

**Aprilia West:** It's not as visible, right? So it's easy not to see that as being quote unquote problematic. Um, and the other two BS are, uh, biases that we all come wired with. And those include the negativity bias that has us paying more attention to what's wrong or what could be a threat in our environment.

Um, this, the, the other bias that we have is, um, emotional reasoning that, you know, essentially. What inspired the title of the book that, that everything we feel is true, that if we feel it, it must be true. And, um, and then we also have the, uh, confirmation bias, which means that we start. Pretty much any, any in any moment with ideas about what it is that we expect to be true.

And then we look for evidence to support that. So that's the second be working on your choices. And then the third B has to do with our beliefs about our emotions. You know, so many of us [00:20:00] grow up in, um, either cultures

or families, uh, that have beliefs about certain kinds of emotions being acceptable or not acceptable.

And then we also have experiences where we learn that, oh, wow. That was re I was really sad after that breakup. I never want to feel that way again. So then we might, uh, develop a belief that sadness. Dangerous for us or to be avoided at all costs. And so that is also working on our emotions. So, and these three bees are working on, um, not only our emotional experience, but our choices, which is what makes decoding those defaults when they're unhelpful so important.

Uh, because once you realize that you have some unhelpful default happening, you can also tune into what really matters. And that's, that will transform what's possible for you in a moment of choice.

**Debbie Sorensen:** So to, to delve into this [00:21:00] choice idea a little bit more, I think sometimes those emotional default. Can be helpful, right. And sometimes our emotions can have some great wisdom and sometimes they can be less helpful. How do you look at the difference? Like how so I'm having an emotion. Let's say, how do I, how do I tell if this is a helpful emotion or if this is one, maybe that's getting in the way.

**Aprilia West:** Yeah. Yeah. So usually when we notice our emotions, it's because we're triggered somehow. And so you would pause and, and really just tune in. So this is the first skill in the book, right? Emotional awareness, where you're just tuning into what's happening for me right now, you know, what's going on in my body.

What are my thoughts? What are my feelings? And what's the urge here. Getting really clear on what's happening and then, um, being able to hang out with it. And that's where, when you can hang out with it, instead of just acting on the urge is where you have an opportunity that. [00:22:00] To decode what matters most?

Uh, so you, you to answer your question, you will learn this by practicing it and by learning how to really listen to your inner most desires interest in yearnings, um, it's something that not everybody is encouraged to do in their life. You know, a lot of clients I work with come in and they've never really asked themselves that question.

What do I really care about or what really matters to me in any moment? So it's, it can be a whole new practice for people

**Debbie Sorensen:** You know, it's, it's interesting. I'll tell you an example in my life. Maybe you can help me. So. Like a lot of people

I have learned sometimes to override emotions related to like, I'm tired, I'm stressed out and I need a break. It's not just emotions. Right. It's also sensations. Sometimes it's like, oh, I'm hungry, I'm tired.

I need to take a break, but you get so good. If you're busy [00:23:00] and focused on being productive sometimes. Sometimes that signal gets lost and sometimes you almost need to overwrite it, right? Like I'm tired, but I'm seeing a client right now. I can't just go take a snooze other times though. I should really start tuning into that more and learn when to unplug, take a break.

So can you use that example to just illustrate what you're talking about here?

**Aprilia West:** Yeah. I mean, and this is something that I have in the book too. It's called a WTF inquiry, which stands

**Debbie Sorensen:** I love that.

**Aprilia West:** for What's The Function. So we would look at, you know, if so let's say that you're really tired and you're, you're trying to make a choice. Do I stay with it or do I take a break? Then you could drop in and really listen and ask yourself what would the function of taking the break be?

And does it move me toward what matters most in this moment? And usually we can decode those signals and our bodies, you know, just by asking [00:24:00] the question, you know, what would it be like for me to take a break right now? Uh, and then asking the question again, what would it be like for me to finish this work for.

And, and usually people will notice an energy shift, um, by the way, emotion literally means energy in motion. So, uh, anytime we're tuning into our emotions, it's about understanding what's happening with the energy. And, uh, more and more we're realizing that the body is, uh, an incredible compass for what's happening with our emotions.

So can receive. And just right now, you know, what, what would that be like for you? To do that inquiry in the moment.

**Debbie Sorensen:** I think that what, comes to mind for me is that there are definitely moments where, um, I think there's a narrative in my mind that I can't stop and take a break or slow down because I have to get this done. Actually, you write about this in the book as well. [00:25:00] When we get into that business. Doing mode. I love the phrase death by a thousand goals in your book. I was like, oh, I got to hold onto that one. It's so good. Um, but I think that

**Aprilia West:** Being human doings instead of human beings.

**Debbie Sorensen:** exactly. Yeah. So I think what I need to do is yeah, sure. Some days. I can't really stop and take a break because I, you know, like I said, I might have clients booked or something like that, but there's other days where I need to just be aware that I'm getting a little hooked into that

**Aprilia West:** Yeah. Well, even you're so as I'm listening to you right now, um, and I hope this won't feel too intense, but, but your languages, some days I can't stop and take a break and there that isn't the language of choice,

**Debbie Sorensen:** Yeah. Oh, that's such a good point.

**Aprilia West:** Yeah. So some days I might not choose to stop and take a break because. What matters more to me is staying, you know, with my schedule clients. But other days I [00:26:00] might choose to stop or cancel sessions in order to do something else that matters more. Maybe it's tending to yourself. If you're not feeling well or haven't slept or other things that are going on in your life.

**Debbie Sorensen:** yeah, or take a Saturday totally off or stop at five and put the computer away. I actually have heard from a couple of people who got sick with COVID and still like, felt like they couldn't stop working. From home. And you think that's a case where take a break, you know, cancel those appointments and take care of yourself.

**Aprilia West:** right, right. Yeah. And you know, that's part of the narrative in our culture, right. Is that we need to work. We need to, it's sort of like, um, tough it out. And you know what? This is a way where we, where we kind of do

emotional bypass. We don't listen to her emotions. We don't stop to go. Huh? I'm I'm feeling something.

What is this thing? What is it telling you? We, we tend to, and even in our field, I think we tend to look at [00:27:00] emotions more as problems than as a portal to what is, what really matters and what's possible. And, um, and so this drive to just go, go, go all the time. It really comes from a story or a rule, or even you could think of it as a should or what I call them the book of fake value that no matter what, I'm going to work through it, I'm going to push through the pain.

That's not an authentic free choice. If, if the, if it's generalized like that, if you never, you know, if you're, if you're never stopping to go, but what, what really matters here in this situation? How do I want to show up,

**Debbie Sorensen:** right?

What's this for? Because I could see how that becomes a rule that is not helpful at that point, um, versus something that is truly values driven and that's really working for you. Um,

**Aprilia West:** And to go back to your original question about, [00:28:00] you know, how do you know, you know, the question that's the simplest is just, is that it's my choice to stay with this work helpful or unhelpful. Sometimes it's not black and white, but usually you can find that one, you know, choice feels more helpful than the other.

And if not, if not, I just tell people to flip a coin.

**Debbie Sorensen:** right.

**Aprilia West:** Either way you're going to be doing something helpful. So

**Debbie Sorensen:** Yeah. And it's even just pausing to ask yourself that question sometimes is what you need to do. It's not even that there's a right or wrong answer. It's more just stopping to check in right.

**Aprilia West:** That's right. Yeah. And over time, you know, as people practice doing this kind of inquiry, it gets easier and easier to know. Without having to search or work so hard to decode or stop and do a WTF inquiry or ask the question like, is this helpful or not helpful? You start to get, you know, really good when you develop your emotion, efficacy muscle [00:29:00] at just

knowing like, oh yeah, no, this is one of those situations where I'm pushing too hard. I'm actually going into the red here. I'm being a human doing and I need more beans. To maintain the level of, you know, wellbeing in my life where I can flourish.

**Debbie Sorensen:** Yeah. So going back to what you were saying earlier about some of the messages that people learn over time about emotions. I think sometimes people do get some unhelpful messages about emotions. Maybe you mentioned that you might start to feel afraid of an emotion or something like that.

And one thing that you'll see around a lot is this kind of toxic positivity idea. Um, could you speak a little bit about toxic positivity and the downside of those types of messages?

**Aprilia West:** sure. Yeah. So, you know, one of the things that I believe is that negative emotions get a bad. Uh, when actually [00:30:00] what we call negative emotions, or it's probably more appropriate to call them a Versive or unwanted emotions have really important functions for us. And this is all over in social media. I see it all the time.

Um, and, and the truth is we don't appreciate that. We need all the feelings in order to figure out what matters to. Um, and versa, the emotions can motivate us to, uh, be socially sensitive, to reflect on the impact of our behavior to more losses, to withdraw when we need to recover to problem, solve to remind us what we really care about.

Um, you know, negative or a verse of emotions motivate us to cooperate with each other and peacefully coexist. They also help us survive. Um, sometimes the discomfort and distress we can experience is exactly what we need to snap into effective action. You know, I think the example in the bus I use in the book I use is if a bus is careening toward you, [00:31:00] you want to feel scared in order to.

You know, snap into action and do whatever's effective to move you out of harm's way you don't want the warm fuzzy. So, I also think the toxic positivity we see in our culture is really invalidating for people who.

Like most people aren't happy all the time. Um, it's not even a natural state for us to be happy all the time. Um, when, when clients talk about, you know, I want to live my best life, my response is usually what you do that by figuring

out how to show up as your best self. Because happiness is a mood state. It's not a permanent experience.

Um, we, you know, we kind of, we bump up and have sort of happy moments or we may have a general sense of wellbeing, but it's not something that we can just achieve and maintain, um, as a mood state anyway.

**Debbie Sorensen:** I think maybe we'll keep this post nameless, but you said you just [00:32:00] saw a social media post. I'm bashing anger. And I think that's one that a lot of times people have trouble seeing as a helpful emotion. Um, what, what are your thoughts on anger?

**Aprilia West:** Yeah. You know, I mean, sometimes anger is exactly what you need to remind you that a boundary is being crossed that your rights are being violated, that your needs are being met, that you're choosing to do something that is not working for you. There's so many helpful functions that anger can serve in our lives.

You know, anger in itself, just like any emotion that's unwanted or uncomfortable. Uh, is not a problem. The problem, uh, shows up when we do things that don't serve us as a result of experiencing that emotion. So I could be angry every day for the rest of my life, but as long as my actions align with what matters to me, there's no problem there.

I mean, [00:33:00] it would be, it would be uncomfortable for me. And I would, you know, I'd probably work with someone to try and lower, lower that the occurrence, the frequency and intensity of anger. But, but, but the experience itself is not, the problem is the best way to say it.

**Debbie Sorensen:** Well, and almost if you imagine a world in which you're trying so hard, not to feel any of those emotions, right. You're in the toxic positivity place where you're like, you know, good vibes all the way, no negative emotions or, you know, Versive emotions whatsoever. That's so much pressure.

How could you possibly do that? Right? Like It's, just not going to work out.

**Aprilia West:** it's it's not realistic. It's a set up for people to feel bad about themselves and to, you know, and especially with social media just reinforces this because most of what gets posted is good vibes and positive. Experiences, and it starts to reflect back to us that this is the normal, when really most of

[00:34:00] us going through our day are probably not having especially good vibes or, um, you know, uh, elevated mood, unless, you know, we've had some positive emotion trigger in, you know, in recent minutes or hours.

**Debbie Sorensen:** Well, let's talk a little bit about the metaphor of emotions as waves. That's an, a metaphor I use with my clients a lot. And you use that metaphor in the book. I think sometimes people don't think of emotions in that way. Right. As, as an experience that will. Change over time that will come and go. Um, you know, what are, what are your thoughts about that?

And, and if you think of emotions in that way, how can you navigate them better? How can you use that to your advantage?

**Aprilia West:** Oh, I think it's so helpful because so many people, um, you know, when they talk about their emotions for the first time, I'll hear things like, you know, I'm just afraid that if I open up what I'm feeling even a little bit. [00:35:00] I'll become overwhelmed or it won't stop. That's, that's a really common fear, especially about the so-called negative emotions and the beauty of the metaphor of the emotion wave, which, um, you know, Matt McKay and I also used in the clinician's guide to emotion, efficacy therapy is that clients learn how emotions work.

And the way we talk about it is, you know, every emotion starts with a trigger and then that triggers. Um, leads to an emotion wave or energy in motion, and which will naturally peak and resolve just like a wave in the ocean and clients are also, um, happy to learn that often these waves can resolve in as little as 90 seconds.

When you don't do the things that naturally prolongs them or intensifies them, which, you know, especially in the act community, we would talk about, uh, being ex ex [00:36:00] experiential avoidance or emotion avoidance behaviors so they learned that they have a lot more control over what happens after an emotion trigger

**Debbie Sorensen:** Yeah. And I think if you do really hone in on your emotional experience and watch it change over time, you get that sense. You know, you'll notice if you're feeling one way and you can check in and see how that feels inside your body and notice everything about it. And then 30 seconds later it's completely changed and it's, you're feeling something very different.

It just kind of constantly changing.

**Aprilia West:** Yeah. Yeah. Are, you know, emotions are a lot like the weather, you know, they're just always changing and moving and, and that can be another really helpful thing for people to understand is because again, when we get scared, um, often the thought or narrative or belief that will show up is, oh my gosh, I'm going to be stuck with this.

And I'm not going to be able to get out of it. Uh, and just knowing that it's very natural for emotion with. [00:37:00] Or even mood states to come and go can be really helpful for people. And in, in this particular way, we're working on people's belief about emotions,

**Debbie Sorensen:** Well, and you really. Advocate for emotional awareness and the skills of being able to observe and describe them. And curiosity, you have quote from your book. Curiosity is the antidote to emotional reactivity.

**Aprilia West:** right?

**Debbie Sorensen:** So tell us about curiosity and how that is such a magical elixir.

**Aprilia West:** it really is magic. And part of the reason it's magic is it's the exact opposite of what we typically want to do when we're triggered. When we're triggered, we're thinking about how can I be safer, more, certain, more comfortable, more, how can I have more cohesive? And more pleasure. And that usually doesn't lead us to pause and just get curious about what's happening or what we're [00:38:00] experiencing or what the emotion trigger might be signaling for us.

**Debbie Sorensen:** That has a flavor of kind of an awareness and acceptance based approach. You know, we, and I think in your book and in your approach, right in emotional efficacy training that you cover acceptance based approaches, where you just are aware and accepting of your emotions, and that has that's associated to me with acceptance and commitment therapy and some of the other, acceptance based approaches. Um, you also give some skills, some really helpful skills for emotion regulation, like relaxation and self-soothing, which I associate a little bit more with dialectical behavior therapy.

This is a question that I think comes up a lot for anyone who knows about both of those approaches to emotions. Um, so could you talk a little bit about. When

is emotion regulation indicated versus a more acceptance based approach where it's more like curiosity? What are your thoughts about that?

**Aprilia West:** Oh, it's such a good question. And you're right. This comes up a [00:39:00] lot, especially in people who may either be in the acceptance commitment therapy, um, community or the dialectical behavioral therapy community. Um, you know, in EET, we conceptualize any kind of emotion regulation strategies as, as moving you toward your values.

So in other words, you would use those when you. Done the first two skills in emotion, efficacy training, which are tuning in to what's going on to all your emotional stuff. That's the acronym I use for sensations, thoughts, or just in feelings. And then.

**Debbie Sorensen:** T U F

**Aprilia West:** That's PUF stuff. That's right. So you've done that.

And then you've tried the acceptance piece, which is this emotion surfing, which is just not only tuning in, but then, then hanging out with it, which you know, is a lot harder than it sounds. We don't like to hang out with our negative aversive, unwanted emotional stuff. But if you've already done those two [00:40:00] things, and it's still not clear to you either what matters or that you can act on what matters.

Then you would use a mindful coping skill, uh, where you would do something that would regulate your emotions down, SIF downshift, your, uh, your level of emotional activation enough, just enough to be able to do your values based action. So it's, it's always used in the service of values, which might be a little bit different than how it's taught in DVDs.

**Debbie Sorensen:** Yeah, it's and it's really kind of depends on the situation, right? And often it is a step in the direction of doing something more effective and. Can be used, not necessarily as an avoidance thing, but more as a, like what's going to work right now. What's going to help bring me closer to my values. And so it's, it's flexible. right? It's like what's going to work in this situation.

**Aprilia West:** It's very flexible. And I think one of the things I would say to you, cause you just [00:41:00] said not as an avoidance thing in, in, in emotion, efficacy training, avoidance can also sometimes be in the service of your values.

So as long as you're going back to that WTF inquiry and asking what's the function of this behavior, um, avoiding someone I know, will.

You know, trigger me to the point where it will threaten my well being or get in the way of what matters most to me is actually values-based action when you do a functional inquiry with it. So, uh, even though we call emotional avoidance, sort of the, it's sort of the, the process based culprit, the thing that we don't want to do, um, there's a difference between a mode avoiding emotions because.

We just don't want to feel that pain and avoiding something that will elicit those emotions because it will actually move us away from what matters.

**Debbie Sorensen:** That is such a good point. There is a time and a place even for avoidance. And we might choose sometimes [00:42:00] avoidance because even if you're very intentional and values based that. The day that it goes back to the choice idea that we were talking about earlier. Right?

**Aprilia West:** right. Yeah.

**Debbie Sorensen:** this and maybe I have no, there's a little tinge of avoidance to it, but that's okay. that's still, I mean, I do that every day. I'm sure most people do right.

**Aprilia West:** Again, you know, it's a tinge of avoidance or a whole heap of it. Um, as long as it's moving you toward what matters most? So the example I give in the book is when I was studying for my licensing exam. Was the most dreaded test I think I've ever taken in my life. I was just so exhausted when I was studying for it.

And I had to do a WTF inquiry on myself because what I would find is I would take these breaks from studying that would end up becoming two and three hour Netflix binges. And. In my mind in the beginning, I was justifying it by saying, you know, I really need to just think about something else. And I was even thinking about the [00:43:00] idea of distributed learning, where it's helpful to take breaks and come back to things, um, in order to consolidate the information you're learning.

And, but over time, when I did the WTF inquiry on myself, I started to realize that the avoidance was moving me away from what mattered most, which was passing the exam. In the beginning, it was moving me toward taking a break and getting some rest so I could come back and study even better. So it's, it's a

complex process, but once you start getting comfortable with doing that inquiry, you can start to see places where, you know, what seems like it should be the right choice may or may not be in context.

**Debbie Sorensen:** I'll give my example. Now I did dry January this year. Um, so I, I like to drink a glass of wine at the end of the day, not every day, but you know, it's a nice little while I'm cooking dinner kind of routine that I get into sometimes. And so I try that [00:44:00] out going for a longer stretch of not drinking wine.

And I think what I've realized is that sure, there's a little tiny bit of an emotional avoidance component of drinking wine in this. I'm stressed and it reduces my stress a little bit. And I also realized I enjoy it. It's not a big, it's not like I have a big problem with it. It's not really causing, you know, it's not that much quantity and it's not really causing a big problem.

So it's like, it is a little bit avoidant, but it's also something that I'm choosing to do, you know, not every day, of course, but in a flexible about it and try to keep it in check and not just make it an automatic habit, but it's like,

**Aprilia West:** Yeah. Yeah.

**Debbie Sorensen:** that's not really causing a huge problem in my life, you know?

**Aprilia West:** It's is it moving you away from anything that matters?

**Debbie Sorensen:** No, I mean, I could see sometimes it makes me tired and maybe I had planned to, you know, get something done that night. And I don't so sometimes right. Like maybe I wanted to exercise or like get [00:45:00] a little bit of work done or

**Aprilia West:** Yeah.

**Debbie Sorensen:** but I think that on those nights I just don't drink. And if I do, it's like, okay.

Oh, well,

**Aprilia West:** Right,

right.

**Debbie Sorensen:** later.

**Aprilia West:** Yeah, well, it's it. So it sounds like you're being a boss level choice maker here, you know, and being able to really know tonight what matters more is getting work done or exercising, or maybe what matters most is exercising first and then drinking the wine. Yeah. Yeah.

**Debbie Sorensen:** Good point. Then the order matters a lot there. Right?

**Aprilia West:** the order matters a lot and this is, you know, again, this is really, um, higher level. Choice-making we're talking about. And, um, one of the things that I loved about writing this book that I learned, uh, through my research is a lot more about decision-making and choices. And one of the, one of the things that I loved most learning is that on average, we make about 35,000 choices a day, and about 98% [00:46:00] of those are fast automatic decisions.

So there's all. Possibility to become millions of, of moments of choice, more powerful. If we are more clear about what's happening in each moment, you know, and a lot of us don't even realize when we're making these choices. Like for a lot of people, I bet they just go and pour the glass of wine and they don't even see it as a choice that they have the choice to do it or not to do.

**Debbie Sorensen:** Well, and for me to, cause I think the reason I even decided to try out dry January or in the first place is because sometimes it does start to feel automatic, you know? So I relate to that.

**Aprilia West:** totally. Totally. Yep.

**Debbie Sorensen:** So within the emotion regulation skills, you give some. Techniques that people can try out relaxation skills, self-soothing skills. And even I noticed, as I was reading through your book, I was just sitting there and, you know, kind of read, prepare for the podcast, read through the book mode that I [00:47:00] actually felt soothed, just even looking at the list.

I wasn't really doing anything different, but it just evoked a very nice, warm feeling. So could you share some examples of some of the self self-soothing skills or self-soothing activities that people might do?

**Aprilia West:** Absolutely. And I just want to frame for the, for the listener, there's three types of emotion regulation skills, and the book. The first is perspective taking that's changing, how you're relating to your thinking with coping thoughts and radical acceptance. The second one is relaxation, which is really working through the bottom.

To relax, um, through some different skills, um, both breathing and then using your senses to, uh, signal to your body that it's safe enough to relax. And then what you're talking about is the third, um, mindful coping skill, which is attention shifting. So what we know is that whatever we pay attention to our emotions follow.

So the example you've just given with how even just looking at this list was [00:48:00] calming for you. It's my guess is it's because you shifted from whatever was activating you. Um, you know, I don't know. W what were you feeling? Were you feeling anxious or tired, or

**Debbie Sorensen:** Well, I was feeling, I was like in that kind of intellectual mode of reading and thinking, I guess I would say. I want to ask good questions. So how am I going to translate this into this, you know, interview that I'm going to do? And so I think, I, I don't know if I would say anxious is the word for it, but it was definitely the. mode of, Um, you know, doing a work task.

I want to do a good job. I want to highlight your book. So I'm trying to put some effort into it, you know, so it's a little, it's like a slightly stressed mode, I guess. Not.

**Aprilia West:** Yes. Yes, that's right. Which is natural whenever we're planning and preparing or anticipating something. So, so you went from, from experiencing stress to reading this list and by putting your attention on some of these things, your emotion waves naturally. [00:49:00] Downshifted, you know, it, it resolved. And I'll just share a couple of, um, a couple of things from this list, which I'm so glad you like.

Cause I, I sometimes forget that when you're activated these things that are so seemingly simple can actually help a lot. Even just thinking about them. Um, so, uh, some of them are paying attention to something else. Um, it could be listening to all the sounds around you. It could be, um, planning a day trip somewhere you've already, always wanted to go listening to music, finding a space.

That's quiet to hang out in. Um, Going to a flower shop or somewhere and smelling the flowers, uh, writing a love letter to yourself. Um, the other type are paying attention to someone else. So it's, you know, you can call a friend or, um, see if anybody needs help with a chore or, or anything. Um, you could bake cookies for someone.

You could [00:50:00] write a note to someone who's changed your life for the better and tell them why. And, um, and then the last example is just taking a time out. You know, sometimes we need to step away when we're emotionally activated and by just shifting our attention for a little while we can recover and then come back to focus on what really matters.

**Debbie Sorensen:** So to bring things full circle. Next time I'm noticing my emotion in my emotions that maybe I'm tired and could use a break. And it seems like the right choice in that moment for my own values. Think about this list and maybe take a break and do one of these self-soothing things and see, see what happens and approach that with curiosity.

**Aprilia West:** Absolutely. Yeah, that's the, that's the real key here is just, it's being curious about what's happening for you in each moment. And I talk in the book about how your life is a series of moments of choice. And when we realized that so much more as possible, uh, [00:51:00] otherwise we could end up living our lives in default mode.

As we've talked about are sometimes helpful and sometimes really not helpful. And this gives you the ability to make sure that in each moment you have the opportunity to choose what matters and to show up as the best possible version of yourself.

**Debbie Sorensen:** well, this is the perfect segue to what I think is my final question for you. And this is something that we have. Kind of talked about a little bit when we were getting ready to talk to each other today, um, which is about the idea of languishing and moving into flourishing. And I don't know if, if you saw this article or if any of our listeners saw this article that.

Wrote in the New York times, a few months back about languishing, which is when you're not, it's not like you're so depressed or you're in this terrible state, but you're also really not thriving. Right? You're not feeling. Super inspired or [00:52:00] motivated or like you're in a really good place. And I know for

myself and a lot of people I've talked to over the last couple of years with the pandemic, languishing is pretty familiar.

It's like, I'm okay. I'm fine. You know, quote, I'm using air quotes. Like I'm fine. But it's like, You don't really want to be just fine anymore. You'd really like to move into a place of better than fine, you know, um, reconnect with some vitality. So using kind of what we talked about today and, and your approach in your book, what, how would you, if someone's languishing right now, what would you, what words of wisdom would you give.

**Aprilia West:** Well, I w I would ask them where, where the pain is. I would get really curious about what the pain is that they're experiencing. And I mean, when I say pain, I mean, w what's the discomfort what's, what's there for them. That's unwanted as an experience. And then once they're able to tell me that we would get really curious [00:53:00] about whether that emotional pain is.

Coming from a signal that one of their values is threatened or more one or more, um, whether there are some unmet needs there, um, or whether there are potentially stories or biases or beliefs that aren't serving them and we would decode it together. And then we would figure out whether there's something to accept or something to change.

**Debbie Sorensen:** Yeah. Great. Yeah. So if you're a languishing or if you feel like you could use sort of a recharge, that's a great, great place to sit.

**Aprilia West:** Yeah, no, I think my hope is that that this book will help even people who may not struggle so much with their emotions and choices to really see what's possible for them. Um, when they're able to become more aware of not only all the moments in which we're choosing, but our ability to decode what really matters [00:54:00] what's possible and to get way more intentional, flexible, and creative with how we show up.

**Debbie Sorensen:** I love that you you've mentioned possibility in your book a few times as one of your values. And I think I see that in your book and also in your career over time that it's, you know, you can really. You're an embodiment of that, but you can also share that with others to help them see their own possibility and potential.

Um, so for people who are interested and want to learn more, the book's great. And I hope people will look for that and are pretty aware. Can people find you online? Where do they go? If they want more of this, this kind of information.

**Aprilia West:** Sure. Well, um, if the, the place to go where everything is is my website, which is just Dr. Brillio west.com. Uh, and then both of the books on emotion, efficacy. As well as the book that includes the chapter on acceptance and commitment, coaching in the workplace are [00:55:00] available through Amazon.

**Debbie Sorensen:** Great. Well, I really appreciate you talking to me today and for sharing some of these skills and ideas with our listeners. Uh, thank you so much.

**Aprilia West:** You're so welcome. It's great to be with you. And I appreciate you talking with me about this. I'm really excited to, to be able to share this with the world.

**Debbie Sorensen:** Likewise. Thank you.

**Debbie Sorensen:** Thank you for listening to psychologists off the clock. If you enjoy our podcast, you can help us out by leaving a review or contributing on Patreon.

**Yael Schonbrun:** You can get more psychology tips by subscribing to our newsletter, and you can find us wherever you get your podcasts. Connect with us on social media and purchase swag from our merge store. By going to our website

at off the clock, [psych.com/march](https://psych.com/march)

**Jill Stoddard:** We'd like to thank our strategic consultant, Michael Harold, our dissemination coordinator, Katy Rothfelder, and our [00:56:00] editorial coordinator, Melissa Miller.

**Debbie Sorensen:** This podcast is for informational and entertainment purposes only, and is not meant to be a substitute for mental health treatment. If you're

having a mental health emergency dial 9 1 1. . If you're looking for mental health treatment, please visit the resources page of our website off the clock.

[psych.com](https://www.psych.com).