

## Ep #37: Healing the Healers: Eliminating Suffering for Clinicians



### Full Episode Transcript

With Your Host

**Heather Branscombe**

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Welcome to *Clinicians Creating Impact*, a show for physical therapists, occupational therapists, and speech-language pathologists looking to take the next step in their careers and make a real difference in the lives of their clients. If you're looking to improve the lives of neurodiverse children and families with neurological-based challenges, grow your own business, or simply show up to help clients, this is the show for you.

I'm Heather Branscombe, Therapist, Certified Coach, Clinical Director, and Owner of Abilities Neurological Rehabilitation. I have over 25 years of experience in both the public and private sectors, and I'm here to help you become the therapist you want to be, supporting people to work towards their dreams and live their best lives. You ready to dive in? Let's go.

Hi there, friends. I've just come back from my coaching conference last week, and it was so much fun. I have to tell you, Dallas was stupid hot, like 43 degrees Celsius hot. But I learned so much, including from a fellow clinician that I hope to get on this podcast soon. And I had an aha moment that I really wanted to share with you today.

So the theme of this conference was feel harder. And the speakers used that theme to talk about the role that feelings have in our lives, again, specifically, because this was a coaching conference around coaching. The opening speaker talked about the feeling of suffering. And that really piqued my interest because so many of us as clinicians have really gotten into this work because ultimately we want to relieve the suffering for others.

And so I thought I would share my aha moment from this non-clinical perspective, and show how I can see us applying it not only for our clients, but also for ourselves.

Now, before I start I want to ask you a question. Do you know someone who's ready for a change to reignite their passion for clinical work and the impact that they make for themselves and those that they serve? I'm asking because we have a few limited spaces available, limited because our clinic spaces are only

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so big. But we have these limited spaces available for clinicians who are curious about making a change.

So if you or someone you know might be interested in making that change, you can learn more about Abilities or working with me directly by looking at our profile on Indeed, or email me to set up your confidential conversation about where you might want to take your career next. Both the Indeed profile for Abilities and our website are in the show notes, you can check it out or send it to someone who might be ready for a change.

Now, with that being said, let's talk a little bit about suffering. So the opening speaker of this conference, her name is Brooke Castillo. She's the founder of the school where I took my coaching certification and she's someone I actually highly recommend listening to if you're interested in a broader perspective to all things mindfulness.

Anyways, Brooke was saying that she mentioned that suffering as a feeling is actually the avoidance or resistance to a feeling. So she was talking about this concept in the context of how we as humans, with human brains, often hide from our emotions, especially those negative emotions. So thinking about emotions like boredom, restlessness, shame, despair, disappointment. That kind of list of negative emotions caused me to think about the clients that I've had in my clinical career.

So even though when I was working clinically, I was working as a physical therapist, I have definitely seen all of those kinds of feelings come up for my clients as I was working with them. And I suspect no matter what your discipline or context that you're working in clinically, those kinds of feelings have come up for your clients, and maybe for you as well. Because I thought about how those emotions have also come up for myself in my own clinical career.

There have definitely been times in my career where I have felt boredom, restlessness, shame, despair, disappointment. And to be clear, that's not because I've had a horrible career. I can think of times that I have felt each one of those even in the last year. And I think you might know this by now, I actually love my job right now. And I love almost everything that I'm doing about my job.

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Not everything we're going to love about our job every single moment, of course not. But on the whole, this is my dream career. And yet I have felt every single one of those emotions in my clinical work, that's not so clinical right now, in the last year. So first, let's normalize having those kinds of feelings, and even hiding from those kinds of feelings for our clients and for ourselves.

So Brooke went on to talk about how suffering is actually caused by the brain. So remembering suffering comes from resistance or avoidance of those kinds of negative emotions. So we suffer because we're actually resisting feeling those emotions that our brain offers us with thoughts that could sound something like, I shouldn't have to experience it, whatever the "it" is. This negative emotion is bad. This situation that I'm dealing with, I don't want in my life and so it's bad.

So those are the kinds of thoughts that generate that suffering, because you're deciding the negative emotions that are in your current work life are actually bad and shouldn't actually be there. It caused me to think about the suffering we're looking at to relieve as clinicians.

Now, when I asked ChatGPT, which is kind of my new Google. I don't know if it's your new Google, but it's definitely my new Google right now. I asked ChatGPT what their definition of relieving suffering was. And this is what they said. Relieving suffering refers to the act of alleviating or reducing physical, emotional or psychological distress, discomfort or pain experienced by an individual or a group.

Now, that makes sense. Look, ChatGPT works, people. And that's what we do as clinicians as a whole. We use our different scopes of practice to achieve this goal in our own unique ways. But there's no doubt that as a group we seek to relieve suffering for our clients. So I also started to think about the suffering that we experience in our work as a clinician, the suffering we experience.

Remember those negative emotions that I've had, and that I'm guessing you might have had as well? Things like boredom, restlessness, shame, despair, disappointment. What if we look at those feelings a little bit differently? What if feeling those feelings, even at work, aren't a problem? And maybe what if feeling those feelings is actually the point?

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I don't know about you, but if you had asked me that question a couple years ago, I would have said feeling those kinds of feelings sounded like a terrible idea. And if you are right there where I was two years ago, thinking that that's a terrible idea, I have a little tip for you to try to help you and perhaps to help you to help your clients as well.

Some of you may even well be doing this currently with your clients. And yet, I wonder how often you do it for yourself. So let's make feeling the feelings the point for a moment. Just for a moment. Trust me, it's going to be worth it, both for you and for your clients.

One way to do it is something called affect labeling, or in simple terms to just name the feeling that you're feeling. So affect labeling is a psychological and emotional regulation technique and it involves identifying and verbally labeling one's emotions. It is a simple and yet a super powerful method that can help individuals just like you manage their emotions more effectively, especially in situations where you might feel overwhelmed or distressed.

So here's what you do and why it works. So first, affect labeling is exactly what it says, what we want to do. Number one, we want to identify the feeling. The first step is really just to become aware and accurately identify the feeling that you're experiencing. So this can involve something like dropping into your body and naming the sensations that you feel in that moment.

Then comes step two, which is verbally expressing it. So after you identify that emotion, you're going to verbalize it by saying or writing down what you're feeling. So, for example, if you're feeling anxious, you might say or write down I'm feeling anxious right now. And then as a bonus, you might want to say the why. I'm feeling anxious right now because I don't know how the next client session will go, for example.

And then step three is that externalization. So by expressing your feelings verbally or in writing, you externalize them, which means that you take them out of your internal emotional experience and make them more objective and tangible.

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So, I don't know about you, but if you're anything like me, the first thing I thought of is how helpful this could be for my clients. Especially so that I, as a clinician, could then validate those feelings and then we could move forward from there. That would create more of a relationship of trust and intimacy. But I want to invite you for a moment to apply this to yourself. Let's just keep your clients your clients for a moment and apply it to yourself.

How could this affect labeling help you at work? Let's go through some of the benefits of it to see how it can help. I have come up with five benefits. It's not an exhaustive list. Let's see if these are some of the ones that you might think might be helpful for you.

So number one, talking about emotional regulation. So doing this kind of affect labeling helps to regulate these kinds of intense emotions, or even less intense emotions by engaging the prefrontal cortex and, again, that part of the brain that's responsible for that cognitive control and decision making.

It can lead to a reduction of the intensity of the emotion as we talked about before in the three steps of just understanding the feeling, naming it and externalizing it. So how could emotionally regulating yourself be helpful to you and your clients in the workplace?

The second benefit is increased self awareness. So doing something like affect labeling is going to promote self awareness by encouraging you to pay closer attention to your feelings in your work environment. That self awareness can be a crucial first step in managing and understanding your emotional responses. So a question that could be helpful to you is, how could becoming more self aware help you be a better clinician?

The third benefit is emotional processing. Affect labeling can facilitate the processing of emotions, and so that can make it easier to explore the underlying causes and triggers of those emotions. How could better processing your own emotions affect how you show up at work for yourself, for your teammates and for your clients?

The fourth benefit I came up with is improved communication. So expressing emotions verbally can also improve communication, both with one's self and



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with others. When you can accurately label your emotions, you're better equipped to convey your feelings to others, and to seek support when needed. How could that improved communication help you be a better teammate at work?

And then the fifth benefit is reduced reactivity. So by taking a moment to label a feeling, an individual can reduce that more impulsive reaction driven by intense emotions. This can lead to more reasoned and less impulsive decision making. So finally, how could reducing your reactivity at work help you show up as your best self?

So I want to invite you to heal yourself and eliminate your own suffering as a clinician as a way to create a bigger impact and eliminate suffering for those that you work with. Let's bring our own feelings into the work that we do. I guarantee that if you do that, if you bring your own experience and healing through feeling your feelings, it will absolutely help you show up as a more effective clinician.

So let's feel all the boredom, all the restlessness, all the shame, all the despair, all the disappointment that happens for us as clinicians in the workplace. And let's use that to help ourselves and to help others to create a bigger impact.

Let me know how it goes and if and where you get stuck, because of course it can happen. And if you do, I want to be here to help you. I can't wait to see the total amazingness that you create with this. Have a great week and I will see you soon.

If you enjoyed today's show and don't want to worry about missing an episode, you can follow the show wherever you listen to your podcasts. And if you haven't already, I would really appreciate it if you could leave a rating and review to let me know what you think and to help others find *Clinicians Creating Impact*.

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Thanks for joining me this week on the *Clinicians Creating Impact* podcast. Want to learn more about the work I'm doing with Abilities Rehabilitation? Head on over to [abilitiesrehabilitation.com](http://abilitiesrehabilitation.com). See you next week.