

## Ep #47: The Root Cause of Bad Behavior



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**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, friend. I'm recording this at the end of November and I have to say, I can really see the month of November starting to hit people. The days, I'm noticing, are definitely shorter. I've got my own winter jackets on solid rotation. And, again, you can definitely see the effects starting to hit some people harder than others.

Just this week I was in a meeting with a variety of external professionals and they were individually expressing the challenges of meeting the needs of the populations they serve. They talked about things like hiring challenges, the trauma experienced by both clients and staff, as well as just the overwhelming need for the service that they had not yet seen in this career.

Now, some of this definitely isn't just November. But the feeling that I got as these smart, capable and kind service professionals shared what they saw in their world as the current reality was overall it really felt a bit down and kind of hopeless. And truthfully, I get it.

It's not that I don't see those similar circumstances as well, but I was also mindful of the unique position we have to help. And how helping clinicians and service professionals with mindfulness doesn't necessarily change our

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circumstances that we're living in, we're definitely not going to change the month. But it really can empower us to act to improve these circumstances. It reminded me of how important taking the time to take care of yourself as a clinician if you want to create a larger impact for yourself and for others.

So along those lines, could you do me a favor today? The podcast is definitely my passion project because I want all clinicians, even if they never work with us or even for us at Abilities, I really want them to be able to use this tool as a way to magnify this impact. It's like my love letter to clinicians.

And one way to do that is to spread this message so that other clinicians just like you can have that opportunity. So you can help me do that in a couple of ways. One, you could follow, rate and review this podcast on your favorite podcast listener, Apple Podcasts would be amazing. And that feeds the algorithm so that when a clinician is searching for this kind of podcast, it will come up more easily for them.

Secondly, if you could share this podcast, or better yet, one of your favorite episodes with a colleague that you really care about, you can consider it an early Christmas gift to me, and obviously you do not need to give me any kind of gifts. But I would be eternally grateful to you for any and all of the above. So with that, let's talk about bad behavior, shall we?

I was recently listening to a podcast where they were interviewing Dr. Becky Kennedy. So Dr. Kennedy is a clinical psychologist, and I'll actually link her TED talk from earlier this year in the show notes. It's slightly adjunct to what I want to talk about today, but it's a really great TED talk.

She talks about relationships, most often from the lens of a parent, but even she points out in the TED talk about the framework and the advice that she shares, that it's equally as useful in almost any relationship. I myself have found it super helpful, so I thought I'd share with you a little more about it today and how I think it could relate to your clinical work.

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One of her concepts that I really love is around bad behavior. She states bad behavior is when our feelings overpower our skill. I love that. I love that so much I'll share it with you again. Bad behavior is when our feelings overpower our skill. I instantly both related to that statement and agreed and aligned with that statement. It felt super aligned with what I know, both as a parent and as a clinician.

As a clinician, most of my work has been around skill building. And I've seen through my own work and watching the work of clients or patients with other professionals, that as we build skills in a certain area, our behavior does change, as does the way that we feel. And so as I started to kind of test this newfound thought by observing behavior, I definitely found how it had application in my own life, especially when it comes to emotional resilience.

When I myself feel more emotionally resilient, I certainly behave more like the person that I actually want to be, both at home and at work. One small example I can think of shows up, as a female, on a monthly basis when my hormones change along with that monthly period of menstruation. There are definitely times in the month where I'd love to think that I have things under control, but the fact is I just have less emotional resilience. And that's also the time where I'm often shorter with my family members, and even a little more abrupt, at times, at work.

And when I think about this, I'm a little embarrassed to say that I'm often much nicer at work than I am at home. And it's most likely because I'm scraping every skill I have to keep myself in emotional check at work at these times of the month. And then I probably let loose a little more in the place that I feel most comfortable. And, of course, that makes sense. Don't most of us use more skills in our "public" life and probably use a little less of those skills at home where we might feel more safe? I know I do.

When I think about the patients or clients that we work with, we definitely can see where the skills of regulation, specifically emotional regulation, can either help or hinder our sessions. As clinicians, we'll often plan our sessions, hopefully, to align with the client's current skill set. And yet, there are times

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where we may get it wrong. And the result is a behavior that we may not have expected.

I think it could be helpful to extend this concept to our co-workers as well. When our colleagues show up in a way that we might not expect, be it sometimes being late, not following through, maybe even being more aggressive than we would expect, there really is this opportunity to get curious. What if the behavior that we may label as bad because we didn't expect it, is because of a lack of skill instead of a personal characteristic?

This is how I actually use this, fun fact, with my own mother without her even knowing it and how it has literally changed my relationship with her. So quick backstory, I live in the same town as my mother, who is a widow for the past 18 years. And who I know, without a shadow of a doubt, loves me and of course I love her too.

She has also had a long-standing history of significant mental health challenges. Without going into her details, because it's her story, not mine, but as a child she was hospitalized more than a few times from the time that I was about in grade seven up until the time I was in college. So the challenge I was having is well I knew that my mom cared for me, I felt like my relationship was very superficial.

Now, again, I love my mother deeply and I admire her in so many ways. I definitely attribute my love of service from her example of serving others growing up. And the fact is managing feelings, especially the feelings for others, is objectively hard for her because of her own mental health struggles.

So what this meant for me as a child growing up is that I didn't have a parent who could hold space and validate the big feelings that all children are naturally going to have growing up. It resulted in some feelings for myself because of thoughts I had of how a mother "should" behave as I became an adult.

So through the help of counseling and applying Dr. Becky's sentence to my mother, I was really able to tell that the truth was any bad behavior on my

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mother's part was really because her feelings overpowered her skill. So in this case, the skill to manage her own feelings.

I can't tell you how powerful that thought was to me. It really did allow me to honor my feelings as a person, as well as to honor my mom and where she was at. I'm not expecting her to change and it is so much easier to feel love and compassion for her with this thought in mind.

So how can we test this theory of the thought that bad behavior is when our feelings overpower our skill in our work environment? Well, first, we need to think about the skills required to perform a given task. And then if we approach it, maybe from a top down approach, it can go from the actual understanding of what we were expecting them to do in that given moment, all the way down to the bottom.

Meaning, did this person have the skill to both identify and regulate their nervous system as a foundation to any given skill set that we were asking them or they were asking themselves to do? So if you want to know more about regulating your own nervous system and the skills for that, go and listen to my interview with Leah Davidson in episode 43 and 44.

Now, this is all most likely a guess, and I certainly wouldn't expect you to ask the person who has performed the "bad behavior" why they did that. And even if you did, you're probably not going to get the kind of answers that my feelings overpowered my skill. Of course, they're not going to say that. But there is still value from asking and answering these types of questions for yourself.

The value that I can see is to help you understand where the behavior may be coming from, and then to adjust your approach accordingly. So how would that practically look like at work? So if I were to use this hypothetical thought as a construct with my clients, I would test my theory out by adjusting my sessions and my approach based on my best guess, and see how the client would respond.



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With a colleague, I'd do the exact same thing. Coming from that place of curiosity, which is incidentally super helpful for your own nervous system, and allows you to use that prefrontal cortex to decide what feels best for you as that next best step, both for yourself and for the person that you're working with.

So give it a try next time you see what you consider as bad behavior. Use it as an opportunity to get curious as to what skills may be missing and how their feelings may be overpowering them in the moment. And when you behave in a way that you might not like, you have an opportunity to get curious about yourself and what you might need next.

In my experience, this has been super helpful to be the kind, compassionate person and clinician that I know I want to be and I know that you are as well.

Thank you so much for listening and I can't wait to hear what you do with this. Please let me know how it goes and what kind of questions, concerns or problems that come from it. Have a great week, and I will talk to you next week. Take care.

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.