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164 - Friday Fix: Ask Me Anything (Part 3)

Amy Morin:

Welcome to *The Verywell Mind Podcast*! I'm Amy Morin, the editor-in-chief of Verywell Mind. I'm also a psychotherapist and a best-selling author of four books on mental strength. You're listening to The Friday Fix. Every Friday, I share a quick mental strength strategy that can help fix the thoughts, feelings, and actions that can hold you back in life. And the fun part is we record the show from a sailboat in the Florida Keys!

Every day, my inbox is flooded with questions from people who want to know more about how to grow mentally stronger, and I just don't have time to answer every single question. So this is my solution. Ask your question on the show, and you don't have to leave your name. I'll answer it publicly because there are probably a lot of people out there who could benefit from hearing the response too.

So today, we're doing the third installment of Ask Me Anything. I've received tons of voicemail messages from you with great questions about everything from parenting issues to depression. I picked a handful of those questions to answer on today's show. If you have a question that you want me to consider for the next Ask Me Anything, leave me a voicemail message at speakpipe.com/verywellmindpodcast. Now, let's dive into today's episode!

Our first question is about self-compassion.

Kaley:

Hi, Amy. My name is Kaley, and I was wondering how you would differentiate between being self-compassionate and making excuses for yourself when difficult circumstances prevent you from reaching your goals. Thank you.

Amy Morin:

So the difference between self-compassion and making an excuse is really about accepting responsibility. Self-compassion tends to involve an explanation, but not an excuse. So here's the difference between an explanation and an excuse. Let's say that you decide that you're going to start to eat healthier, but then on the way home from work, you stopped and got a giant burger, some fries and a milkshake. An excuse would involve saying something like, "My boss stressed me out today. I had too much work to do and not enough time to prepare something healthy." A self-compassionate explanation, on the other hand, would involve saying something more like, "I worked a lot of hours. I didn't plan ahead, and I was stressed out." That's a slight shift in the way that you word it, but it makes a really big difference.

Just remember that self-compassion accepts responsibility, but it's not overly critical, because being too hard on yourself doesn't do with any good either. Maybe you say something like, "You're so stupid. You always mess up. This is never going to work." Those kinds of thoughts increase the chances that you're just going to mess up again tomorrow. Self-compassion is about speaking to yourself the same way that you talk to a trusted friend, that friend that you're willing to be honest with and call them out when you're concerned about their behavior, but you do it out of kindness, not harshness.

Our next question is about depression.

Lucas Caldwell:

Sometimes, I think I have depression. Other times, I think it's probably normal and everyone feels this way. How do I know for sure, and is there any benefit to knowing?

Amy Morin:

Oh, good question about depression because depression has a bunch of different symptoms and the symptoms sometimes look different in different people. I'll have a lot of people come to my therapy office and they're irritable, but it's actually depression, but they look way more irritable than they do sad. Or some people lose their appetite, while other people eat a lot more when they're depressed. Same with sleep. Sometimes, people can't sleep at all. Sometimes, people sleep too much. So since the symptoms all look different, it's hard to know sometimes.

Well, one thing you can do is go to the Mental Health America website and take a test. They have a really quick questionnaire that can help you know if you might have depression. They also have lots of other questions too, so that you could determine if you might have another mental health issue or a substance abuse problem, like PTSD or an anxiety disorder.

Another option would be to just talk up to your physician, let them know that you're questioning if you might have depression. Most physicians can give you a screening tool or a questionnaire to help figure it out. And so, while we usually think that we're supposed to talk to our doctor about our physical health problems, they are usually fairly well versed in the mental health problems too, and they can always refer you to a psychiatrist or a therapist, if they think that you need something more than they can offer.

Or you could just make your own appointment with a mental health professional for a checkup. You can talk to somebody online, if that's easier than meeting with someone in person. But the same way you might talk to a doctor once a year for an annual physical, you could just meet with a therapist to say, "This is what's going on. Do you think I might have a problem?"

And ultimately, the way that we decide if somebody has a diagnosable condition like depression is based on the amount of problems it causes in life. All of us have a down day or times when we aren't feeling as good as usual, but when it's something like a clinical diagnosis of depression or anxiety, it starts to interfere with your social life, your work, your educational functioning, and it usually lasts more than two weeks. And then knowing that you might have depression can then help you decide

what to do about it. For some people, that might mean going to talk therapy. For other people, it might be about taking medication, or it might just then be about making some lifestyle changes so that you can manage your depression on your own.

And our third question is about in-law trouble.

Anonymous:

Hi. I wanted to know what should I do? I've been married for almost 21 years, and my mother-in-law is still not my biggest fan. She never has been. She never thinks I'm good enough for her husband still. To my face, she's nice and polite and says she loves me, but I know behind my back, she talks about me negatively. And I just wanted to know what I should do.

Amy Morin:

So it sounds like you certainly don't have the dream relationship with your mother-in-law that you might have hoped, but you don't say whether your mother-in-law is telling people that you're not good enough or whether you just assume it. So I'm not sure if it's a fact or just an assumption that she doesn't think that you're good enough.

So the first thing you might do is think about that. Has she actually told you, or has she told somebody else that she thinks that you're not good enough? Or how do you know that she's talking poorly about you? Who is she talking poorly about you to? And then think about what evidence you have. So maybe you just assume this, or maybe you're just reading between the lines and making that assumption. If it's an assumption, then you can address your beliefs. Maybe you think you aren't good enough, and you're making the assumption that she feels the same.

So you could look for evidence to the contrary. Are there times when you think that you do assume that you're good enough? You could also ask yourself, well, what advice would I give to my friend who had this problem? Same question that we asked earlier. If your friend said, "Gee, I feel like my mother-in-law doesn't like me," what would you say? You probably have some kind, compassionate words.

Okay. But let's assume it's a fact. Your mother-in-law has outright told you or your husband that she thinks you're not good enough. You have three options. First one is just work on trying to improve your relationship with her. You can't just go out there and accomplish a whole bunch of stuff that would make her start to see you as good enough, but you might be able to improve the relationship, so that over time, things might shift a little bit. Or you could just accept things for the way that they are and decide this is how it's going to be. Or you could do both of those things at the same time. That would involve accepting things for what they are now, well, knowing that perhaps, down the road, things might change.

Ultimately, it's up to you to decide how you want to handle it. And you might make that decision based on how big of a problem this is for you and for your family right now. So you can't control what your mother-in-law thinks or how she feels, but you can address her behavior, and it might be up to both you and your husband to address that. So if your mother-in-law's being unkind, you can establish healthy boundaries. That might be ending a conversation if she says something rude. And you want to make sure that you and your husband are on the same page and that he's willing to set limits if his mom is speaking poorly of you.

If it's affecting your relationship with your husband, talk to a therapist together. In-laws and extended family are a really common reason why people seek professional help. It's important that the two of you set healthy boundaries to prevent other people from interfering. And if your husband's not interested in seeing a therapist, you can always see one for yourself to address the issue.

So that's it for this Ask Me Anything. If you want me to answer your question, go to the show notes on the [verywellmind.com](https://www.verywellmind.com) page and leave me a voicemail message. I'll try to answer it in an upcoming episode.

If you know someone who could benefit from hearing this message, share it with them. Simply sharing a link to this episode could help someone feel better and grow stronger.

Do you want free access to my online course? It's called "10 Mental Strength Exercises That Will Help You Reach Your Greatest Potential." To

get your free pass, all you have to do is leave us a review on Apple Podcasts. Then, send us a screenshot of your review. Our email address is podcast@verywell.com. We'll reply with your all-access pass to the course.

Thank you for hanging out with me today and for listening to *The Verywell Mind Podcast!* And as always, a big thank you to my show's producer (who doesn't ever get seasick), Nick Valentin.