

Ep #82: Healing Depression: An Interview with Certification Graduate Austin Chason



Full Episode Transcript

With Your Host

Susi Hatley

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Male Announcer: You're listening to *From Pain to Possibility* with Susi Hately. You will hear Susi's best ideas on how to reduce or even eradicate your pain and learn how to listen to your body when it whispers so you don't have to hear it scream. And now here's your host, Susi Hately.

Susi: Welcome back to *From Pain to Possibility*, I am so delighted that you're here, and especially for this episode. Because with this episode I go into an arena of health that people don't necessarily know me for. They certainly know me for biomechanics, they certainly know me for yoga. They don't necessarily know me for the work I do with depression.

And so this might be a surprising dialogue that I'm going to have. I've brought in one of my yoga therapy certification graduates, Austin. And he is going to share his story and his experience, and he's going to share a couple of like how to use the conversation. And really the reason I brought him on is to really highlight what's possible.

I'm someone who in my former marriage I was married to someone who had depression. And together we helped him get out of the grips of depression. So I'm familiar with being someone who supports somebody with depression. And I've worked with clients.

I find that a lot of people who tend to come see me are those who have a biomechanical issue first and foremost, and then there's the depression that shows up. But since Covid that has been shifting a little bit, there are people coming in specifically around mental health issues that they want to be able to work with.

So with Austin here I just want to be able to show you the light of possibility around what it is for recovery and healing. So without further ado, welcome Austin.

Austin: Thank you, Susi. And thanks for having me on.

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Susi: So let's get into this, you had said we want to make sure that we set this up so that people know how to use the conversation, sort of a disclaimer of sorts. So let's start there.

Austin: Yeah, I've noticed in my own experience with depression and then working with other people who lived through it the last thing people like hearing is a list of things that you should be doing. And so this conversation is less about trying to cure you of depression and more of turning the idea of what we think of depression on its head and playing with it a little bit.

The prevailing mythology of our culture, and I use that word mythology very intentionally meaning the background beliefs that we have, is one that separates the individual from everything that's going on around it. And in that process we tend to talk down to ourselves and talk down about our human experience.

And it's a lot like listening to a chamber orchestra and then coming out at the end of it and saying it's just a bunch of horsehair scratching on cat entrails. It's just a bunch of noise that's happening. And so when we do that, and I guess the scientific equivalent of depression would be well it's just your neurons misfiring.

It's just this little thing that's happening inside of your head that exists independently of the entire context. With the chamber orchestra, leaving the music and the beauty of the counterpoint out of that discussion is similar to how we're talking about depression. We're not talking about how it's showing up in the rest of your life and what it can be an indication for.

So this conversation is less about fixing you and more about how are you thinking about your depression. Are you thinking about it as this thing that happens to you and you're just some poor fish who's crawled out of the celestial goo thousands of years ago and you're trying to come back? Or is it an indication of something that's going on in your life? Can it be

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something can turn into your superpower? Is it something that's guiding you in a different direction?

Susi: I love that. I remember when I was with my husband, my first husband, and I came across Cheri Huber. And Cheri Huber is a Zen monk who wrote a book called, of all things, *The Depression Book*. And in that it was sort of the first time I really saw depression in a different way, which was depression is suppression, that's how she labeled it.

And that may be a really simplistic way of looking at it. It was very helpful for my husband and I, or my ex-husband and I. Where it's like okay, so what's actually being suppressed? What's actually going on here? What's the quality here?

And then as we were able to support him in that expression, then things really started to shift for him and so that when he came off of medication, then he was starting to be able to kind of play in that realm of expression and not suppression. Because the medication, I've never taken antidepressants, but from what I understand about them is that they are one of those stimuli we'll call it, inputs, that really dull everything.

It really makes the noise, what you said there, it really makes it all noise or dulls down the noise, I suppose. But it misses out on the vitality or the liveliness of the experience.

Austin: Yeah, I have noticed that, a lot of people who are on any kind of mental health medicine tend to report feeling less overall, particularly with depression. Now, if it's something that's pulling you out of bed in the morning and enabling you to continue with your life, it's doing its job and that's a good thing.

I have never been on anti-depression meds as well. I grew up in a house of people who live with mental illness, some of whom acknowledge it and some of them don't. And I was in that category of not acknowledging it for a

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very long time. And so throughout high school was definitely when I first started having symptoms of it. I would cut myself very regularly, probably up until I took your intensive.

And it's difficult when you are in that space of hopelessness because nothing is going to make you better. And I noticed that trying to fight it doesn't help. And so one of the instincts and impulses that I had for a very long time was I should not be depressed. This is something that I shouldn't have and I should work to overcome this.

And even though I didn't acknowledge to myself that I was depressed, it was the shadow that was lurking in the background that was constantly being kept at bay. And that was taking tolls on the rest of my life, where I couldn't really engage with people. There was like this very surface level performative style of being around people and making them happy but it was kind of to deflect from what was happening inside of me so that way people wouldn't get too close.

And what changed was presence, the power of just being. And that's something that you do very well. I didn't come to the intensive to be cured of depression, I came because I wanted to be a yoga therapist because somehow that's better than being a yoga teacher. Which after this whole experience they're both great.

And so I came in very intent on having that title yoga therapist because somehow it was more legitimate than yoga teacher. And what I found was that opening myself to just being present through movement, all of this came about from learning how to move with my body. I had low back pain chronically since junior high. And Susi started working with me helping me to move better in the legs and the pelvis and all that stuff that I'm sure you all are familiar with by now.

And in that conversation of not compensating, of moving in a place that doesn't need to be moving, that translated to well, where am I moving in my

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mind where I do not be moving? What's happening in that realm? How am I compensating in other areas in my life to make up for the fact that I'm masking this shadow?

And eventually the walls kind of broke down, everything poured out. Things were awful for a very long time, but they were awful in a very good way. They were awful because I was aware of it. I was able to sit with it and be present with it.

Susi: To frame a little bit more what Austin is saying, when I'm working with people at the intensive level we're primarily working with movement patterns because most people who are coming in to see me are coming in from this biomechanical standpoint. And yet there are very few people who come to see me, or many of the graduates of my training, who only have an orthopedic issue.

So what ends up happening is there's these three questions that we ask ourselves. it's like what's moving that should be? And what's moving that shouldn't be, i.e. compensation. And then what should be moving that's not?

And so by answering those three questions we really begin to see biomechanically all right, what's going on? Where's the grip? Where's the brace? Where are they holding their breath? What's moving that really is not intended for the purposes and can be quieted down?

And then that bubbles over into these other aspects, which Austin was referring to. It's like okay, where in my mind and I going that I don't need to go? What's online here that doesn't necessarily need to? What's compensatory? What am I pushing aside? What am I bracing against?

And it doesn't mean that you must go there, I think that's really important. It doesn't even mean you have to engage in the questions. What I have found for those people who resonate with this and are like okay, I think I

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might want to start with those questions it becomes really curious. And as one moves along they start to recognize like where I was taking the conversation from Cheri Huber, is they start to realize the effort it takes to push aside.

Now, not until someone feels really, really safe inside and safe in their environment, from my experience anyway. Our systems have a tremendous capacity to protect ourselves and there's no rush to do any of this. And that your system will actually come forth.

I remember another trainee that I've recently had who one day said to me, "I think I've got it." And I thought she meant something to do with movement or the yellow lights conversation that we had where the yellow lights are the whispers to let you know that the pain would come.

And she said, "I get it around depression." And I'm like, "Oh, do tell me." And she said, "I used to be on the precipice and I would know the depressive episode was going to come. I just knew it, I could taste it, I could feel it. It was just like all right, let's hang on, we're going down the rabbit hole of darkness, it's going to be a swirl."

And then one day she said, "Oh, wait a second, I might not have to go down that. I can choose something else." And she did. And she said, "Maybe this precipice is not the indication that I'm about to go down the rabbit hole. Maybe this is the indication that I need to do X, Y, and Z." And so for her it was self-care, her version of self-care.

And then what started to happen is then she started to notice the whispers or the yellow lights toward the precipice. And then the whispers and yellow lights towards that whisper. And so she became quieter, and quieter, and quieter that she could perceive that which, if I use the words of Cheri Huber, that which she had been previously suppressing.

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And then out of that released a whole bunch of energy and a whole bunch of an awareness of what she really needed to support herself, to the point where she said to me that she doesn't think she's clinically depressed anymore. I'm no one to verify or validate that at all, but it was just curious that that was her experience of what she was experiencing.

So it's interesting the evolution that people can have. So one evolution for her and then where for you, Austin, you were describing how it was really hard. But the hard work also sounding like on some level it made sense.

Austin: Oh, absolutely.

Susi: And that there was structure enough that you could go through it.

Austin: Yeah, there was structure and there was appropriate support. There were people around me who were willing to let me experience the things I was experiencing without trying to tell me how to feel or what I should be feeling.

And I do remember you sharing that story with us early in the certification process. And I remember waking up unable to get out of bed several days and I was like, "When is that day where I choose different going to come for me?" And it was still kind of that process of I need to fix myself, I need to fix myself.

And that's why I really like what you said about it really goes at your own pace and you choose how far you go. And it's not so much you choosing, it's your system choosing. Let's be real, there's very little conscious attention. You can consciously be aware that you are doing this, but your system is your system and you kind of have to go at its pace.

And it's frustrating kind of going at that pace because you want to be able to look deep down into that void and say no thank you. But oftentimes you

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just wake up in the void and you're like, "Oh, I'm here now, what am I doing with this?"

And so recognizing where you are at and recognizing that if you wake up in the morning and you're in that space, or if it just comes on you in the middle of the day that that's just where you are. And something about your day triggered you to get there. Or maybe there wasn't a trigger, that could just be what happened.

And when you can sit with that and just recognize it for what it is that's, for me at least, when things started to change. And it was slow and it was painful. But being open to it really pulled out those things that I was suppressing and pulled them into my conscious attention. I wasn't aware that I was suppressing most things until I sat with it. Until I was inviting it to bubble up to the surface.

Susi: I remember a conversation you shared with us, and I'm going to get this somewhat inaccurate, but I hope that as I share it you'll remember it. You were in the shower, you asked yourself the question, what am I feeling? And then you had the realization, you were answering the question about what you should be feeling. Do you remember that?

Austin: Yeah, that's something I do a lot, I think about what I think about my feelings and I don't let myself feel. And so feeling has been huge component for me these last couple of years.

Yeah, I was just taking a shower, and there's a whole bunch of meditations out there where it's like the who am I meditation and then you get a response at the back of your mind. and your response should be well who is the voice that's talking to me? And it was kind of that moment where I realized whenever I do that kind of meditation it's just me saying the thing back and forth to myself constantly and I'm not actually doing the meditation.

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And so when I was in the shower and I had that moment it was an eye opening experience of like oh, this is just a form of myself blocking. This is that previous belief system, kind of that belief system that I'm just this lowly poor individual who just has this weird chemical imbalance and wakes up depressed.

And it was just kind of this shift because it didn't have to be like that that way anymore. I guess that's my shower moment, that's my shower thought., when I realized that I didn't have to go in that direction. Because there is this other conversation that we can have with ourselves that's based on feeling and not the words we identify with.

Susi: So let's just talk a moment about that distinction because I think it's really important. There are a lot of people who are very cognitive based, logical people. And I've also noticed that with the clientele that I attract they tend to be cognitive, logical people as well. And so that I see the people that I see who have depression, they tend to be logical, analytical people who also are depressed.

Whether those things go hand in hand amongst, I have no idea because I only have my clients to think about. However, what I have noticed is that there is a lot of thinking their way to feeling, or thinking about thinking about thinking. There's just loops of thinking that can happen.

And so what was it for you, not to give like a three step process or the list or anything like of that sort, but from your experience what were the few things that got you into, "Ah, this is feeling. This is feeling. Ah, no, this is feeling. This is feeling. I don't have to think, this is feeling." Because we are wired up to move away from pain and go towards pleasure. So for any person to feel is really tough, for anybody. And then there's folks who just find it that much harder.

So what was it for you, because you were very good at not feeling for a long time, right?

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Austin: Very good at it.

Susi: Yeah, what was it that got you to that feeling place?

Austin: A brick wall who wouldn't let me get away with thinking. And that brick wall was Susi.

Susi: Okay, so now you've got this wall, which you have lovingly called Susi, so now what did you do?

Austin: Because I think with people who identify a lot with thoughts, and in my case in particular, those thoughts become reality. And I think a lot of this goes back to the mythology discussion that I had at the beginning where our symbols get confused with how we show up in the world.

And so the words take the place of the actual meaning of the words. And so there's these conversations that I have with myself that take place of feeling. And so when I wasn't able to use those words anymore I had to rely on something else. And it was an interesting experience because even though the words were still going in my mind, I was open to this feeling because I knew that I wasn't going to be able to communicate with words.

That doesn't make sense because I have to communicate with words. But Susi was calling me out whenever she could recognize that I was relying on the words and the thought processes and not the feeling. And that had never happened to me before, where someone could see if I was coming from a felt sense or not.

And I think that has a lot to do with meditation practices. And a lot of it has to do with a lot of the Ayurveda work that I did with Mona Warner about learning about daily practices and how to support myself. There was a lot of the experience in feeling that was based on well what are stimuli that I'm taking that contributes to feeling this way?

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Smoking weed was one of them, drinking a whole bunch was one of them, and they're all just kind of feel good coping mechanisms. And then once I cut those out because I realized maybe this isn't serving me in the same way, then I realized that there's other practices that I'm engaging in like staying up till three o'clock in the morning for no reason. Or eating foods at specific times. And this one sounds really weird, reading books during specific seasons.

There's all these different practices that take shape throughout the year and while I've been thinking about this podcast I've been thinking a lot about taking care of house plants. If you treat a houseplant the same way in July that you do in December, you're going to kill the house plant. You have to adapt and modify that practice with the plant.

And a lot of the strategies that I've tried and heard about with depression involve one thing. Just do this one thing. And there's not a consistent felt sense in what do you need right now? There's that very intellectual this one thing is going to help you and here's what it is.

And whenever you can really quiet down and feel into well, what is it that I need? That's when a lot of things start to fall apart. People are going to leave you and you're going to leave people. And that's okay. And that's where I think a lot of the magic in this is, is because you are coming into your authentic self by really listening to what it is that you need.

But I was only able to come to realize what I needed because someone was offering me a different way. Someone was showing me how to feel as opposed to thinking my way into things.

Susi: That was really, really great. And I remember when you were having those realizations. Mona, she's been on the podcast before and she's a trainer in the certification program. And I remember your explaining your realizations around oh, maybe this stimuli was what we call them, or input, isn't actually serving me.

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And there's not a reason why I use that word, because I actually believe that is what everything is that we do. And so it's like what we do is not right or wrong, it's like what's the result from what it is that we do? And do we like that result? And there are times when coping mechanisms are absolutely vital and important.

Austin: 100%.

Susi: And then there are times when those coping mechanisms start to turn on us in a sense and they're no longer the supportive, sustainable things that they had been in that coping way. And so then that's what you were starting to really recognize, it's like oh, these aren't actually serving me and then started to kind of play with that.

I love that plant analogy, I'm going to so use that because it really is true like how we are in different seasons has an impact. Which is one reason with my former husband he had a really rough time in February. Like February, March-ish in Canada it's dark and we're coming out of deep winter. And that can be a really tough time for a lot of people, it was for him.

Whereas other parts of the year it wasn't as big, and so it got to the point where he could actually predict in October, what would happen in February, he'd kind of get a feel of it. And then sort of it was just interesting to see how the trajectory of it went.

So yeah, so it becomes it's really, really interesting when you've got that space. Because the thing with you, Austin, and I have found this as well with other people who I've worked with with anxiety and depression is that the mechanisms by which you have to not feel are often— You're very articulate, you can use big words. And there's times when your intelligence, you over utilize it.

And that's what I would always pick up on. I'm like, "Oh, look, he's up in his thinking. He's really overthinking here." And that was sort of one of the

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clues for me. And so in some ways that could kind of get you around the brick wall before.

Austin: Yep.

Susi: And then it stopped working.

Austin: And then it stopped working. And then it crashed and burned and I was like, "Well, there's that coping mechanism."

Susi: Those are really interesting insights there around just noticing what it is that one is doing, and is that serving or is that not serving? That's, I think, a great place to begin.

Austin: Absolutely. And also going into that, that wasn't possible for me until much later in the process. I didn't start thinking about the future until I realized I could have one. Because for the longest time my coping mechanisms were just getting me to the next suicidal thought. There was no hope past tomorrow for a very long time.

And then it was about, I guess it was like a quarter, maybe halfway through the certification process where I started to see months and months into the future. And then now I'm years into the future, like where I'm thinking and planning and that is possible for me.

And so when we talk about coping mechanisms, that was getting me through day to day, but I wasn't able to get rid of those coping mechanisms because there was never a future for me. There was never something beyond tomorrow. And so I think that's important to relate to people, that you don't have to have anything other than what's getting you through today.

Susi: I love that.

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Austin: And you just need to acknowledge that this is keeping me well right now. And sure, I'm staying in bed and I feel lazy. I feel like I should be productive. I feel like I should be something. And you are taking care of yourself. That is self-care. And for anyone who's in that space, good job. You are doing it.

Susi: Love it. That's really excellent. Because I think the other message that I'm hoping is coming across through this is there's nothing wrong and there's nothing bad. And even as I say that I'm thinking, oh gosh, there's probably people out there saying what are you talking about? Of course depression is bad and wrong.

So how would you kind of add on to that? How is it that it's not bad? How is it that it's not wrong?

Austin: That's a really good point because there's a lot of that fake positivity where it's like be thankful for your depression. And that's not— Depression sucks, if somebody tells you be thankful for your depression, punch them in the face and spit with as much ahimsa as possible. And so it's a difficult line to walk. And I've noticed that it's less about making it okay and more about being okay with it.

Susi: Great distinction.

Austin: And that's not to say you're resigned to it, because that's also a different category that you can get into. But noticing I am here now and that is enough. As I am, with all of this baggage, as crappy as I feel, I am here now. And from that point everything falls into place.

I've been using map analogies a lot recently, where like if you were going to take an Uber ride somewhere— Do you have Uber in Canada?

Susi: Yes, we have Uber.

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Austin: Okay. If you're going to take an Uber— I'm sorry, I don't know, different companies. If you're going to take an Uber ride somewhere but the Uber doesn't know where to pick you up, you're not going to get to where you're going. And so in a very similar way, if you don't know where you are with everything that's going on with you, you're not going to get to where you want to be.

And you may not know where you want to be right now, and that's okay. What you do know is that you don't want to keep feeling this way. And you can start feeling into the experience that you're having right now and let it be okay. Because all of that's just clues, all of that's just data letting you know something.

And when you can sit with that something, you can filter out and determine what can I do to support this?

Susi: And then with that support, then something changes. Because as we mentioned earlier in the episode, and I think this is a great way to kind of wrap it up, is that what we said earlier in the episode is that your system is your system. And your system will move at the pace that your system moves at. And it really moves at its pace, there is a relationship to the level of support. And sometimes we will say that there is support there. But really when the support is actually there, that's when we see the shift.

And so sometimes we don't know the support is there until we see the shift. We're not necessarily sure what the support necessarily is, just all of a sudden there is change there. So I think, again, if we kind of keep bringing sort of this to a closure, when we think about key points around utilizing this conversation, what are sort of three bullet points you'd like to leave people with, Austin?

Austin: It's okay where you're at, even if it's in bed. Not knowing what's beyond tomorrow is okay, but trust that there is a tomorrow. And then the last thing goes back to the early point that I made, be careful of what we as

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a culture define depression as and what you as an individual can experience it as, because those two are not the same thing.

And so there's common knowledge, and it's common for a reason, because it's a way to communicate to a larger number of people. And there is also the experience that you are having, and that is very different than a series of misfiring neurons.

Susi: We are more than our anatomy, aren't we?

Austin: We are much more than our anatomy, we're star stuff.

Susi: So with that, if you're listening to this and you're like, "Oh yeah, this was great." I'm going to provide you two options. One is that Austin will be inside of the Healing And Revealing Human Potential program teaching in February. And we're going to be having anxiety and depression conversations to really support people who are in those spaces.

And if you are teachers or health professionals who work with those people in those spaces and you want more yoga, meditative, Ayurvedic type of techniques to support you, that is where it's all happening in February. And we would love love, love to have you in there. All you need to do is email us at health@functionalsynergy. You have a conversation with Kia, she can give you all the lowdown of what that is all about.

And the other is if you just want to go direct to the source and work directly with Austin, Austin, what's the best way for people to reach you?

Austin: You can reach me on Instagram or you can email me at yoga4everyone@gmail.com.

Susi: And then your handle on Instagram is yoga4everyone?

Austin: It's yoga4everyone.

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Susi: Great. Okay, well that's where you can find Austin. And if you have really liked and this episode has resonated with you, it would be fantastic if you could post a review on Apple or a comment because that is the way that these podcasts get out to people and how they get referred or how the algorithm works. So a five star review and a comment would just go a huge way to help this episode reach more people.

Thank you again, Austin. Love, love, love, love, love, looking forward to our work in February.

Take care everybody, we'll see you next time.

Austin: Thank you.