



1002: If You Spot it, You Got it: Why Triggers are Teachers (Solo Episode)

Child: Welcome to my mommy's podcast!

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This podcast is brought to you by BIOptimizers and in particular, their product that holds my heart, which is their Magnesium Breakthrough. My goal this year is to continue to focus on my wellness and to create more harmony and resonance, and we all know that the foundation of health is a good night's sleep.

I talk about that so much on this podcast. And magnesium is the one nutrient that helps my sleep so much as well as so many other aspects of my health because magnesium is vital for so many things within the body, and it is nearly impossible to get enough from food anymore. And Magnesium Breakthrough from BIOptimizers is in a category of its own.

They have seven different forms of magnesium in one supplement, and since magnesium is involved in over 600 different biochemical reactions in the body, no other supplement on the market offers all seven types of magnesium in one bottle. Pretty much every function of

your body is upgraded when you take magnesium regularly from the quality of your sleep to your brain function, from metabolism to stress levels, and so much more.

This is one of the few supplements that lives on my nightstand and I'm a little odd, but I take every morning because I actually get energy from it though most people notice that it's better at night. Now studies point to a lot of benefits of magnesium, including that it may help improve sleep quality, especially by supporting healthy sleep onset and have more peaceful nights.

Magnesium is also involved in stress management support and it may help maintain energy levels and positive mood while also supporting mental clearness and relaxation. Magnesium is also important for healthy and balanced muscle tone and providing the building blocks to strong bones, and it promotes a balanced stress response, supports relaxation.

And I feel much calmer when I'm regularly taking magnesium. So let's face it, even if your 2025 resolution is not all about focusing on your health like mine is, how are you going to be able to achieve your goals in any area without enough quality sleep and stress management? Check out Magnesium Breakthrough and make it part of your daily routine this year as well.

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Katie: Hello and welcome to the Wellness Mama podcast. I'm Katie from wellnessmama.com. And in this short solo episode, I am not talking about physical health, but something that actually I feel like personally for me has related to mental and emotional health quite a lot. And has been a tough learned lesson that I'm still learning and often one, I have not necessarily enjoyed looking at.

However it has been a helpful teacher, which is the idea of if you spot it, you've got it. And I'll explain what that means more in depth in this episode, but essentially why our triggers can be incredible teachers. And how I've noticed, at least for me, a pattern that what often annoys me most in other people points instead to parts of myself that I am not integrated or in acceptance of, or that are unhealed parts.

And so there's a mirror and a trigger there. And this relates somewhat to Carl Young's shadow work and it, it will tie in ideas of projection and self recognition. Obviously, this is a deep psychological topic and I am by no means a psychologist, psychiatrist, or anyone qualified to give advice in that realm.

So I'm strictly sharing in this episode things I have noticed in myself and patterns and what's been helpful to me. None of this is advice. As always, anything I say in these podcasts is meant to strictly be informational or inspirational. Never prescriptive. Or advice. I'm strictly sharing my opinion and I would love to hear yours and if this resonates and what has worked for you.

I'm also gonna touch on a few practical tools that have helped me personally in case they might be helpful to you as well, and some real life examples of spotting it and how this led to some breakthroughs for me. So, this was a thing and it took me a lot, a long time to finally start noticing. But we all have people who drive us crazy for whatever reason.

Maybe it is the interrupter, someone who's chronically late, the loud talker, the know-it-alls, but whoever it is, we've all had people at different times that just drive us crazy. And the uncomfortable truth that I have noticed almost without exception in my life, is that what annoys us is often a reflection of something within us. And that has not been a fun pattern to realize.

And even realizing that, I still have blind spots related to this. And even recently had a day where several people annoyed me and I realized, oh wow, what is in this lesson that is within myself that I'm not wanting to look at, that these people are simply being a mirror for? So a small example would be, I once got so irritated with a friend of mine who it felt like she always had to be right all the time, and it made it about her and the problem outside of her and, and I was in my head about the situation.

I found myself not wanting to spend as much time with her. And eventually I realized this mirrored my own inner desire to be right or to be perceived as smart and how of course there was like a little bit of a competitiveness in this there. Because I also wanted to be right. But also how there's a part of me that I didn't wanna look at or acknowledge that I also had that same desire.

And there's actually some data around this as well. There's something called the projection study, which was in 2001, showed that people who denied aggression perceived others as more aggressive. So they noticed it outside of themselves, not within themselves. We also know that humans often have a negativity bias where our brains are wired to focus on the negative or focus on what irritates us. Probably because at some point there was a survival aspect to this, but we are five times more likely to notice negative bias than positive. And there's also a positive side to this, which is data showing the benefits of self-reflection. People who practice self-inquiry and are willing to go into this have lower stress levels and higher emotional regulation.

And of course, easier said than done. But the concept that I've heard from many other people, I certainly don't claim this as an original concept, but the idea that if you spot it, you got it. And this is tooted in Carl Young's idea of the shadow and in work related to that. His specific quote, I believe, was "Everything that irritates us about others can lead us to an understanding of ourselves." Or as my friend Aaron Alexander says, never waste a trigger.

And there's also the mirror principle, which is that other people act like mirrors, which show us unintegrated parts of ourselves. So in that sense, everyone can be a teacher. I feel like this can be especially true as parents. Our kids can be tremendous mirrors. We love them so much and they have an ability to sometimes mirror really uncomfortable parts of ourselves that we may not wanna look at. But that we might be willing to because of, because we care about our relationship with them.

Also, I wanna point out as an important caveat, this, if the idea of you, if you spot it, you got it, or seeing something in someone else. That doesn't mean we're exactly like this person. It means that some aspect resonates, which may be suppressed, may be unhealed, maybe something we're subconsciously not looking at.

There's some aspect. It does not mean we are just like them, nor does it mean necessarily that anything within this is wrong. It's simply an opportunity for curiosity.

I also wanna go a little bit into my perception of the idea of why this happens in the first place. And the idea of psychological projection, which is a defense mechanism where we project our disowned traits onto someone else. And there's a lot of better explanation than I can give on this in things like IFS, Internal Family Systems and in lots of different types of therapy work.

But it's a psychological thing that we often take the problem and put it outside of ourselves to make it feel easier to deal with. Research shows that projection is common. One study found people who denied having aggressive tendencies were likely to perceive aggression in others at a higher rate. And that was in the Journal of Personality and Social Psychology in 2001.

We also know that humans have something called mirror neurons. Our brains are wired to reflect what we see in others, and sometimes this discomfort is recognition of something within ourselves, which can be an uncomfortable truth. Especially if it's something that really bugs us in someone else. And it's so much easier to let that problem remain outside of us.

And there's also the concept of suppression, in that we often, the traits that we dislike in ourselves resurface when we see them outside of ourselves. So this is a trigger and it's challenging our suppression, our successful suppression of these traits. Therefore it's

uncomfortable. So some practical examples of this, if we are annoyed by arrogance, for example, maybe we've suppressed our own confidence or our fear of being too much. And so seeing this in someone else becomes a mirror, or it might be that we actually like have those parts of ourselves and we've been actively suppressing our own confidence.

And that is simply mirroring and triggering that suppression within us. Or if we are triggered by laziness or judging laziness, maybe we are overworked and resentful for not allowing ourselves to rest. Maybe the mirror is pointing toward that. Or if we are irritated by someone who always needs attention, maybe we actually crave recognition and deny it to ourselves, or don't allow it from others as well.

Maybe we have core questions about our worthiness and deeply desire to actually have the attention that we perhaps did not have as a child. There's also often, I feel like, more than one thing wrapped up into a single cause here. So as a personal example, I've been in the online world for almost 20 years now, which is crazy to say. And have been through a lot of the evolutions of the internet.

The forum era, the initial social media commenting era. It's been the Wild West out there at different times. And at different points in that with where I was on health journey, pregnancies, et cetera, I have been like vastly varied shapes and sizes and physical appearance during that time. And throughout the years, I have gotten quite a lot of comments that were extremely physically or emotionally hurtful to me, including finding whole forums on the internet entirely dedicated to picking apart my appearance.

And that one actually for weeks, I was in my head about, and it was really, really difficult at the time. And there were times in that I even considered fully removing myself from the work on the internet and from Wellness Mama because of that. And what I realized when I was willing to get really radically honest with myself.

Is that these things were hurtful because A, there was an element of truth in them. I still was working on healing and finding my metabolic healthy point and resolving thyroid things and postpartum and all kinds of stuff. So it was mirroring one of my greatest insecurities, and there was an element of truth in that, that I was deeply insecure about.

And it revealed my own inner critic and insecurities. Those comments hurt because I also said those things to myself internally, and I didn't like admitting this. I also, my inner critic often said hurtful things about other people, not usually on the internet or even to their face, but internally. And so it was a very uncomfortable thing to get to face and a beautiful chance to start paying attention to that and to shift that.

And I realized that at least the parts I could control were learning to slowly shift my inner critic and the voice toward myself and toward other people, because I couldn't, of course,

control what strangers on the internet think of me. But I can control even my inner dialogue around other people. And I found that as I found more grace and joy and positivity and kindness, even in my inner thoughts that no one else ever heard.

But even as those shifted about other people and about myself, interestingly, the outer reality started to shift as well. So those comments were hurtful because there was an element of them that was true and it was also a beautiful opportunity and place to grow when I was willing to face it. I'll say I've by no means done this perfectly.

I'm still in the journey of that and sometimes comments are still hurtful and I've gotten better over the years at realizing that what other people think of me is actually none of my business. And not dwelling on that or certainly not seeking out those places on the internet where people are just having conversations to pick apart my appearance. And I'm really grateful that that was such a trigger to that inner lesson.

I also wanna point out the positive flip side here because this is not always a negative principle. The idea of if you've spotted, you got it. Sometimes spotting positive traits also reflect positive things within us. Like if you admire it, you have it often. And like if anything where our energy goes, our attention flows, or what we resist, persist. What we flow our positive energy toward often can blossom.

And I've noticed the more I have both naturally or intentionally started noticing the beautiful positive qualities in other people. The more I'm willing to acknowledge them in myself and the more of them I see. And it's a much more pleasant way to go through life. Over time, having trained this muscle of noticing the beautiful things in people to go through life, seeing that beauty everywhere rather than seeing the negativity.

And it was an intentional practice for me. I didn't just wake up one day and have the ability to see the beautiful things in people, and I'm still working on growing that ability. But it is a much more pleasant way to go through life is to just... And I find myself now like constantly having moments of, wow, humans are so incredible, or that person, that's amazing what they did.

It's just a lot more fun. So I feel like this is a little bit of the ambiguous part. I'm going to attempt to provide some of the tools that have helped me in learning this journey. I do feel like it's a very individual journey. Probably not in any ways a linear path. Different things, of course, like in anything will work differently for different people.

But some maybe things that might be helpful if you are curious about doing an exploration into where this might be applicable in your life. Some practical suggestions. The first one, incredibly simple, but that is simply to pause and reflect. I think this is actually extremely beneficial life advice in many, many areas, but especially when we are triggered. Rather

than immediately responding, taking a deep breath, and then asking, what is this showing me about me?

And sitting with the answer for a minute, because likely it's not entirely about the other person. It might not be about the other person at all. And this can be a topic for different podcasts, but I actually find this is potentially one of the most helpful parenting tools as well. And the idea of getting curious, visiting with our kids' realities instead of assuming that our reality is correct.

And Dr. Kelly Brogan tells a beautiful story of this on her podcast, which I love and highly recommend. It's called Reclamation Radio, but where she tells the story of how she asked her daughters at one point what they needed from her and what, if anything, sort of like that she had, like was unhealed within them or that they needed from her and were not getting. And she got a response from one of her daughters, a text response talking about... And like, well, to to preface, she expected to get kind of a glowing review of what a great mom she was.

And instead one of her daughters wrote back very heartfelt, but hard for her to hear message, talking about all the ways that she felt like she had not shown up for her at different times. Or things that had been really painful for her for different reasons throughout her childhood. And Kelly's lesson in that she had the instinct to self defend as we all do, and to tell her side of the story.

And like, if only they understood, then they wouldn't feel that way. And instead she paused and reflected. And felt the parts of that that were true. But more importantly, she decided to be present with her child's reality rather than to be right. So rather than defend herself, she went to her daughter and said, can you tell me more?

And they had a great conversation and that was one of, I would guess of many things that really positively impacted her relationship with her daughter. And I think obviously our children are very important relationships in our lives. I think this has wide applicability into practically any relationship. And many, many things, I've learned this lesson the hard way myself many times, could have been navigated much more gracefully if I simply paused and reflected before responding, rather than acting on the immediate emotional impulse, but instead getting curious about it. Finding out what that trigger might perhaps be willing to teach me.

There's also the idea of the 3, 2, 1 shadow process, which I believe comes from Ken Wilbur. And this one helped me to kind of like mentally sort this out or figure out what the trigger might be when it felt a little ambiguous. So the idea of 3, 2, 1 is third person, second person, and then first person. So starting with the third person.

What bothers you in them? They are arrogant, they're loud, they're late, whatever it is that you think the problem is outside of you. Name what bothers you in them. The second person would be, speak to them in a dialogue. Doesn't have to be out loud or directly to them, but in your mind, speak to them in dialogue and tell them. And then the first person touches directly on this concept we're talking about, and you own the concept in the first person. So, I am this thing, or I am showing signs of, if you don't wanna use the words, I am in a, in a negatively powerful way. Or I feel, or my experience is. But put it back in the first person because now when it's in the first person, you now have some ability to affect change in that area.

I also, you've heard me say this in relation to a lot of things in life. But if we can shift into more curiosity and away from judgment, that also opens up a whole realm of possibilities for us in growth and in healing and simply learning about ourselves and others. If you haven't seen the show, Ted Lasso, there's a beautiful scene where he mentions the Walt Whitman quote about curiosity, not judgment. And there's a dartboard scene, which is perhaps my favorite scene in any TV show of all time. But it's such a good reminder to as much as possible stay in a state of curiosity and not judgment. So replace thoughts like, oh, I hate it when blah, blah, blah, to, I'm curious what this is mirroring in me.

Or I wonder what in me is reacting to this? Simply moving it back into our own agency, to our own ability to affect change, and into our own self-inquiry gives us so much more authentic power and often peace and grace related to whatever it's going on. Also, I feel like it's important to have conscious self-compassion within this work or within anything that's touching on these deep inner realms that can be so uncomfortable at different times.

Because noticing isn't about blame. I feel like in almost every case, blame is largely not helpful, but it's about integrating. So staying in that curiosity versus shifting into the cause and effect of blame and trying to fix it. Instead get curious and try to integrate it. So some journaling prompts that you could play with in this arena would be, what bothers me the most in others? Where does this live in me, even in very small ways? How might this trait be useful if it was integrated? And what would it feel like to be unbotherable by outside forces? And this is something that a lot of the stoics even talk about, is that we of course can't affect the outside world. We can't affect, we can't change other people.

We can't force other people to be how we want them to be. But we have complete ability to shift our own perceptions, emotions, responses especially. And what peace comes when we can find a place of being unaffected by that, which is without us. Some benefits that I have found as I've done this work. I, like I said, it has been very painful at times.

I don't think any of the deep work is always easy along the path. But I have found that by shifting into this curiosity, accepting that when something bothers me, it is because it is resonating with something within me that I may not wanna look at. Over time this has reduced irritation and conflicts quite a lot and led to some really fascinating insight within myself.

I also feel like it's very helpful for empathy because we can see others more easily as humans, just like us when we acknowledge the mirror that is within us that is seeing those things in others. And when triggers become teachers, it turns simply painful circumstances into guides and lessons that can have a really positive impact on us and on others. And I think it also frees up a tremendous amount of our creative energy, which is an intangible.

There's no lab test for this, but when we shift away from annoyance or judgment or anger and into creativity or presence or love, we unlock more of our own creative inner force and have more bandwidth for the things that actually light us up. So this one I know is a little bit more conceptual than tactical, but as key takeaways or just a summary. I just love to bring up this concept as a curiosity, as an idea, as a place of inquiry, not as advice, but the idea that triggers might be teachers.

Perhaps something in this podcast even triggered you. Perhaps there's a chance for curiosity there. Reminding that the idea of if you spot it, you got it, is not about blame, it's about opportunity. And it's about actually returning our power to ourselves, and ability to affect change in a positive way in our lives.

And that even where these things mirror painful things or these triggers point to uncomfortable parts of ourselves, those are also opportunities. As Rumi said, the wound is the place where the light enters you. And I would love to hear your experience with this, if you've noticed anything similar, if you have had any similar realizations in your life, what those examples look like for you. Or to hear what topics, questions, guests you would like me to jump into in future episodes of this podcast. I do read every comment and rating and review as well as most of my messages on Instagram, so I'd love for you to reach out in any of those places.

And I would be deeply, deeply grateful if you would take two minutes to leave an honest rating and review wherever you listen to podcasts. This really helps other people to find the podcast and helps to keep it going and growing, and I'm always so grateful. And of course, I'm grateful for your time, your energy, and your attention for you sharing with those with me today. And I hope that you will join me again on the next episode of the Wellness Mama Podcast.