John Moe: We're gonna talk about burnout, and you'll find out how to fight burnout and feel better. But first, the Guggenheim Smithsonians were a Seattle band, mid-'90s. They never recorded an album. They only ever played two or maybe three live shows. And in those shows, they only ever played three songs, one of them being "Godzilla" by Blue Öyster Cult.

In performance, their version of "Godzilla" featured a brief interlude where Tina, the lead singer, shouted, "Puppet show!" and then did a puppet show of what was happening in the song "Godzilla". At one of these shows, I sat in on drums on Godzilla and played without hands. It was only kickdrum and high hat. Here's where I tell you that the Guggenheim Smithsonians are still regarded as the most important band in post-grunge Seattle. But I'm not gonna say that, because that's probably not the case.

I remembered this because I was thinking about Blue Öyster Cult. I never considered myself a super fan, but there's more there than I expected. There was that one Gugg's show. There's my continued belief that "Don't Fear the Reaper" would be a fascinating, deeply inappropriate high school prom theme. And I always insist on one particular Blue Öyster Cult song whenever we talk about burnout.

Music: "Burnin' For You" from the album *Fire of Unknown Origin* by the band Blue Öyster Cult.

Burn out the day

Burn out the night

I can't no reason to put up a fight

I'm living for giving the devil his due

And I'm burning, I'm burning, I'm burning for you

I'm burning, I'm burning, I'm burning for you

(Music fades out.)

John Moe: Frankly, we could talk about burnout every week on this program. More people are experiencing it now than ever, more intensely than ever. Life is stressful. I mean, life was always already stressful. But given the modern sociopolitical situation and economy and climate, it's even more so. And as a result, more people get to the point where the constant, gnawing stress gets to be too much for their mind and their body, and they start to break down.

Maybe it's happened to you. Maybe you're nervous that it's about to. Burnout used to be seen as exclusively a workplace issue. Then it was extended to parenting. And now *(sighs)* I think it's life. Particularly given the blurry line between work and home and everything else in our modern society. I've been thinking about burnout here in Minnesota, given the siege and activity and killings by the federal government here. It's so stressful. It's such constant stress. You wake up with it; you go to bed with it; you experience it while you sleep. And here in Minnesota, we didn't know when or if all this activity would end.

It hasn't ended, by the way.

So, it becomes a matter of what we're going to do about burnout. Fortunately, I know Dr. Emily Nagoski. She's been on the show before, talking about sex. She wrote the book *Come As You Are*. Emily also wrote *Burnout: The Secret to Unlocking the Stress Cycle* with her twin, Dr. Amelia Nagoski, who's a music conductor. Emily says burnout is real. It's intense. We can improve our situation, and we can do that by employing—her phrase here—bubbles of love. That's not a sex thing.

Transition: Spirited acoustic guitar.

John Moe: Emily Nagoski, welcome back to *Depresh Mode*.

Emily Nagoski: I am so genuinely thrilled to be here talking about this.

John Moe: Shall we start with Herbert Freudenberger?

Emily Nagoski: *(Excitedly.)* Shall we?! Yeah, let's just go ahead and start with it. So, he—

John Moe: He coined the term. We gotta give it up for Herbert coining the term.

Emily Nagoski: —gave us the original definition of burnout, which will be familiar to many people. He was studying specifically workplace burnout,

specifically air traffic controllers. Herbert Freudenberger is studying workplace burnout, and he comes up with these three defining characteristics—which will feel, uhh, so familiar to so many people. The first one is emotional exhaustion. Which is just exactly what it sounds like. It's the fatigue you feel when you've just been in a high, elevated state of emotion for too long. And like, your body can't sustain that forever. And eventually it will collapse. The second one is depersonalization, which is where— I mean, especially if you're in like a caretaking capacity, you emotionally check out from your job, like to preserve your sanity.

John Moe: Is that similar to the—and we'll get to the third one, but is that similar to the emotional thing where you just run out of emotional gas, and you just don't feel anymore? Or is there a difference there?

Emily Nagoski: There's like a cognitive— One is straight-up emotional, where if— So, if I'm emotionally exhausted and a person who is in a desperate state comes to me needing something, I have nothing left to give. But if I'm depersonalized, that person comes to me with desperation and needs something, and I… have emotionally disconnected from empathy and don't care. We've all run into burnt out service workers and people who were like, "You—? Oh, I see what's going on! You cannot afford to care about my situation. And so, you are not caring and you're protecting yourself. And I see that. And I wish your situation were better so that you could help me." Right?

John Moe: Calling health insurance companies comes to mind for this one.

Emily Nagoski: Yeah! Exactly! Like, those people deal with calls like yours all day, every day.

John Moe: And they're broken. Yeah. Yeah.

Emily Nagoski: And those calls are always distressing, and they just have to check out for their own sanity. Though you're not sane anymore when you get to that point. So, the third one is a decreased sense of accomplishment, where you feel like you're working and working and working; you're putting in so much effort, and you're not making anything like the kind of progress you feel like you ought to have been making considering how much effort you're putting in. Sisyphus!

John Moe: Right, right. Okay. So—and this was a workplace thing, and I understand Freudenberger had reached this point himself with— You know, there was a story where they talked to his kids. And they were like, "Yeah, this is what he was going through too." *(Chuckles.)* But this was—

Emily Nagoski: I do not relate to the idea of studying something because it's what you're experiencing.

John Moe: *(Laughs.)* Yeah. Well, we'll get to the blurred lines between work and life here in a moment.

(Emily laughs.)

But—so, then that was the introduction of that kind of thinking. This is something that had enough to it that caught on. And then over time, did people start applying this to more than just the workplace, or is that a brand-new thing?

Emily Nagoski: It's pretty— It's like last 10-20 years, which feels brand-new to me from a science perspective. But there have been books published about like parental burnout, which is another situation where so much is being demanded of you, especially emotionally. And sometimes people—especially if you've got a trauma history or struggle with mental health issues or addiction—like, you have to check out because you have nothing left. And it's, uh—*(sighs)* anybody who has ever had little kids knows what it's like to have to set a boundary. My mother used to tell stories about like just going into the bathroom and sitting on the toilet seat just to have five minutes of alone time. And we—she would tell us these stories of sticking our fingers under the bathroom door and calling to her.

(They laugh.)

'Cause we just were like, "MOOOM!"

John Moe: Yeah. Yeah. No, I've been in that bathroom when that's—*(laughs)* I think in my life I've probably been on both sides of that door.

Emily Nagoski: Just five minutes of silence.

John Moe: Yeah. Well, if this is something that people have been going through—I remember when my kids were young, just thinking about— You know, I have three kids. And when they were young, just thinking, "This is an unimaginable amount of work that I will have to do for an unimaginably long time." Because it's a 24-hour job. And when the kids were like two/three years old, like, "Oh my god, how can I perform this job and still function?"

Emily Nagoski: Yeah. And the answer is you can't.

John Moe: Yeah.

Emily Nagoski: The solution—just like to skip to the end, the cure for burnout is not any kind of self-care. And I'm gonna talk so much about self-care, but it isn't actually the answer. The cure is all of us taking care of each other. What you need when you've got little kids is not greater skills. You need more help.

John Moe: Yeah. Okay. Well, okay, so we've talked about Freudenberger. What about Nagoski, and the Nagoski sisters, *(chuckles)* from the book *Burnout: The Secret to Unlocking the Stress Cycle* by Emily and Amelia Nagoski? Your twin sister, Amelia. How are you—? Let's start with definitions there. How are you defining burnout in a way that's evolved from Herbert Fruedenberger, whose name I enjoy saying?

Emily Nagoski: Yeah. Amelia also likes saying it. I should note that, since we wrote *Burnout*, Amelia has realized that they're nonbinary; they're agender.

John Moe: Oh, okay!

Emily Nagoski: So, Amelia is my identical twin.

John Moe: Gotcha.

Emily Nagoski: And I tend to use they/them pronouns. "She" is fine. Amelia wouldn't be distressed if you use "she," but she's also not distressed if you use "he." So, I tend to default to "they" these days. And imagine being a sex educator, 45 years old, and your twin is like, "Hey, did you know that agender is a thing?"

Yeah, of course, I knew that's a thing! How come you didn't?!

(They laugh.)

John Moe: Welcome, Amelia!

Emily Nagoski: Right? Yaaay, you discovered that! But like, oh, what happened that I never had a conversation about like, "Part of gender identity is not having—" Anyway. So, when we were writing the book, it was based on Amelia's experience of being in grad school. And I don't know if you know that classical music, the field of classical music, is just as misogynist as any STEM field. And as a femme person in a choral conducting program, Amelia got so burned out that they were hospitalized twice. And I, as a health educator—

John Moe: With what symptoms?

Emily Nagoski: The reason that they— So, she went to the emergency room with abdominal pain so intense she thought she was dying. They kept her—they admitted her and kept her because her white blood cell count was through the roof. And I thought Amelia's story was really extreme, and it was going to be the extreme story we told in the book to help illustrate how bad it can get. The very first public event we did to promote *Burnout*, a woman came up to us after the talk and said, "I was just released from the hospital today. And the diagnosis they gave me was just stress."

John Moe: Ah! Okay. Well, so—okay. So, Amelia goes into the hospital, white blood cell—

Emily Nagoski: *(Strained.)* Twice!

John Moe: Twice! White blood cell count off the charts. Their body is fighting something; there is an invasion that has taken place.

Emily Nagoski: Fighting something. The second time, they finally removed Amelia's appendix, 'cause it was inflamed enough for them to be like, "Let's just get rid of this."

John Moe: Don't need it anyway.

Emily Nagoski: Right. Yeah. And it was not responding well to the amount of stress that Amelia was experiencing. So, it was those experiences. And me, I'm a professional health educator. We grew up in an emotionally stunted home of family of origin, and so I responded by providing her with a stack of peer reviewed science that's like, "Hi. Stress exists in your body. It is a physiological event. And what you're experiencing is what happens when the stress you accumulate gets so intense that organ systems start to fail."

John Moe: Okay! *(Unclear.)*

Emily Nagoski: And the phone call I got as Amelia's reading this science, she calls me soooobbing. And they're like, "*(Upset.)* You mean to tell me that stress is a physical, biological event and not just in my head?!" Yes. Yes.

John Moe: Not an emotion. Not exclusively an emotion.

Emily Nagoski: It IS an emotion! All emotions happen in your body! How do you know you're excited or in love? There are physical symptoms that happen to you when you are in love. And so— But we talk about them as being like emotions

are things that happen in your head, when really they happen all over. They use your whole physiology. Every organ system can be involved in emotional experiences.

John Moe: And from what I've understood— I don't know much about medicine, but the head is connected to the body through a whole series of tubes and attachments!

Emily Nagoski: So, one of the ways I like to talk about literal physiological pain and also emotional experiences, when people say, "Are you saying it's all in your head?" like it's a dismissive thing to say: "Yeah! 'Cause that's where your brain is! Your brain is part of your body, and it's super involved in all of these things that are happening. Yes, yes. Congratulations. You worked it out!"

John Moe: *(Laughs.)* You know, I didn't pay much attention in biology class, but I nailed that one.

Emily Nagoski: Yeah. Head, shoulders, knees, and toes.

John Moe: Knees and toes! So, Amelia is in there, and they say that they have stress—that it's stress that's causing it. What's the difference between stress and burnout?

Emily Nagoski: Stress is a thing that happens to all of us in response to anything that our bodies perceive as being a potential threat. Which can be— In the environment where we evolved, that's gonna be predatory animals and stuff like that. Like, if you're being chased by a lion, your body experiences a stress response physiologically. These days our stressors, the things that activate the stress in our body, are almost never things that can actually kill you right away. But our bodies don't really know the difference between a lion and the helicopter overhead.

It responds with a VERY similar stress response. Now, the effective strategy for managing the stressor—the thing that activated the stress in your body? Really different when it's a lion versus a helicopter, right? The process of dealing with the stress itself? Almost exactly the same. Because your body doesn't know the difference. So, this is the place where we're at, where the process of dealing with our stressors—the things that activate the stress—has to be separate from the process of dealing with the physiological stress itself.

John Moe: Okay! Okay. So… slow that one down for me. Make that differentiation really clear.

Emily Nagoski: Okay. So, you're in a workplace. You're in a meeting. And you suggest an idea; the idea gets sort of dismissed. That's fine. That happens. Five minutes later, Justin says exactly the same thing, and your boss says, "You know what? That's brilliant!" And your body goes PWFF! Chemistry! Adrenaline, and cortisol, and glucocorticoids, and your body gets activated as if you are being chased by a lion. Or in this case, instead of it being the flight version, it's the fight version where you want to— If it's an in-person meeting, man, you wanna like crawl across the table and tear your boss's face off! Not like literally, but like— But you behave yourself, because you wanna have a job tomorrow also.

So, the process of dealing with the stressor—which is to say this workplace situation that all of us have experienced, and we just take a deep breath and put a smile on our faces and say, "Yes, that's a great idea." And you collaborate and are nice. And the wonderful thing about humans and their bodies and emotions is your body will just go ahead and hold on to that spinning, activated stress response as loooong as you need it to.

Transition: Spirited acoustic guitar.

John Moe: Okay, so then you have that stress built up inside of you, and you're holding onto it, and what do you do with it? We'll find out after the break.

Transition: Gentle acoustic guitar.

John Moe: We are back talking with Emily Nagoski about stress and holding onto it and burnout. A big part of Emily's approach to burnout is that you have to complete the stress cycle. Let's find out what that means, because it's rrreally helpful.

Emily Nagoski: There was a while there where I was biking to work—four miles to work and four miles home. And that four-mile bike ride home— When I had a hard day, there were days when… When you're being chased by a lion, what do you do?

John Moe: You run.

Emily Nagoski: You run! Right! So, the single most efficient strategy for completing the stress response cycle so that—as far as your body's concerned—you did escape the stressor is physical activity. I would also cry on those bike rides home, because that's another evidence-based strategy for completing the stress response cycle. I would talk about it—

John Moe: To cry is?

Emily Nagoski: Oh yeah, absolutely! Not everyone cries very intuitively. This is another thing that—like, it comes very naturally to me. Like, my body says, "Aaaah! Distress! You gotta—really gotta purge this outta your system!" And so, crying happens. Amelia had to learn it from a therapist. She had a panic attack in therapy, and the therapist is just like, "Okay, tell me what's happening in your body." And Amelia gets all poetic about describing like hairs rising and tears and snot falling down their face and like the tension in their muscles and the way they're breathing. And the therapist says, "Okay. And how does it feel now?"

(Beat.) "Oh, it's gone. Oh, it's over. It stopped." Yeah. Yeah!

John Moe: Because Amelia completed the cycle.

Emily Nagoski: The cycle. 'Cause her body moved through it. She allowed the observation— The technical term is observational distance: granting yourself permission to just notice what your body's experiencing and allowing it to finish. That's the ball game right there.

Which is why everybody's like, "Mindfulness is sooo good for you!"

(John laughs.)

And it's not because mindfulness is about being calm. It's about paying nonjudgmental attention to what your body's experiencing and allowing it to move through it. Many people worry that if they start crying, they feel like they're neeever gonna be able to stop. And like, I recognize that feeling! And the reality is that, physiologically, it's just impossible for that to be true. When you begin crying, like you just get too tired to keep crying.

John Moe: I used to work at Amazon, long before I ever got into radio and podcast.

Emily Nagoski: I'm aware! *(With a French flourish.)* Ze bottleneck!

John Moe: *(Chuckling.)* Yes, the bottleneck. You've read the book! And—

Emily Nagoski: I listened to the audiobook!

John Moe: Oh, good! Good. And there was an article that came out in the *New York Times* when I worked there, and it said people at Amazon in executive positions are crying at their desks. And I read that, and I thought, "Doesn't everybody everywhere cry at their desks?"

(Emily laughs.)

"Of course, we're crying! What—?! This is like saying people drink coffee! Like, you go to work, you have meetings, you cry at your desk, you drink coffee."

But I never felt like that was completing anything. It just felt like it was compounding this stress until I either needed to get out of there, or I was going to break. And I got out of there before I did. So, I'm a little confused about the idea of crying or something like that completing a cycle. It just seems a little tidy the way you just described it.

Emily Nagoski: Yeah. There's a couple of ways to cry that don't help. One of them is wallowing, and I don't think what you're describing is wallowing. Wallowing is where you cry and you just keep feeding the sadness by continuing to have thoughts about how terrible the situation is and all the things that caused your distress. You'll notice in Amelia's story, they were just thinking about what's going on in their body in the here and now, not about the story and the events that activated that distress. If you're crying at your desk—or, as many people will recognize—going into the bathroom to hide and cry, or going into your car and crying, or crying as soon as your car door closes; often what's happening is you're just siphoning off the absolute worst of it. Like, your body is beyond its capacity to hold the stress in, so the stress comes out in the form—

So, you're not actually like reducing the stress level in your body. You're just like at capacity, and if you keep adding ice cubes to a drink that is full, it's gonna splash out! Yeah! But you keep adding to it, and it just splashes out, and you add more ice cubes, and it splashes out, and it doesn't get any better. So, the crying that completes the stress response cycle is the crying where you pay kind, compassionate, non-judgmental, observing attention to what's happening in your body. You pause the thinking about the problem. 'Cause, again, separating dealing with what's causing the stress from the process of dealing with the stress itself. When you're sitting at your desk continuing to work while you're crying, you are not separating yourself from the cause of your stress. You're just experiencing the stress while you're dealing with the stressor. Does that help?

John Moe: You're not building a story around it. This is something that I've run into a lot, and I think probably a lot of creative people and a lot of writers run into this a lot—where you have the stressful event, and you attach narrative to it, and you imagine narrative to it. And you might create multiple narratives, because one of them might be right. And so, you're running from the lion, but you're also thinking about all the other lions and your behaviors that might encourage lions and—

Emily Nagoski: —*(building on what John is saying)* that encourage the lions, and how personally you should take it that the lion chose you.

John Moe: Right. And what it reflects—that you are fundamentally bad. That's why the lions are doing this.

Emily Nagoski: Yeah. And if you were really a strong, good person, you wouldn't be reacting so strongly to the fact that this lion is chasing you. You'd be able to like keep your cool and keep it together and tolerate being chased by a lion. Because how weak is it to feel so threatened by like—? *(With a mock scoff.)* That's just a lion.

John Moe: Well, but this is what separates us from the zebras. So, the zebras will run.

Emily Nagoski: Who famously don't get ulcers!

John Moe: They don't get ulcers. But you know, they probably couldn't play jazz or write poetry either.

(Emily agrees.)

They're not all that smart. And so, how do we do this, given the brains that we have and the capacity for narrative that we have to process these things? Because I'm— Well, I'm gonna get to that question in a second. First, this question: how do we do that, given that we have the brains we got?

Emily Nagoski: By learning a new skill. Which is recognizing, "Oh, my stress response is activated. I need to complete this stress response, so that my organ systems don't fail!" And I know that even though I've spent my whole life learning that the way to deal with my stress is to deal with the problem that caused the stress in the first place, it turns out that's wrong. Because we don't live— We're almost never chased by lions or hippopotamuses or anything like that anymore. We actually live in a world where we're more likely to die from our stress than from the thing that causes our stress.

John Moe: Okay. But then how do you— *(Sighs.)* I'm hesitating to use the word compartmentalize, but how do you separate one from the other? How do you separate the whole world of stress from this situation and completing the cycle and being aware of the physicality of it and slowing yourself down that way? Especially if you're like Amelia, and you're given to these profound stresses.

Emily Nagoski: Yeah. So, Amelia is a very particular and extreme case, because— So, we're autistic, and Amelia's the kind of autistic, where you don't have a lot of information about your physiological state. It's called alexithymia, where you're just not aware of stress accumulating in your body. You're not even aware that you need to pee. Amelia has to pause—

John Moe: You're a head floating through the world.

Emily Nagoski: Yeah. And the idea that your body is real is just an inconvenience that you occasionally have to confront. And part of why they ended up in the medical situation they did is because… they didn't notice their body screaming for help until it was screaming so loudly it literally had them lying on the bathroom floor in pain—in sooo much pain, they thought they were gonna die. So, I am the opposite, as autistic people tend to be like one extreme or the other. And my body will not stop telling me what's going on with it. So, it's really easy for me to be like, "My body needs me to cry! My body—"

When I was in high school— *(Sarcastically.)* It will surprise you to learn I was a theatre kid. So, in my first year in high school, I auditioned for the fall play, and I really, really, really, really wanted to be in the fall play. But after my audition, I got home. I was told—eeeverybody told me freshmen never get parts in the show. And I was so tense about it, my body was like, "You gotta go to your room and close the door, and you need to sob." And I did for ten minutes, and then it was gone. Because my body was so clear in its communication with me that I was like, "I don't know what—" I didn't know that the sobbing would end, but I trusted my body enough to be like, "This is what it needs! I just need to give it what it needs!" And it did end, because it always ends.

So, I have an advantage that way, that it never gets to such intensity that my body collapses and organ systems start to fail. So, for some people it's comparatively easy. You can recognize what your body signals are. They're saying to you, "Hey, this is getting above our threshold to manage, uhhh, so go ahead and do something about it so that you will be able to deal with the stressors themselves." Because the thing is, if we don't allow our bodies to complete the stress response cycle and just hold onto the stress, like "*(Strained.)* I just know I'm gonna get through it. I'm just gonna get through this, and then I can deal with the stress," you actually lose your capacity to solve problems or think creatively or communicate effectively. Because you are in this activated fight or flight stress response—flop, freeze, fawn, all the different kind of stress responses that make it more difficult for you to deal with the stressor itself.

So, you have to learn how to deal with the stress so that you can be effective enough at dealing with the stressor.

John Moe: And if you don't do that, if the stresses compound and we respond more like Amelia than Emily, is that what causes burnout? Because I know it can cause depression, but is that what makes the burnout?

Emily Nagoski: It surely can! It depends on the emotion system that's involved, but yeah. It absolutely can lead to depression. And so, we define burnout as being overwhelmed and exhausted by everything you have to do while still feeling like you're not doing enough.

John Moe: Mmmm. Preach. Yes.

Emily Nagoski: One of the things I have spent *(chuckling)* more time thinking about than most people do is the kind of stressors that we have in our lives, because this is a place where the research is really inadequate. Almost all the research on things like stress and stress management and self-efficacy assess and hope—which is deeply related to burnout, because a loss of hope is often perceived to be like a symptom of something being very seriously wrong. Almost all of that research is focused on things in people's lives that they actually can have some degree of control over.

We're in a place societally where we really do need everybody to be participating in making the world a better place. But that kind of work, you don't—a single individual is too small to make a difference they're gonna be able to feel and recognize most of the time. Like, no individual one of us is going to fix it.

John Moe: Right, right. Well, I mean this is why I keep coming back to burnout, and this kind of gets to why we called you up to talk about this too. Because traditionally, like you say, it's been thought of as a work thing. But one, I don't know if you answered any work emails over this past weekend, but I know I did. *(Laughs.)* Because everything's blurry now. Everything's blurrier than ever, in terms of work and life. Also though, we're beset by lions on all sides. Here in Minnesota, absolutely. But really, everywhere in the world with what's happening with politics, what's happening around the world, especially as it relates to America and Americans; what's happening with the climate—which hasn't been taking any time off from doing what it's been doing. It doesn't seem like a work thing anymore. It seems like life itself is burning us out.

(Emily agrees.)

Transition: Spirited acoustic guitar.

John Moe: This is what's been on my mind. And as I said, this is why I called Emily Nagoski. I'm fortunate that I can call up someone like Emily and ask her

about this. But I'm doing it for me, and I'm doing it for you, dear listener. I suspect we're all in this position, no matter what job we have—if we have a job, if we're in Minnesota, wherever we live—where it's like that stressful work meeting Emily described. Life is like that all the time. Happening always. We live in that meeting that she talks about 24-7. We're gonna get the solution to what to do about that in just a minute. It involves the delightful phrase "bubble of love."

Promo:

Mark Gagliardi: Hey, what's up, everybody? My name is Mark Gagliardi, and I host *We Got This with Mark and Hal* on the Maximum Fun Network. Would you like to introduce yourself as well?

Jessie: My name is Jessie and I am from Minneapolis, Minnesota.

Mark: Hi, Jessie from Minneapolis, Minnesota. Jessie, you are our Maximum Fun Member of the Month.

Jessie: I'm so delighted to hear that I'm the member of the month. Thank you.

Mark: Is there a first episode that you remember?

Jessie: The pretzel shape episode. That's pretty classic.

Mark: Yeah! Both of us just killed off each other's answers and went with pretzel rod, which is clearly not the best.

Jessie: No. *(Chuckling.)* That is a terrible pretzel!

Mark: As our Member of the Month, you have a parking spot at Maximum Fun Headquarters, as well as a $25 gift card to the Maximum Fun Store. We say at the end of the episode, "We wouldn't do it without you, and we couldn't do it without you." So, thank you for that.

Jessie: You're welcome.

Speaker: Become a MaxFun member now at MaximumFun.org/join.

Promo:

(A phone rings.)

Speaker: Hello?

Benjamin Partridge: Hello, I'm calling on behalf of the Beef and Dairy Network Podcast.

Speaker: No, no. I'm sorry. No sales calls. Goodbye.

Benjamin: It's a multi award-winning podcast featuring guests such as Ted Danson, Nick Offman, Josie Long.

Speaker: I don't know what a Josie Long is. And anyway, I'm about to take my mother into town to see *Phantom of the Opera* at last. You are wasting my time—and even worse, my mother's time. She only has so much time left! She's 98 years old. She's only expected to live for another 20 or 30 years. Mother, get your shoes on! Yes, the orthopedic ones. I don't want that to carry you home again, do I?!

Benjamin: *(Awkwardly.)* Right. Well, if you were looking for a podcast—

Speaker: Mother, you're not wearing that, are you? It's very revealing, mother. This is musical theatre, not a Parisian bordello.

Benjamin: —simply go to MaximumFun.org.

Speaker: I'm reaching for my Samsung Galaxy 4 as we speak. MOTHER! Mother, not that hat!

Transition: Gentle acoustic guitar.

John Moe: We are back with Dr. Emily Nagoski.

Emily Nagoski: So, again, the cure for burnout cannot be self-care. It has to be all of us caring for each other. One of the most important things each of us can do is to create what in the book we call a bubble of love. So, you create a circle of people who all care about your wellbeing as much as you care about theirs. And we don't say "as much as you care about yours," because so many of us find it easier to care about other people's wellbeing than we do for ourselves.

There's a lot of like self-care memes like, "You can't pour from an empty cup," or like, "You don't have to set yourself on fire to keep other people warm." But I mean, no, you don't. *(Sardonically advocating escalating burnout to make a point.)* I mean, suppose you've got an empty cup. You've still got a cup, and Jane over there hasn't got a cup. How about you give Jane your cup? Like, how—? No, no, self-care is really important. Good for you! Holding onto your cup even though you don't have any water. No, you don't have to set yourself on fire to keep other people warm. But those people over there are really cold, and you do have two legs. But no, good for you. Self-care's reeeally important. You go ahead and keep both your legs and don't put one of them in the fire so that other people can be warm.

Like, we live in a world that doesn't actually care about self-care, which is why we need all of us to care for each other. So, like the people I collaborate with for work stuff have this agreement that we are going to help each other protect our boundaries instead of accepting that sometimes you're gonna answer emails over the weekend. Like, we set limits, and we honor those limits. And some stuff doesn't get done as a result, and there is no such thing as an emergency in my kind of work. So, whyyy would we pay a physical toll to do work where like, what's the worst thing that's gonna happen if I don't answer this email over the weekend?

This does not come easily. Amelia did a workshop for c-suite executives at a social media company, all women. And someone asked the question, "How do I stop answering emails at three o'clock in the morning?"

And Amelia's answer was, "Has it ever occurred to you that there are some people who never even consider opening an email until they're at their desk at work?" This is pre-pandemic. Truly, this c-suite executive at a social media company had not considered the possibility that there are some people—I'm gonna call those people men—who just don't even consider it!

John Moe: *(Laughing.)* Well, let's talk about—

Emily Nagoski: Not all—I mean, hashtag #NotAllMen. *(Laughs.)*

John Moe: Well, point taken. But let's look at that for a minute too. A lot of what you talk about in your book is about the effect of burnout on women. But I am

also familiar with another book that you've written where you talk about how, yes, there are some differences, but there are a lot of similarities when it comes right down to this species that we call humans. There's a lot in common. So, in terms of the practical application of this, what should men do to play to what they're dealing with, and what should women do to play to what they're dealing with? And what should nonbinary people do in regard to what they're dealing with?

Emily Nagoski: Yeah, yeah. So, the answers are almost exactly the same. The difference only comes in what script you were taught to follow. So, if you—on the day you're born, people looked at your genitals and were like, "It's a girl!" then you got raised with what we call the Human Giver Handbook, which taught you that you have a moral obligation to be pretty, happy, calm—

John Moe: Pleasant.

Emily Nagoski: —generous, and unfailingly attentive to the needs of others. And because it's a moral obligation, if you fall short, you deserve to be punished. If there's no one around to punish you, you just go ahead and beat the crap outta yourself! And so, that's what women are working with as a script. And if you people—the day you're born, they looked at your genitals and went, "It's a boy!" then you're gonna get raised with the script of being a Human Winner. Which teaches you that you have to fight and win and never need anything from anybody, even though both fighting and winning require that somebody else be there participating with you. *(Chuckling.)* But that's not contradictory! You don't need anything. This may feel tough to hear, but you can take it. You can take anything!

John Moe: Yeah. And to win, someone else needs to lose.

Emily Nagoski: The emotions you're allowed to have, you can— Right! Someone else has to lose. And those men are pussies! Because the rulebook you got handed is like, "Being a girl is the worst thing you can be. And how dare women gatekeep your access to anything?" I'm not gonna go on a thing, but if these grow— Like, you say them out loud, and you're like, "That is obviously bad and wrong! And that's not who I am as a person." And this stuff has been embedded in your brain often from before the day you're born. People have parties to celebrate with other adults the shape of their baby's genitals. Like, that's how much it matters to us.

John Moe: *(Chuckles.)* Well, and then too, if— For men, I would think it would be harder—it would be hard to process some of these stresses and complete these cycles that you're talking about and—

Emily Nagoski: Yeah! Here I am going like, "Bubble of love," and men aren't allowed to ask for help or need anything!

John Moe: Right! Well, because if you're bred into this combat scenario of the provider and the victor, and all of these—you know, spin the Joseph Campbell wheel and see what you land on—all these archetypes, that vulnerability is a liability. And so, you're taught to kind of quash that. And I would think that would certainly— It didn't get in the way of me crying at my desk at Amazon, *(chuckling)* but I imagine it got in the way for other people.

Emily Nagoski: Yeah. Yeah. The emotions— If you're raised as a winner, you have permission to feel angry. Anything in the anger range. You have permission to feel winning. And horny. And that's kind of it.

(John agrees with a chuckle.)

And if you ever feel sad or lonely, like what's the matter with you? What are you, some kind of girl to have those feelings?

And if you're a girl, you're allowed to—again—be happy and calm and occasionally sad, but like eyeroll. And never angry. Like, how daaare you inconvenience someone with something as ugly as your rage? Literally, I've had women come up to me and say, "Yeah, I read *Come Together*, and I read about the emotional floor plan, and you talk about this rage space. I feel like I just don't have one."

(Concerned.) Oh, my friend! Oh, my friend.

John Moe: *(Laughs.)* You just haven't unlocked it yet.

Emily Nagoski: Yeah. And it is hoarded full of a lifetime of every time you felt like it's not fair. And you got some decluttering to do.

John Moe: *(Laughs.)* Something that's happened in my years of hosting this show and of trying not to get burnt out while doing it is that I find some things that I kind of keep holding onto, kind of keep chewing on. One of them was a show that we did in December with Dr. Ryan Martin, who's a professor at University of Wisconsin Green Bay. And he's an expert in anger. And it came about because I read an article on rage rooms and how experts say, "No, that's not gonna cure your rage at all. That's like going to a bar and drinking in excess to cure alcoholism. It's just—you know, there's no such thing as catharsis with this emotion."

And what he talked about was people fearing rage or anger because it was scary. And his position is: it's a signal that your body is sending about injustice.

(Emily agrees immediately.)

And it's—maybe you're completely clued in on some righteous injustice to yourself or to your community or to your country, whatever it is. Maybe you're responding with an outmoded—you know, like it is actually fair, but you think it's unfair because you're responding to it in an earlier version of your mind. But his point was like, "No, this isn't a bad feeling. This is a message being sent to you." And it seems like that's sort of what you are saying with stress is like, "Listen to this. Listen to what it's saying. Listen for the meaning. Don't slam the door. Invite it in, find out what it wants, and then see it on its way."

Emily Nagoski: Yeah! So, it's called the fight or flight response. The most basic version.

John Moe: Yeah.

Emily Nagoski: Flight, we know, is fear. Everything from a slight worry all the way up to full terror.

John Moe: Run away.

Emily Nagoski: Including— Anxiety lives in the fear space. Rage is the fight response. Flight is when your brain assesses a stressor as something you're most likely to survive by trying to run away, escape, avoid. The fight response is when your body assesses a stressor and decides you're most likely to respond by trying to destroy it.

John Moe: Mm! Okay.

Emily Nagoski: And we worry about people expressing anger, because that's your body being like, "You need to go destroy that thing." And actually, literally destroying almost all of our stressors is either not possible or not advisable. Right?

John Moe: *(Chuckling.)* Yeah. Yeah. That could get you in some trouble.

Emily Nagoski: But you complete the stress response cycle the same way you do with any of the other stress response emotions, it's just a specific flavor of it. My favorite rage response thing doesn't require any kind of physical activity. And like 100% percent permission, physical activity is not accessible to everybody. This one requires that you lie down. If you can find 15 minutes to lie down in the dark, what I do is I lie there and I let my body get really tense as I viscerally imagine beating the crap out of whatever it is that activated my rage. Like, I let my imagination let my body experience the idea of destroying this thing that I couldn't actually destroy in real life and wouldn't destroy in real life.

But when you imagine vividly enough, your body does not know the difference between really vividly imagining it and actually doing it. Amelia used to get on the elliptical machine. And while doing the elliptical machine thing you do, Amelia would imagine just being a Godzilla and stomping on the bursar's office and the parking office and her dean's office and her advisor's office. And instead of it just being like a sweaty workout and she's tired when she's done, at the end of that workout?! They feel elated! Because as far as their body knows, they have actually conquered and destroyed something.

John Moe: Oh! Okay. So, is this the cure to burnout—or the prevention to burnout—is the physical processing? Is this the secret that you refer to in the subtitle of your book?

Emily Nagoski: From people's reactions, it is the single most important idea. If the whole book could have been, "You have to separate dealing with the stressor from the process of dealing with the stress that's actually in your body," that would've been enough to help lots of people. I was just talking to someone, the producer of a radio show, who was like, "Just by the way, before we get started, I wanted to let you know that I teach that to my kids, and I'm so glad that I have that thought technology to give them—that they can feel anger at an injustice, that they can feel sad about a loss, that they can feel afraid of a new experience. And they just have to allow that." Like, there's no emotion that's inherently unsafe. And you give your body what it's asking for, and as long as you're not hurting anybody, your body is safe.

John Moe: Yeah. Yeah. I teach my kids the idea of the emotion is happening to you. You didn't select it off a shelf. You are responsible for your actions.*(Laughs.)* You're responsible for your behaviors. But the feeling is involuntary.

Emily Nagoski: Yeah. Yeah. You have permission to beat on your chest and roar like King Kong. You don't have permission to put your hands on someone else or use your words as a weapon against someone else.

John Moe: Do you think that there would be more trauma responses that we would recognize if we didn't insist on them all starting with the letter F?

Emily Nagoski: *(Laughs.)* The list just grows, right?

John Moe: Are there some good ones out there that start with T that we're just ignoring?

Emily Nagoski: So, the thing is—*(sighs)* gosh. I'll be able to answer that question when there are fewer people carrying trauma around in their bodies.

John Moe: Okay. *(Laughing.)* What is that gonna be, Emily Nagoski?

Emily Nagoski: It's gonna be a minute.

John Moe: Okay. It's gonna be a little while!

Emily Nagoski: It's gonna be a while. And there's gonna have to be some real fundamental changes that have to happen in order for people not to be traumatized before the age of 12. Would be great. What you've just described is raising your children in a home where they have permission to experience their emotions. Some of us got raised in what John Gottman calls emotion dismissing families, where we're taught that our emotions are our fault, that our emotions don't matter, and we need to go to our room until we can put a smile on our face.

John Moe: *(Chuckles.)* Yes. That feeling emotion and demonstrating the feeling of emotion—

Emily Nagoski: —is misbehavior!

John Moe: And is fundamentally shameful and embarrassing.

Emily Nagoski: Yeah.

John Moe: And then some of us go on to talk about mental health all the time in their careers.

Emily Nagoski: *(Chuckles.)* Some of us write books about it. It's fine!

John Moe: Some of us write books about it, it turns out! So, really, if you want your kids to write books someday… you know, still don't do it.

(Emily cackles.)

It's not worth it!

Emily Nagoski: It's really not.

John Moe: But how— First of all, Emily and Amelia are kind of fundamentally the same name, and you're—

Emily Nagoski: Yeah. That's a whole—yeah.

John Moe: And you're twins.

Emily Nagoski: So, one parent named each of us. It is just a coincidence. I do need to say that when I was in high school, my French teacher was actually Russian, and she taught Amelia Russian. And her response—Mrs. Madela; she was wonderful. "*(With a Russian accent.)* Emily, Amelia is the same name!"

(John laughs.)

For four months she thought we were messing with her and were the same person.

John Moe: *(Giggling.)* —the same person, because you're twins. And then also, just before we go, what's it like to write a book with your sister? I love my sisters, and they're both really good writers, but I kind of— I don't know how that would go.

Emily Nagoski: Yeah. The reason I wanted to write a book with Amelia is writing *Come as You Are* was <u>really</u> tough. I thought it'd be easier to split it with another person. I was wrong! But again, we were raised in an emotion dismissing family of origin and an alcoholic family of origin. So, we were taught not to express our emotions to each other. So, actually what happened is— So, the whole book, we thought it was gonna be about stress management. It turns out it's a book about… love! *(Sighs.)* It's about caring! The cure for burnout is not self-care. It is all of us turning toward each other with kindness and compassion. And the science <u>just kept saying</u> the answer is love and care. And the science was so persuasive that we finally had to start following our own damn advice.

And when people hear that you're twins, they have an idea of what your relationship must be like. Because we grew up the way we grew up, we didn't get that. But we created it. We learned how to be siblings. We learned to feel a twin feeling by doing the work that we prescribe in *Burnout*. So, even if no one else had ever read it, it would've been worth the process, because I have a twin now in a way that I didn't for the first 40 years of my life.

John Moe: I'm not sure if everybody in the Twin Cities metro area read your book on burnout, but what you're describing is kind of what we did here. And it looks like it kind of worked. It's been horrible here, of course, and there have been murders. But also—<u>and</u> also, people have come together reaching out to each other, forming little cells of like, "Here's the signup sheet for the preschool to go monitor—"

Emily Nagoski: Bubble of love.

John Moe: Yeah. Little bubbles of love all over the Twin Cities. And I feel this, and I talk to so many people who feel this now. Like, we wish we never had to face this. But everybody feels stronger and closer and more bonded and more attached—more bonded with the city than before.

Emily Nagoski: Yeah. You share what we call in the book a "something larger."

John Moe: Yeah, yeah!

Emily Nagoski: There is something larger than yourselves that all of you are collaborating on working toward. It's not just that you're fighting against something, it's that you're working toward the city that you believe you deserve. That you do, in fact, deserve. And you've realized that there is no difference you can have with the people in your city that is even remotely as important as the things you have in common in fighting against the changes that some people are trying to impose on your community.

John Moe: Emily Nagoski, thank you, as always.

Emily Nagoski: It was absolutely my pleasure. I hope it helped!

John Moe: I think it did. I'm sure it did.

Transition: "Burnin' For You" fades briefly back in under the dialogue.

John Moe: Dr. Emily Nagoski and Dr. Amelia Nagoski are the authors of *Burnout: The Secret to Unlocking the Stress Cycle*. Bubbles of love, my friend. Love bubbles.

Again, not a sex thing.

Music: "Building Wings" by Rhett Miller, an up-tempo acoustic guitar song. The music continues quietly under the dialogue.

John Moe: We can bring you shows like this; we can help you with your burnout; we can introduce you to ways to treat it to have a better life, because people support the show. That is the only way that we're able to pull this off. If you get something outta the show, if you think somebody else is getting something outta the show—especially during these very trying times—we need your support. It's so easy to do. Just go to Maximum Fun.org/join. That's Maximum Fun.org/join. And then find a level that works for you. 5 bucks a month, 20, 10, whatever. I don't—You figure out that budget for yourself and then pick *Depresh Mode* from the list of

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We're on BlueSky at @DepreshMode. Our Instagram is @DepreshPod. Our newsletter is on Substack. Search that up. I'm on BlueSky and Instagram at @JohnMoe. Our Preshies group, our listening group, is on Facebook. A lot of good people hanging out there, helping each other out, talking about mental health, sharing a surprising number of animal pictures and jokes. Our electric mail address is DepreshMode@MaximumFun.org.

Hi, credits listeners. When I write a rundown script for a podcast and I mention Blue Öyster Cult, I always make sure to put the umlaut over the capital O. Now, will that rundown ever be published? No. Will anyone see it except for producer Raghu? Again, no. But do I actually have a very good reason for including the umlaut? For a third time, not at all.

Depresh Mode is made possible by your contributions. Our production team includes the aforementioned Raghu Manavalan, Kevin Ferguson, and me. We get booking help from Mara Davis. Rhett Miller wrote and performed our theme song, "Building Wings". *Depresh Mode* is a production of Maximum Fun and Poputchik. I'm John Moe. Bye now.

Music:

I'm always falling off of cliffs, now

Building wings on the way down

I am figuring things out

Building wings, building wings, building wings

No one knows the reason

Maybe there's no reason

I just keep believing

No one knows the answer

Maybe there's no answer

I just keep on dancing

(Music fades out.)

Transition: Cheerful ukulele chord.

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Speaker 3: Of artist owned shows.

Speaker 4: Supported—

Speaker 5: —directly—

Speaker 6: —by you!