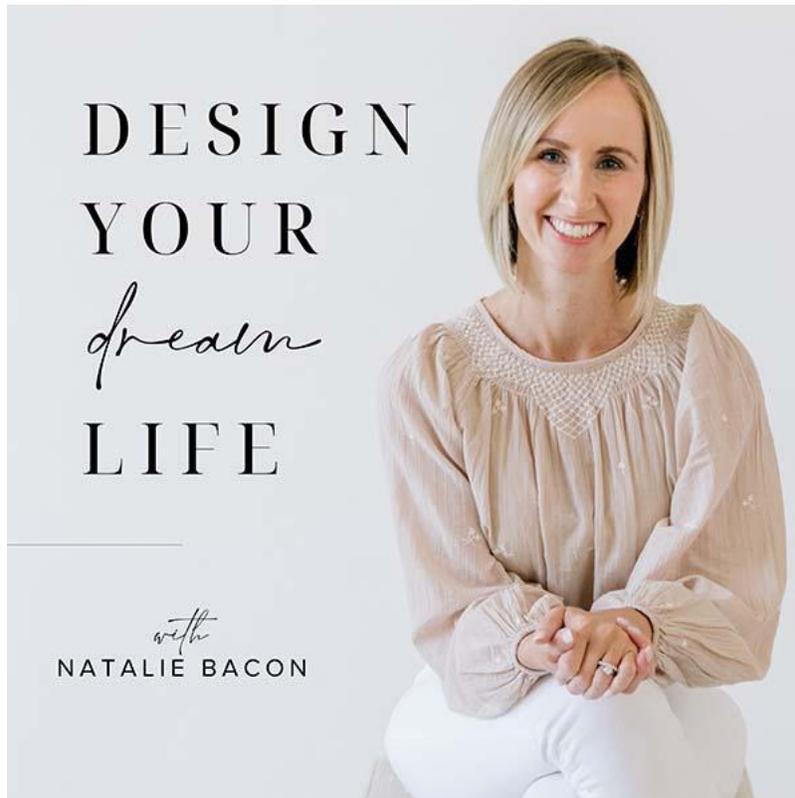


Challenging In-Law Dynamics



Full Episode Transcript

With Your Host

Natalie Bacon

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Hi there. Welcome to the *Design Your Dream Life* podcast. My name is Natalie Bacon, and I'm an advanced certified mindfulness life coach as well as a wife and mom. If you're here to do the inner work and grow, I can help. Let's get started.

Hey, you, how's it going? I'm so glad to be here with you. Today, we are going to be talking about challenging in-law dynamics. This month inside Grow You the topic of the month is navigating challenging relationships. I thought because the in-law relationship is one that I coach on the most, and I noticed that there wasn't a specific podcast for it, that this would be an excellent topic to bring to the podcast. So that's what we're doing today.

Before we dive in, I do want to let you know that you if you are listening to this in real time, on November 16, head on over to nataliebacon.com/opencall. It's all one word. Make sure you join me this afternoon for a public live open coaching call. I will answer any question that you have about anything.

This is a chance for you to see how to take the work that we do on the podcast deeper. I will apply the tools that I teach you here to your specific circumstances, to your life, and you can really see what it's like to have someone show you your mind and see the effect of that on your life. It's so very powerful. It's so different than what we actually do on the podcast.

So I really want to encourage you, particularly if you've never been coached, you've never been inside Grow You just join this call. You can even listen in if you want and hear the other women get coached and see what it's all about. Again, this afternoon on November 16, head on over to nataliebacon.com/opencall to reserve your seat, and we will send you the Zoom link. It's very easy. You can join from anywhere.

I'm excited. I'm really excited. I love coaching. It's so life changing. I can coach on anything because I coach myself and I coach my clients. So it really is a skill and an art that I am just delighted to bring to all of you. With that, let's dive in to one of the most popular topics that I do coach on, which

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is relationships and specifically in-law relationships. That's what we're going to be talking about today.

What makes in-law relationships so challenging? Ask yourself that question. Your brain will want to go to what your in-laws do or say, but the real reason that they're challenging is because we have a human brain. Our human brain will automatically have thoughts and opinions and sentences in our mind where we expect other people to behave in a certain way, to be a certain type of person. Often, that's not who they are.

Where that disconnect lies is where we can use coaching to really help ourselves show up as the best version of ourselves and think about it in a way that's useful and helpful. It will have the impact and benefit of helping you navigate really difficult situations whether they're really small or whether they're bigger.

So in today's podcast, I want to talk with you about four specific examples, and go through each of them with the mindfulness tools that I use so you can really see how this would work practically, with any type of situation with respect to your in-laws.

So the first example is let's say that you feel pressured to attend big family gatherings, and you wish you and your spouse and your family could just opt out. But you feel like you have to see these people, you have to attend. You feel a lot of obligation.

In this example, you want to know that you don't have to do anything you don't want to do. You really don't. If you think about your own agency, no one is holding you down or physically picking you up and making you attend the gatherings. You have your own agency to think, feel, and do whatever you want. The story in your mind of I have to attend these big family events is what's creating the pressure.

Even if someone outside of you, let's say your brother in-law, says to you, "Hey, we better see your family at the next holiday party." Even if he says

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that to you, what you make that mean, your interpretation of it, is what creates the pressure for you.

So what can be very powerful, and I do this in my own life just with anything that I feel obligation towards, or like I have to do something. I just remind myself of the truth, which is I don't have to do any of it. Did you know you could just opt out of all of it? Of all the gatherings, of all the get togethers, of all the holidays, of all the parties, of all the gift givings, of anything that you feel an obligation towards. You can just say no.

Living in this space of it's possible for me to say no. I can say no if I want. I don't have to do any of this. I'm not obligated actually changes your relationship to the thing. Interestingly, you end up then saying yes to more things out of genuinely wanting to be there. You might still say no to some things, but the key is that you're doing it based on truly what you want.

Oftentimes, I'll see a couple and one person, maybe it's my client, doesn't want to go to the thing and the significant other does want to go to the thing. What I say is you can go if you want to go, even if that reason for wanting to is simply because you want to be a significant other who supports your partner in going. You might say you know what? I want to go just for my significant other. But that is an abundant reason.

That's very different than thinking oh, I have to go. I'm obligated to go because they want me to go. Or you can do it from abundance and say no. Say you know what? I love you so much significant other. I would love for you to go, and I'm going to stay back.

Your brain will trip you up here and think that it's impossible for you to just say no, and that you have to do these things because you've always done them. But living in the space, even if it's just in your mind, of really getting grounded in I don't have to do any of it. I don't have to say yes will allow you to really get into your own confidence and authority in deciding who you want to be and whether you do want to do the things you want to do.

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I get this way a little bit with respect to the holidays. Steve and RJ's birthdays are also in December. On default, my automatic brain goes into oh my gosh, there's so much I have to do. Anytime that sentence enters my mind, I know it's the default way of interpreting the facts that is never going to serve me because it feels like pressure and obligation and dread. I don't want to feel that way as I head into a season that I want to create a lot of joy and celebration in.

So what I do is I remind myself, I actually don't have to do any of it. I don't have to do holiday cards. I don't have to do events. I don't have to do gifts. I don't have to do any of it. From that place of just saying no to all of it in my mind, then I say to myself okay, what do I want to do?

So for you as it relates to your in-laws and family gatherings or get togethers or anything like that, if you're feeling pressure, it's because you're thinking a thought, and that thought is probably something like I think I have to go. Just talk back to your brain. Tell yourself the truth. You don't have to do anything that you don't want to do. What is it that you want to do?

All right let's move on to example number two. In this example, let's say that your mother-in-law needs help physically, and isn't taking your advice for her care. She's also not taking your husband's advice. And it is very upsetting to your husband. It's his mom.

On default, it's likely that your brain will think that your mother-in-law is doing it wrong. She should take your advice and your spouse's advice. She shouldn't act this way. She should listen to the experts. She's doing it wrong. When you have that mindset and that way of thinking about it, it leads to a lot of frustration and anger or irritation. There's a lot of disconnect happening in your body, and it's not going to be useful for you. It doesn't help you show up as your best self as a spouse or as a daughter-in-law.

So instead of shoulding on her and thinking that she should do something differently than she is, it's asking yourself the question who do I want to be

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here? I can't change mother-in-law. I can certainly make a request of her. Hey, would you like to take our advice? But she's already said no to that.

So who do I want to be? As a wife who is supporting a husband, who is going through a really hard time with his mom, and also as a daughter-in-law? How can I allow space for my husband to feel really upset without trying to fix his feelings? How can I validate his experience, and say I believe you. I know this is so hard. This is hard for me to and really love and connect with him without trying to fix his feelings.

We always want to fix other people's feelings. That is not what other people need us to do. What other people need from us is for us to validate their feelings. Validation is just I believe you. Tell me more. So if you are in a situation where you are shoulding on your in-laws and thinking they should be a certain way, act a certain way, do things differently. Even if you have all the evidence on your side, even if you know that how mother-in-law is acting isn't best for her health. That's based on what the doctors have said and the experts have said.

What is most helpful for you in this situation is for you to let go of trying to control mother-in-law, and instead control yourself. That starts with controlling your mind, controlling how you want to think about it and how you want to feel. You might decide that you want to feel sad and some grief. That will be more useful than anger and frustration and irritation. Trying to control mother-in-law so you can feel better and husband can feel better, which doesn't work, right.

So instead, it's okay, maybe I do want to think I'm sad that mother-in-law has this challenge. I'm sad that my spouse is going through this. I'm sad that this is happening. And I'm going to show up loving, compassionate, connected, maybe offering to help if anyone wants my help.

The main point here is instead of trying to control from a place of I know how other people should be, it's I have no idea how other people should be. Other people should be exactly who they want to be. That's all I know. Instead of trying to change them to be who we think they should be, it's

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allowing them to be the fullest versions of themselves. Us going back inward and saying who do I want to be here? That question will serve you so very well.

Example number three. Let's say that your sister-in-law hosts a girl's trip, and she doesn't invite you. But she invites other members of your family, and you feel left out. It's okay to feel however you are feeling. You want to validate your own feelings just like you would validate anyone else's feelings. What you don't want to do is blame sister-in-law for your feelings.

So it would sound like this. Oh, it's so interesting. I'm feeling really lonely and left out. It's okay. Those feelings are valid. They're coming from a story that I'm telling myself. It's okay. It's normal. It's normal to want to be included, and it has nothing to do with sister-in-law. Sister-in-law didn't do anything wrong here. I'm not trying to change her. I'm not trying to blame her for my feelings. Instead, I'm allowing myself to feel my feelings. I'm deciding what kind of sister-in-law to I want to be.

You might have a conversation with sister-in-law from a place of curiosity and connection. Just to say hey, I love you so much. I would love to be invited on the next girls trip. Or hey, I'd love to know if there was a reason that I'm unaware of so I know for myself why it wasn't invited. Typically, when we want to talk with someone, we are looking for them to kind of make right what we think they did wrong so that we can feel better. That is not what I'm talking about.

What I'm talking about here is genuine connection, curiosity, respect, and allowing yourself to just be a messy human who feels left out sometimes and that's okay. But you want to do it from a place of taking ownership of your feelings and not blaming sister-in-law for how you feel. This is a skill, again, that you can practice. It's a skill that we teach and do a lot of inside Grow You in our feelings work.

But it's something that I definitely recommend because we're not taught this. So often we think that feelings are created from outside of us. Decades of this is us blaming other people for how we feel. What we want

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to do is take emotional responsibility back for our sake. Because then we get to be who we want to be. It's so much more helpful if I know that I'm in control of my feelings. I can feel any feeling. It doesn't mean I'm a robot, and I never want to feel negative emotion. It just means that I know that my brain is the creator of those emotions, always.

Okay, number four. Let's say that you overhear your in-laws talking badly about your family. It can be very tempting to go into defensiveness. Whenever someone else says something negative about us, we want to defend who we are because we are making what they say about us mean that we are bad or wrong in some way.

If you manage your brain enough, you come to the realization that defensiveness, it just isn't helpful. It doesn't help you, it doesn't help the relationship, it doesn't help you show up how you want to. So the first thing is to notice oh, that's so interesting. I'm feeling defensive about this. What's that about? Go inward. The first thing is not to actually outwardly try to defend yourself. Have you heard that quote, that saying the first act of war is defense? So just keep that in mind. When you're feeling defensive, go inward, ask yourself what you're thinking that's creating the defensiveness. Get into curiosity and openness and compassion and love for you.

So depending on what it is that you overheard your in-laws saying about your family, you might come to the realization that you agree with some of it. Like I think the easiest way to end sort of a disagreement like this is to, in your mind, whether it's just in your mind or you explicitly say it. Saying yeah, I get it. Sometimes we are like that. It's just done. When you can own the messy part of you, and you're not trying to be perfect, you drop out of all of that righteousness and thinking that you need to defend against what anyone says about you.

Now, if it's something that you disagree with and you don't get then you might decide to think you know what? They can be wrong about me. It's totally fine. This is something that changed my life when I learned it. Did you know that other people can just be wrong about you, and you can still love them? What? This is crazy. Let's pause for a minute.

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Your in-laws can say something negatively about you and your family. You get to decide if you want to agree or not agree. You get to decide if there's a little truth in it. Or if no, they're just gonna be wrong about us. It's totally fine, And you get to love them. It's they're totally wrong about us, and I love them. Or yeah I kind of get that. We are that way sometimes. That's the messy part of us, and I still love them. Now what?

So often what happens when we hear someone talk negatively about us, or they tell us something that we take personally or as an insult, we make it mean that's the truth. Even if consciously we're thinking, that's not true, and we get into defensiveness. If it really wasn't true, we wouldn't get so defensive about it. Like if we didn't have a little bit of worry that there was a part of it that was true.

So right now I'm wearing a cream sweater. If someone on the street walks by me and says hey, I love your royal blue sweater that you're wearing right now. I would be really confused. I wouldn't be defensive and say that's not true. How could you? That's crazy talk. I would just say, that's weird. I don't really think I'm wearing a royal blue sweater, but okay.

Now, when it's something negative, I think we worry that somehow like our reputation is at stake or somehow other people might believe it, and then they're going to believe something bad about us. Somehow that makes us less good. So our worth is in jeopardy.

What I want you to always know is that you are 100% worthy. There might be times where you ask someone to not say things about you. So let's say that—This is a little bit of a of a one off of this example. But let's say that your father-in-law jokes about you. Let's say that you lost a bunch of weight, and he is making jokes about how big you used to be.

This is not to say that you don't want to ask him to not joke about it. You just don't want what he's saying and doing to have such a negative impact on your emotions. So you might say hey father-in-law, like I get it, but also could you not joke about that. I don't really like it. That could be it.

Oftentimes, we get so defensive, and we make it this big drama in our

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minds. So nothing is dramatic outside of us. We can speak our truth. We can make a request like hey, could you not say that. And/or we can let people be wrong about us, or we can agree a little bit with them.

Also, going back to the original example, let's say that you heard your in-laws talking badly about your family. You can ask other people what they would like to see from you. So I didn't give specifics here, but let's say that you had just stayed over at your in-laws. You overhear them talking about how messy your family is, and how they were glad that you are leaving. You might get to a place where you genuinely want to ask them hey next time we visit, what would make it easier? How can we show up differently?

I think asking other people what they would like to see from us can be very powerful. We just want to do it from a really clean place. We're not doing it from a place of I want to make them happy, or I want to be good enough. We're doing it just from a place of this is the type of person that I want to be. I want to know how other people would prefer that we stay in their home.

The beauty of this is you get to say yes or no. Just because you ask doesn't mean it's an automatic yes. So if they say yeah, I would love it if you made sure all of the clothes were off the floor and the beds were made when you stay over. You might say oh my gosh. Absolutely. I didn't know that was important to you. Thank you for sharing. Done. Or they may ask you that, and you may say, we'll try our best. But with everything that we have going on, I'm not sure that that's possible for us right now.

Just because you make a request doesn't mean you have to say yes. The request and the inquiry into what they would like to see from you is really just useful information because these are people who you care about. The mistake that I see so often is it's like caring too much or caring not enough.

So if you think of a spectrum. On the one hand, if you care too much, other people's thoughts about you are determinative of what you think of you. That's on one end of the spectrum. That's caring too much. So if sister-in-law says that I'm being negative then I automatically take that on as my

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thought about me. I feel terrible about myself. On the other end of the spectrum, it's I don't care what other people think from the same place of insecurity where I don't consider at all what other people think of me.

So if you think of a pie, and you are considering your in-laws opinion, and it's your mother-in-law and father in-law, let's say. Maybe your opinion matters 50%, and each of their opinions matters 25%. You always get to decide what you want to think of you. That should be weighted proportionately more than anyone else's opinion of you. Yet, you're open to what other people, particularly those who you actually care about, what they think about you.

Again, you can agree with it. You can disagree with it. You can say yeah, you're wrong about me, and I love you. There are so many options for you. Because remember, their opinions don't equal what your opinion is. Their opinion is their opinion. Then you get to decide what you want to think about it.

The last part of this that I want to talk with you about is to just notice the default and automatic thoughts and feelings that you have about your in-laws versus what's possible for you for your chosen thoughts and feelings. Did you know that you could think anything you want and feel anything you want with respect to your in-laws? You can do that proactively.

I mentioned this a little bit earlier, but I think one of the worst ways of thinking about other people is wanting everyone to be happy and get along and show up a certain way because it removes the humaneness and the messiness of people and of families and relationship dynamics. Instead a much more empowering thought to think is I just want people to be the fullest version of themselves. I want people to think how they want to think, feel how they want to feel, and do what they want to do. I want that for them.

Then I get to show up and be the fullest version of me. So I'm going to be the most Natalie version of me that I can. I don't want Steve, my husband, to be different than he is. I want Steve to be the most Steve version of

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himself. The same thing with any relationship that you have. I think particularly with extended family and in-laws, we can want them to be the version of them that we have in our minds.

Instead, I would suggest shifting into I want them to be the fullest version of themselves. If they want to feel bad at this family gathering, totally fine. I'm going to show up feeling good. They can feel bad, and I get to love them. So instead of mirroring, instead of reacting, we get to decide proactively who we want to be in relation to our families, to our in-laws. That's what I have for you today my friends. If you want more help with navigating challenging relationships, join me this month inside Grow You. I will talk with you next week. Take care.

If you loved this podcast I invite you to check out Grow You my mindfulness community for moms where we do the inner work together. Head on over to nataliebacon.com/coaching to learn more.