

Ep #167: How to Stop Being a Nice-o-holic



Full Episode Transcript

With Your Host

Dr. Sherry Price

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You are listening to the *Drink Less Lifestyle* podcast with Dr. Sherry Price, episode number 167.

Welcome to *Drink Less Lifestyle*, a podcast for successful women who want to change their relationship with alcohol. If you want to drink less, feel healthier and start loving life again you're in the right place. Please remember that the information in this podcast does not constitute medical advice. Now, here's your host, Dr. Sherry Price.

Well, hello my beautiful friend. I hope you're doing amazing today. In today's podcast episode, I want to dive into something that this season I think can bring up for many women, women in particular. And it's this term that I recently heard that I just really identified with it and I think many of you may identify with it as well and that is being a nice-o-holic. Because I wonder if being too nice and being a nice-o-holic is leading to you becoming an alcoholic or drinking more than you want.

And so I want to dive into that concept of what is being nice, because I think a lot of times women are socialized to be nice, be polite, go with the flow. That's the right thing to do, the nice thing to do. That's what it is and what it means to be a good girl and follow the rules and color in the lines. And that's what's expected of us, and to show up that way. And I know I was raised that way, to be nice, to be nice to others, to be considerate of others, to put others needs before my own right. Being nice was virtuous. It was moral. It was what the good girls did.

And so I really want to peel back being nice and seeing if being overly nice or a nice-o-holic leads to us wanting to break out of that and get relief through alcohol. So being nice is defined as monitoring yourself to make sure that you come across in a pleasing manner to others and that you don't offend anyone. It's making sure others like you and they really don't have a reason to have negative feelings towards you.

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So in your presence, no one gets upset, no one's confused, no one's bored, no one's irritated or sad or hurt or angry or even fearful. Because you're so nice that you're always pleasing to them and worrying about their feelings, that you actually take on the management of other people's feelings. How does that resonate with some of you? Because I know a lot of us grow up and we're told to be nice and to be overly nice where we're always monitoring and taking the temperature of the room and the people around us. Are they having a good time?

Do we feel like we need to be the cruise director all the time when we throw a party or when we have a social gathering or when we show up to a social gathering? Are people going to like me? Am I engaging enough? Am I talking about the right thing? Am I avoiding the top three topics we're never supposed to talk about at a party? We have all these rules about how we're supposed to show up in order to be nice, in order to be good, in order to be liked.

And really at its core, being nice is about being liked by others and making sure everything is running smoothly for everyone else. And I think that's a key part of that statement, for everyone else. Because notice, it doesn't mean that you're feeling peaceful and not angry and calm inside. It's making sure others feel that way despite how you may feel. You may be like, "Oh my gosh, I don't want to be doing this or why are they throwing a temper tantrum or how am I going to make sure somebody's not bored?" It's taking on too much responsibility for how other people feel.

So I'm going to refer to that as being overly responsible. So we are responsible for us. That means we are response able. So we monitor how we respond to a situation. And I talked in the past about being reactionary versus being responsive. So it's our role as an adult to become response able. If we're in a situation, we get to choose that response. Do we panic? Do we run? Do we cry for help? Do we call 911 or do we remain calm?

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So it is really controlling our response to a certain situation. When we are overly responsible, now we are taking not only our response but worrying about how other people feel when they're around us. So taking on their emotional drama or their emotional baggage and making it our responsibility. And maybe just taking on their emotions, it could be even the happy emotions. And so being a nice-o-holic or overly nice means that you don't want to ruffle any feathers.

You don't want to create any discomfort because it's all about people liking you and getting their approval and making sure that everything is just going to be fine and great. But is that really what happens? When you are overly nice, when you're nice-o-holic do you feel that your life is fine and great? Or maybe you just feel it's fine. It's fine. It's fine. It's fine. It's fine. And a lot of times when you just keep saying it's fine, it's really not fine. It's that you just don't want to feel the emotions deep down so you just keep telling yourself it's fine.

And fine can be a very uncomfortable place to be because it doesn't feel good and you're not allowing yourself for it to feel bad. So you become in this place where you're kind of in robotic mode and you're just going through the motions. And I bring this up at this time of year because I think a lot of us feel that we need to be overly nice. We need to say yes to all the people that want to spend time with us and yes to all the people that want to do the things that we may not agree with. Maybe we don't agree with a gift exchange.

Maybe we don't agree with how much money we're spending on gifts or presents or how we're spending our time and how we're allocating our time. Or maybe we don't agree to all the activities but yet we're still saying yes to all of it because ultimately we want to smooth the waters. We don't want anybody's ruffled feathers. We don't want anybody to get upset. We just want things to be fine and smooth.

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And so when things are fine for everybody else and we're just grinning and getting by, underneath it all we're grating our teeth going, "I don't really want to be doing this. This is agony." But we tell everybody else around us, it's fine and keep going. Does that lead you to want to over-drink or even drink to begin with? And when you are overly nice or a nice-o-holic, it means you care about other people's feelings above your own.

And when you care about other people's feelings above your own and nobody's paying attention to your feelings, not even you. And maybe people don't even know how you feel because you're not showing it, oftentimes we feel stepped on, mistreated, taken for granted, nobody cares about us, we're not getting the validation that we want. And we become resentful and bitter and full of anger and regret and sadness, and mostly anger.

I see a lot of women carry a lot of anger when they feel passed over, when they feel that their feelings are not taken into consideration. And notice if that is how you're showing up, not showing your feelings, not discussing your feelings. And so when you neglect your own feelings and when you neglect your own needs, guess what? So will everybody else, because you're not putting them on display for other people to notice or other people to get to know the real you.

And here's another thing that happens when you try to control the feelings of maybe your parents or your kids, and when they're disappointed or when they're angry about something or they're not happy. Is that when you swoop in and take over and solve those feelings for them, when you give them options to make them feel better. Notice that you take away that ability for them to do that for themselves. And over time then they become reliant and I'll even use the word 'dependent' upon you to solve their problems.

I see that happen a lot in my life. I've seen it happen a lot in other women's life that I coach. They get so good at managing other people's problems,

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other people's stress, other people's things going on and they solve it for them. So they become the helpline to say, "Hey, I have a problem here." And they get dragged into these situations that they really shouldn't be in.

So when we make our kids dependent on us because we swoop in and comfort them too much or solve their problems too much, we can do this for adults as well, our partners. They become reliant on us and they wind up giving us their emotional baggage to solve. So again, I call this over-responsibility. And how does it feel when you have so much responsibility, you have your emotions to take care of and your actions that you want to control, and then you're trying to control other people's emotions and other people's actions.

And then something else happens and then something else happens and you're taking on the burden of all these people and it feels like it's a lot. It's a lot of stress. It's a lot of mental energy. It's a lot of mental anguish. And one way to feel relief is to turn to food and alcohol, the chips, the ice-cream, the cookies, the cakes, their over indulgences and, oh my goodness, I haven't had this since last year, and the peppermint bark and whatever else calls your name just so you can feel relief and feel good in the moment.

So when you feel over-responsible, just note that that can feel like pain and stress in your body. And the body doesn't want to feel pain and the body doesn't want to feel stressed out all the time. It can handle short periods of stress but it can't handle chronic stress. And so your body's going to send up signals to say, "Hey, let's end this stress or let's end this pain." And so your brain is then going to be searching for ways to end pain and end the stress.

And if you taught it anything in the past, that food can relieve it or alcohol can relieve it, that's exactly what your brain is going to think of as a solution in these times. Does this sound familiar to any of you? I know I lived this, I would use alcohol, I talked about in the podcast to manage the anger I had

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with trying to control my daughter, trying to get through the night. Trying to control her temper tantrums when she had them, trying to figure out how to parent this deviant child that I had. It was really hard.

And I laugh about it now but it was really challenging and I was not laughing then. I was really at my wits end because it was a form of pain for me. I couldn't figure out how to make it stop. I couldn't figure out how else to manage my anger so efficiently and effectively that alcohol did. And one thing I want to tell you is that I wish I had known it a bit earlier, but I'm glad I still know it now is that I'm really not responsible for other people's emotions.

Now, that's not to say I don't take on the burden sometimes, I do because I want to. But I watch that I'm not overly responsible or I make people dependent on me. And I think it's really important that we remind ourselves and depending on the person, we can remind them that we are not responsible for their emotions depending on the relationship. And it's not to say that you're not caring, that you don't love a person. It's just you can show concern for somebody when they're hurting or when they're angry or when they have a problem that they want solved.

You can still show concern without being and taking on their responsibility to solve it. You could still be supportive, "I understand you feel that way." That's a beautiful sentence to say to somebody who's in pain or in agony. But if we don't let other people manage their own emotions, guess what? They don't develop the skill on how to manage their emotions.

And so this is something you want to teach kids early. And if parents haven't taught that to their kids, they grow up being an emotional mess later in life and not understanding what to do with those emotions, how to handle them. And so a lot of times they can just spew in anger or do things that they don't really mean to be doing because when they calm down, they start apologizing for it. And that was how I handled my anger. I would say

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things I didn't mean. My wrath was awful. And so the wake that I left after one of those spats was just terrible.

And so I didn't want to continue to act that way and continue to dump on other people. I wanted to learn how to become more response able in those moments without turning to alcohol to soothe me. And you'll notice if you are in these relationships where you are overly responsible or a nice-o-holic because you will feel pain in this relationship. This relationship, you will feel that you have to walk on eggshells. That's a common terminology that I'll hear from my clients.

And that they feel that their brain gets all tied up with how to say something, when to say something, what exactly to say. Because if I phrase it this way or I phrase it that way, they're going to fly off the handle or they're not going to hear me or I feel like I'm just going to be talking to the wall. And where do I say it? Do I say it after work, before work, with the kids around, not with the kids around?

And I mean there is so much mental agony and anguish caught up when you're trying to protect another person from their own feelings. And you're trying to protect them from their feelings because ultimately you want to get the best response from them and you don't want a negative response. Because if you get a negative response, maybe your inclination is just to avoid the conversation altogether. And I know a lot of us are conflict-avoiders.

I had been a conflict avoider for a long time until I realized that that wasn't the healthiest way to show up in a relationship. I would tell myself that now's not the time to have that conversation or there'll be another time where it would be really good to have that conversation when they're more open minded. And yes, there's some truth to some timing, but I have found that there's no perfect time. There's no perfect time to start a diet. There's no perfect time to start drinking less. There's no perfect time for a difficult conversation.

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There is no perfect time. There's no perfect time to get pregnant. There's just no perfect time. So you pick a time. You pick a time to have the difficult conversation and you do your best. Being overly nice, I will say, is not the most fun way to live. And if you are a people pleaser and overly nice or a nice-o-holic, you will probably find that you get a lot of what you want in life but not everything that you want in life. And so a lot of people will tell me, "Yeah, I just thought life would be better than this and I'm such a good person." And here's the thing. You are a good person.

This is your conditioning. This is how you think. You're even a great person for how much you put up with and how much you care for other people. And yes, that does make you a good person but it doesn't make you a happy, fulfilled person. It doesn't give you the best life. It does not give you the epic life that you want.

And here's what I find is that when you don't get the life that you really want, and that you feel you deserve, you wind up blaming yourself for it because guess what? You feel overly responsible. And so it's a self-fulfilling prophecy. And you begin to wonder where you went wrong and why people aren't treating you the way you want to be treated or they don't see that you just need to be acknowledged or they're not doing things for you. And so you begin to feel empty and resentful inside so you drink and it just turns out to be a big mess and a bigger mess and a bigger mess.

And I've heard some women say it's just a hot mess because I've seen marriages crumble over this. I've seen parent-child relationships suffer from over-responsibility and being too nice, where the children just run over their parents or one of the parents who's super nice, always giving, always there for them. And here's the thing. The person who's being overly nice, maybe that's you, doesn't see that their niceness or your niceness is part of the problem. They just keep blaming the other person.

They don't see how nice I am. They don't see how giving I am. They don't see how much I do for them and so guess what? They keep getting taken

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advantage of. And like I said before, it's really sad and breaks my heart because these women do have big hearts and they are trying their darndest and they think, here's the key word, and they think they are doing the right thing. And I will tell you this is a recipe for a non-epic unfulfilled life.

So let's talk about the solution. So the solution is not the direct opposite to go out and be not nice, which means being a jerk, being a butt hole and being a selfish son of a gun. That is not what I'm recommending as the antidote. So please know that that is not what I'm proposing, rather the solution isn't about not being nice. It's actually about being truthful and honest. And you can still be truthful and honest in a nice direct way. So for example, let's look at some examples.

So your boss asks you to stay late to get a report done that needs to be done by tomorrow morning and they ask, "Hey, can you stay late to help me get this report done?" And maybe you have something on the calendar that's really important for your family and let's say it's your kid's soccer game. And instead of being overly nice and saying, "Yes, I'll do that." And you understand the importance of this report but really instead of being overly nice, you can be direct and honest.

You can say, "I'd really love to stay and help you get the report done, but I promised my kid I'd be at his or her soccer game." That's being direct, honest and still nice. It's truthful. This is a true story, I'm using it as an example, but our friends came over one July. We were cooking up burgers in our backyard and one of the guys says, "Hey, where's the beer to go with these great burgers?" And my husband and I were not drinking. We were doing a dry July. So I said, "Oh, we didn't tell you, we're doing a dry July, so there's no alcohol in the house."

And then I said, "You can run out and grab some if you'd like." So do you see I'm not saying, "Oh, there's no alcohol, let me go run to the store for you." I could have done that. I'm not saying there's anything wrong with it.

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But I was just honest and said, “There’s no alcohol in the house and you can run out and go and get some.” Very direct, very honest. I still think that was a very kind thing to say. However, I knew he was disappointed. He wanted a beer to go with his burger. And notice I didn’t take on his disappointment.

I let him deal with his disappointment however he wanted to. He could have left and ran to the store. He could have DoorDashed. There’s so many options he could have employed at that point to solve the problem. But he just enjoyed his burger with some seltzer water.

And I think it’s a really beautiful thing when you can be real, authentic and honest, particularly in your most intimate relationships, the people that you hang out with the most. Then you know those are real, authentic relationships where you can be your true self. You can feel free to show up as your true self. And that feels very safe. Trust is built very well in those types of relationships, particularly with immediate family members and it means you’re speaking up and stating your truth.

I think being overly nice is a way to hide, it’s a way to lie and it’s a way to stuff down what we really think and feel. And we can only bottle so much before we burst. Now, I have a lot of compassion in this area because I have had to grow so much in this area. I know many women aren’t raised to speak up, to speak their truth. We were raised differently. We were told to smile, not complain, not to make a stink, go with the flow, be seen, not heard. We got a lot of these messages in society at least the generation I grew up in and where I grew up. That may have a lot to do with it as well.

And while I agree that there are times where that approach may be appropriate. I don’t believe it’s the path to a life that you truly love and allowing people to see the real, authentic you. In fact, being overly nice and a nice-o-holic is a recipe for a life you want to escape and drink away. And I’ve seen that. I’ve seen that in my life. I’ve seen that in my clients’ life. And I really think that’s a disservice. And there’s no blame.

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We could talk about how we were socialized or how we were conditioned to be a good girl or a good Catholic girl or a good Christian girl or a good Mormon girl or good whatever, religion or anything else you want to put. Good Southern girl, a good Midwestern girl. We can add all the adjectives to it, but being polite and agreeable and always using your manners is not always the right strategy. Does that work when you meet somebody who's a master manipulator or somebody who preys on that type of person? No, it doesn't work.

So I raised my daughter to make sure she speaks her truth. Maybe that is being polite and maybe it's not because I think there's a time for both. And here's also what I find, when you're overly nice, oftentimes you lack the power, your own power to speak up for yourself and then you're not taken as seriously, you become a pushover, you get passed over for promotions maybe. Or you're just waiting for somebody to notice you rather than putting out all the accomplishments and all the things that you did do.

It's about being direct and being honest. And that means that you have freedom to talk about what you believe and what is your truth and what is factual, despite how the other person is going to react to your truth. Because I want you to know that your job isn't to protect people from their own feelings. And when you do that, notice what effect that has on you, not only the effect it has on them. When you're trying to protect others from their feelings, notice if you try to protect yourself from your own feelings.

And I think a lot of us do, that's why we turn to alcohol and food to make us feel better because we don't want to feel those negative feelings. So I ask you, as we're wrapping up this podcast, do you manage your anger and your feelings well? I know I didn't, I drank away my anger and guess what? The next day I'd just wake up sad and angry at myself all over again. When the alcohol wore off, the good parts of the alcohol, I was right back to being angry again. Drinking never really healed or solved anything.

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You can escape yourself for only so long but then you come right back to yourself. And I know many women drink away their dissatisfaction in life or now during this busy season and the holidays maybe you're drinking because it's so stressful. So you're trying to drink away the stress of it all. So maybe you're drinking because you're a stress-aholic. And there's no judgment here. Look, I spent years drinking my anger away. I get it.

But I'll tell you, I stopped drinking when I'm angry, so I can learn better strategies to deal with my anger. So I was no longer running from myself, avoiding myself, numbing myself. You know where else I stopped drinking? At parties where I don't know anybody because the first thing I'd do at my husband's Christmas party where I didn't know anybody or any other party where I didn't know anyone was the anxiety was so great. Who I was going to talk to and what I was going to say and how I was going to start small talk because that's not one of my strengths, I just ran to the bar.

So I stopped drinking at parties where I don't know anyone. And I've learned to deal with the awkwardness and the anxiety. I learned how to deal with my feelings rather than running from them. Now, I can't say I'm a smooth talker and I'm not awkward, but I'm certainly much better than what I used to be. And look, I really want you to know that your brain will default to whatever is easiest and whatever works. And we all know that alcohol works for numbing.

So no shame that I ran to alcohol, no shame if you run to alcohol. It's just effective. Our brains are smart. But for me, that excuse of drinking grew old. I kept thinking to myself, I'm a grown woman now. I can learn new skills. I don't have to keep doing this drinking thing like I'm in my 20s. I wanted to figure it out. I wanted to figure out new skills so I could be more successful in my life, not less. And I wanted to learn these skills because I didn't want the crutch of drinking to be my default mode of operating.

And so for you I just ask, is your nice-o-holic leading you to become an alcoholic? And you know I don't like that word, but it just rhymes. And

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notice if being too nice means you're not really speaking your truth. Maybe speaking your truth and having a difficult conversation is exactly what's needed to solve a problem because it's much easier, my friend, to solve a problem than keep running from it.

Alright, my beautiful friend, that's what I have for you today. I'll see you next week.

If you want to change your relationship with alcohol and with yourself then come check out EpicYOU. It's where you get individualized help mastering the tools so you can become a woman who can take it or leave it and be in control around alcohol in any situation. EpicYOU is the place for women who want to be healthy, confident and empowered to accomplish their goals and live their best life. Come join us over at epicyou.com/epicyou. That's epicyou.com/ E-P-I-C-Y-O-U. I can't wait to see you there.