

Ep #34: Connection



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With Your Host

Rachel Hart

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You are listening to the *Take a Break* podcast with Rachel Hart, episode 34. Welcome to the *Take a Break* podcast with Rachel Hart. If you're an alcoholic or an addict, this is not the show for you, but if you are someone who has a highly functioning life, doing very well but just drinking a bit too much and wants to take a break, then welcome to the show. Let's get started.

Hey everybody, how are you? Alright, so before we dive into today's topic, I want to tell you about a special meditation that I put together for all of you on how to handle urges. It's so good. This has been my number one request that I have received from listeners. "How do I allow an urge to be in my body and not act on it without relying on willpower?"

I will tell you, teaching your brain how to let an urge to be in your body without gritting your teeth, without distracting yourself is incredibly powerful. It is such a powerful tool. It will help you retrain your brain, it will help you discover that urges are so much more tolerable than you think they are, and - and this is the best part - if you keep practicing, it will leave you feeling so much more in control when it comes to your desire.

So the meditation is super short. It's only five minutes long because I really wanted you to be able to use it anywhere. And here's the other thing. I created this meditation specifically so you can use it for any kind of urge. You can use it for the urge to drink, but you can also use it for the urge to eat or to smoke or to shop or to check your phone. Whatever it is, because the truth is that we have urges in all parts of our life.

So in order to get your copy of the meditation, all you have to do is go over to iTunes and leave a review about the podcast and then head over to rachelhart.com/urge, and there you can send me your name, your email and the title of your review, and I'll send you the urge meditation. That's it, it's really simple.

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I will tell you, this meditation, it's like having an SOS button when you are feeling overwhelmed and you just need to regroup but you're not sure how. This is the SOS button that you need. It will make such a big difference for you. So go check it out, leave a review, I would really appreciate it.

Okay. So today I am talking all about connection. Now, for any of you out there who feel like taking a break from drinking is going to get in the way of your social life, this is the episode for you. And I decided to do this episode after I was working with a client recently who wanted to cut back on her drinking, but she was really struggling with feeling isolated.

So she's been going to these regular neighborhood meet ups where everybody's drinking a lot of wine, and what she's discovered is that when she has gone and she hasn't been drinking, she finds herself pretty quiet and reserved because she's so used to using a drink in order to loosen up.

So the problem is she's still in the process of trying to lose the last of her baby weight, and she's exercising and she's eating right, but her regular wine habit is the thing that's really holding her back because she just keeps consuming all these empty calories and they're keeping her from her goal.

But it feels like a real conundrum, right? In her mind, it seemed as if there were only two choices. Either she could hang out with the other moms and not drink and then end up quiet and reserved and not really enjoy herself, but maybe the weight would start to come off because she wasn't having all those empty calories. Or, she could drink, which is the way that she knows how to open up and connect with people and enjoy herself, but then she's still stuck in this place where she's not making any headway about losing the weight.

So she felt like she was stuck. And I will tell you, a lot of people really feel like they're in a similar bind. You want to feel connected when you go out with people. But when you're not drinking, it can be easy to feel like you're an outsider, especially if everyone else is drinking... And so you start

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to notice that when you're not drinking you're quiet and reserved, and you feel disconnected from the group and that's not what you want.

So this is what we're going to be talking about today. I am going to show you that you do not need to choose between these two things. You do not need to choose between one, not drinking, being healthy, getting the results you want in life but feeling socially isolated. Or two, drinking, connecting with people, but then being stuck with the same negative results from alcohol that you don't like. It's not a choice between these two things.

So we're going to start with the idea of being connected or disconnected. What do these ideas mean? When it comes to your relationships, feeling connected really is when you have a rapport or you establish a rapport with others. It's to feel friendliness towards the people you are with. And to be disconnected is really the opposite, is to feel separate and estranged from other people.

So right off the bat, you need to consider the word "connect." Connect is a verb. So think about this. What makes people come together? What pulls people apart? It's an action. Connection requires action. You have to do something in order to connect with another person.

And since you all know the think-feel-act cycle, you all know your actions are not this spontaneous thing that materializes out of nowhere. Your actions are driven by your thoughts and your feelings. So that means that if you want to change your action, it means that your emotions, how you feel, and the thoughts running through your mind, they play a really big role in whether or not you're feeling connected or disconnected. Because to connect requires an action, and actions are always driven by what you feel and what you think.

Now, this is not what a lot of people believe. What a lot of people believe is that the feeling of connection or disconnection depends not on the think-feel-act cycle, but in a lot of situations, whether or not they are drinking. Now, when you feel like you can't connect without a drink, what you've essentially done is disempowered yourself. You have removed your

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responsibility to be in charge of connecting with others and you've handed that responsibility over to a drink, right?

You said, "Okay, the drink is responsible for whether or not I can connect. I'm not responsible. It's the drink." And when you start to rely on a drink to connect - and by the way, if you're not sure whether or not you do this, all you have to do is go to your next social outing and not drink and see how you feel, see whether or not you feel connected or disconnected and you will find out.

But when you start to rely on a drink to connect, you're basically sitting back and waiting for the alcohol to do the work of connecting for you. Right? You have disempowered yourself and you have empowered the drink to do the work of connecting.

Now, let me be really clear. There is nothing wrong with this. Nothing. Okay? Alcohol has been used as a social lubricant for thousands of years. So there's nothing wrong if you're doing this, but it's important for you to understand. It's important to understand whether or not you're doing it because when you don't like the results that you're getting from your drinking and you have spent years handing over responsibility for connection to a drink, you are going to run into some trouble, I promise.

You're probably going to find it difficult to connect with people in different social settings when you're used to having a drink in your hand and having the drink do the work. And people will say this to me all the time, they'll say, "I want to take a break and I want to still feel connected with people, but when I'm not drinking I feel so disconnected, I don't know how to do both. I don't know how to take a break and be social and connect with people."

And I always will tell people the same thing. There is some really good news. Humans are hardwired for connection. You are hardwired to connect with people. For humans, connection is as fundamental as food, as fundamental as water, as shelter. All of those things that are fundamental for our survival, connection is included.

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And when you start to think about it, it really actually makes a lot of sense, because if you think about what it was like living thousands of years ago, forming connections was essential for survival. When you were connected with others, it was so much easier to find food, to find safety, to find shelter. Connection allowed humans to work together as a group rather than being left all on your own and figuring out how to survive in isolation.

Connection is actually so fundamental to humans that scientists have found that it actually improves your health. So there are a lot of studies out there showing that strong social bonds not only boost your wellbeing, but they boost your physical health as well, and the lack of social connection is more harmful than carrying extra weight or smoking. So you really need to pay attention to this. You really need to pay attention to connection and of course, it's totally normal that you want to connect with others.

Now, you hear me talk about the brain a lot and how the human brain is one of the most powerful brains that we know of. But here's the thing, it's still a mystery why the human brain is so large because a big brain requires a lot of energy. And so if you think about it, it doesn't seem terribly efficient. So why did the human brain evolve to take up all this space?

And when scientists look across animal kingdom, brain size generally increases with body size. Of course, humans are the exception. Given the average person's body size, the human brain should be much, much smaller. But instead, the human brain, your brain, is by far the largest brain in the animal kingdom relative to the size of the body.

And for a long time, people believed that the reason why humans had a big brain was because our brains had to do all these complex skills. They had to be able to do all the complex tasks that humans are able to complete, right? So you can learn, you can memorize, you can plan, all of these things that are very complex necessitated having a larger brain.

But now, scientists actually believe that the size of our brain is in part a product of something else. One of the reasons why humans evolved to have such a large brain is so that we can cope with the complexities of

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social life and social interactions. We needed a big brain because of how complex social connection is.

So think about it. Once our ancestors started migrating across the globe, they had to have, they had to create good relationships with people outside of their tribal groups. They had to do this to survive. And more complex social interactions required a bigger brain. So what does this mean for you?

Well, long story short, your brain was built for connection. Your brain was built this way. That's why in part it's so big. But just because it was built to handle complex social interactions, doesn't mean that you know how to use it or that you haven't unknowingly learned to seed the responsibility for connection in different situations to a drink.

And I'll tell you, that's exactly what I did. I had no idea I was doing it, but when I started drinking when I was 17 in college, you know, it was a full eight years. A full eight years before my brain was finished developing, and I headed off to college not knowing how to cope with all the anxiety I felt in social situations. But at that very first party, I learned a really useful trick. If I could just keep drinking, if I could just keep having more to drink, then finally after a while, that knot in my stomach would slowly go away. I wouldn't notice it anymore.

Now, the downside was that my brain started to believe that drinking was a silver bullet, that drinking was a way to connection. If I wasn't drinking, I was feeling all this anxiety. But if I was drinking, I could finally connect with people, and that when I finally was buzzed, then I could be relaxed and I could be fun, then I could be free. And I started to believe - my brain started to believe that having a drink was not only the only way for me to connect without feeling incredibly anxious, but it was the only way to find the real me. The me that was fun and relaxed and silly and didn't care what people thought.

Now, you don't have to have started drinking before your brain was fully developed or to have suffered social anxiety in order to teach your

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brain that alcohol is the fastest way to connect with people. It is just built into so many different kinds of social functions. So if you think of networking and dating and sporting events and holidays and entertainment, drinking is just built in for a lot of people, right? It's the norm.

And so it becomes something that we're just used to having by our side. But now here's the thing. The more I look around, the more I see things like boozy painting classes and tipsy yoga and craft brew 5Ks, it's being built into more and more and it starts to feel like, "Well, what am I supposed to do? I want to take a break, I don't like the results that I'm getting, but alcohol is everywhere and that's how I know how to connect."

So let's go back to my client. Her brain, like all human brains, like your brain, was built for connection. But that's now how she felt when she was out with people and not drinking. She felt utterly disconnected when she was in a social environment and didn't have a drink in her hand. But knowing the think-feel-act cycle, I started to use it with her.

I started first by working backwards and starting with the action line. And I asked her how she was acting when she was out with people and not drinking, and she knew that very clearly. She was really able to identify with how she would act when she was in a group and not drinking. She noticed that she was quiet and she didn't participate. Those were her actions.

Now remember, our actions don't mysteriously appear out of the ether. They're not these spontaneous things that we have no control over. They are created by how you're feeling, and so the next question that I wanted to find out from her was whether or not she could identify what emotions were fuelling the action of being quiet and not participating.

So I asked her how was she feeling when she was quiet and she was holding back, and pretty quickly she was able to identify that she was probably feeling some sort of mixture of insecurity and boredom. That's how she was feeling. That was her emotional state. So she now had two pieces of the think-feel-act cycle identified, but the next question is again,

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your emotional state. It doesn't come out of the clear blue sky. Your emotional state is driven by what you're thinking.

So what thoughts were generating these emotions? And now, I will tell you this is where it becomes a little bit more difficult. Most of the times, we can readily identify how we're acting, and it's probably then a little bit easier to identify how we're feeling in that situation. But identifying how you're thinking that can be a little bit more challenging. But you do need to work your way backwards up the cycle if you want to see how it's working.

So we started going through that. We started just really going back in time and seeing if she could go back to where she was, how she was feeling, what she was doing, and if she could connect with the thoughts that were running through her mind while she was sitting there, while she was not talking and holding back, while she was feeling quiet and bored.

And here's what she finally said. "I just kept thinking to myself, I have nothing to say, and I'm not even interested in what everyone else is talking about." And there it was. There we had the cycle. These two thoughts, "I have nothing to say", which was creating her insecurity, and "I'm not even really interested in what everyone else is talking about", which was creating her boredom, were leading to the feelings of insecurity and boredom, which in turn had her acting quiet and withdrawn.

Now, guess what. The cycle is self-perpetuating. This piece is so important. So the more that she was sitting there and being quiet, and the more that she was sitting there and withdrawing and holding back, the more that she was reinforcing the thoughts that she had nothing to say and she wasn't interested in what people were talking about.

And this could go on forever. The cycle will just loop over and over and over again until she could find a way to interrupt it. Now, the problem was, in the past, her focus has not been on using the think-feel-act cycle. Her entire focus was on drinking. Her entire focus was how not drinking was causing her to find these social events unenjoyable and wanting to

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skip them all together, and that not drinking was the reason why she wasn't enjoying these events and was finding herself quiet and holding back.

But focusing on the think-feel-act cycle, it gave her a new place to divert her attention. Suddenly, she could go into these social situations and start to understand why she was feeling and acting the way that she was beyond the very superficial explanation of, "Oh, it's just because I'm not drinking. So when I'm not drinking I don't have a good time."

Looking at her thoughts and her feelings and her actions all together, it helped her find the root cause so that she could start to shift it, and the root cause is always the thoughts that are running in your mind. The only way she knew how to stop feeling how she was feeling, which was insecure and bored, and the only way she knew how to stop acting how she was acting, which was quiet and not participating, was to have a drink. That's all she knew before.

It was either drink or don't drink. And her brain had practiced doing this hundreds, if not thousands of times, and so it's no surprise that she thought her only solution to change how she felt and to stop feeling insecure and bored was to pour a drink.

You can see how quickly a person might come to rely on having a drink as a remedy to change how you feel and to act differently, and I will tell you, it will always be easier. It will always be easier to outsource the work of changing how you feel to a drink. And you can do it, it's up to you. You have free will, you can make that choice. But the question for you to ask yourself is are you okay dealing with the consequence of not only atrophying your ability to connect on your own, but are you okay dealing with the consequence of the negative results you get from drinking more than you want?

Now, your brain has a lot of tricks up its sleeve. It really does when it comes to generating negative thoughts. So if you're not like my client who was stuck in her own thoughts about how she wasn't fitting in and she had nothing to say and she didn't enjoy the conversation, you may notice when

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you're in social situations that your brain starts to mind read. Your brain will start scanning the people in the room and deciding that it knows what these people are thinking.

Now, usually this focus on what other people are thinking about you does not head in a positive direction. I will tell you that nine times out of ten, the mind reading that you do is never positive. But you know, don't take my word for it, go into a social event without a drink and just watch your mind go to work. There are a lot of negative thoughts up in there right now that are happy to take over.

They are happy to run the show unless you purposely decide to point your mind in a different direction. You decide to use the think-feel-act cycle you can start to not just go with these automatic negative thoughts but to start to shift your thinking.

And that's the best news. The think-feel-act cycle is the solution. It not only explains why you feel the way you do but it also shows you a way out that doesn't limit you to "Do I drink or do I not drink?" And one place you can start to notice is just by asking yourself, "Okay, if my thoughts create my feelings and my feelings drive my actions, and I know that I want to act differently, what are some of the positive thoughts that my brain is thinking once I've started drinking and connection seems easier?"

I will tell you, I think this is such a useful exercise because it quickly shows you that your brain is capable of thinking different thoughts. It's just learned to think them under a different circumstance. It's learned to think them once you've started drinking. But you can see that it is possible for your brain to think thoughts like, "That's so funny. That reminds me of something. I have a good story to tell. That person looks nice. I should introduce myself. This is fun." Right? Like these thoughts are possible. They are there. They are in your brain.

It's just easier for you right now to think them automatically when you're drinking. You need to learn how to start thinking them on purpose when you don't have a drink in your hand. Pop any of those positive

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thoughts into the think-feel-act cycle and you will immediately see how they generate entirely different emotions and drive different actions. And emotions and actions are the things necessary that lead to connection.

You have to act differently if you want to connect. You can either outsource connection to a drink and have a buzz and intoxication, be in charge of your ability to ask questions and to share and to engage and to be curious. You can have a drink be in charge of all of that. Or, you can start to notice the current thoughts that you are thinking when you're not drinking and you're feeling disconnected. You can notice those thoughts, you can notice what they generate in terms of how you feel and how you act, and you can decide that you want to think something different on purpose.

You can decide that you don't want to just outsource how you feel and how to act to having a drink in your hand. And I will tell you, this is what shifted everything for me. I was so convinced that I couldn't be the outgoing and funny and silly Rachel without a drink, but it was only because I had practiced using a drink to be that way and to feel that way over and over again. And I had no idea about the think-feel-act cycle.

But once I learned about it, then I could watch my thinking when I was socializing without a drink, and see how my thoughts were the source of my problem, not the drink. Right? Suddenly, I had a brand new way forward. I didn't need to outsource connection. I didn't need to say, "Alright well, it's just healthier for me not to drink but I'm just going to move through my life feeling disconnected."

I didn't need to do that. I could learn how to exercise connection on my own because it's the very skill that my brain, my big human brain was built to use. I could relearn how to connect again. So try it out. See where your thoughts go when you're socializing without a drink, and how that impacts your own think-feel-act cycle.

And let me know how it goes. I love hearing from you guys, you can always send me an email at podcast@rachelhart.com. And check out that

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urge meditation. It's just five minutes long and it will show you a totally different way to interact and relate to your urges that I promise will change everything. That's it for today. See you next week.

Thanks for listening to this episode of *Take a Break from Drinking*. If you like what was offered in today's show and want more, please come over to www.rachelhart.com where you can sign up for weekly updates to learn more about the tools that will help you take a break.