

37. Approval vs Acceptance with Dr. Arpita Gupta DePalma



FULL EPISODE TRANSCRIPT

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Arpita: Hey everybody. Welcome to another episode of Doctors Living Deliberately. I am Dr. Arpita Gupta DePalma, and I'm here with my co-host, Dr. Michael Hersh. Welcome Michael.

Michael: Hey everyone.

Arpita: How are you?

Michael: I am doing great. Excited to be back and having another one of our discussions. I love when you and I get to chat a little bit, go in depth on a particular topic.

Arpita: Yes, totally. And so today what we decided that we, I wanted to talk about a little bit is, you know, parent pleasing and, you know, essentially people pleasing for our parents as well as when we're dealing with, with this, with regards to our children, like with their behaviors and how we start to, you know, think about how we handle those situations, whether or not we accept what they're showing up as, how they're showing up, whether or not we condone what they're doing and overall approval across the board with this. Right? And I know for me specifically the reason I wanted to talk about this, because in the beginning it was really a very culturally driven belief that I had to behave a certain way or show up a certain way or succeed in a certain way in order to get the approval of my parents. And so I felt like this would be a great little thing to talk about today because I think especially within my culture, but even outside of the culture, the more and more I think about this, everybody has this tendency to want to please their parents or please maybe a mentor or somebody in their life. And I really wanted to dive into that a little bit to see why we want to do this, like what drives us to be that way?

Michael: It's a fascinating topic, right? Because you know, we both have parents that we are involved with and we also have children. And you know, it's very normal I think, to having, you know, grown up and parents and there being expectations that are there that you kind of feel compelled to fulfill. And then simultaneously, How are we showing up for our own children? How are we setting expectations? What is the life that we are setting our kids up for when we create expectations for them? And it's so interesting to be intentional about this because I would say this wasn't something that I had thought a lot about before, you know, diving into coaching. But it's something that comes up a lot more when you are choosing to be intentional and deliberate about your relationships.

Arpita: Yeah, I think when I think back, you know, where did this start? And I think as children you know, I had a very loving, I still have a very loving, supportive family and my parents are amazing. But I do remember having almost a little bit of a fear driven goal or ambition, desire to do well, right? If I don't get the A's if I don't succeed in school, if I don't do X, Y, and Z, they're not gonna be happy, right? They're not gonna be approving of my behaviors. IE they're not gonna be approving of me. It's what my brain was telling me. And so very quickly I learned that in order to have a peaceful life or what I was creating in my mind to be a peaceful life, I had to perform a certain way. And what I didn't realize until later is that I was looking at my parents' approval as their way of showing or me believing that that was their way of showing their love for me. Right? And so when I did well in school, when I succeeded in any activity or goal that I was going after, and they were like, good job. You know, I could tell they were approving of that, they were excited about it. They were prideful. They were happy. That's what drove me to believe that they approved of me, they approved of what I was doing, how I was behaving, and that was what I was equating to their love. And that is all jacked up. You know, if we sit down and really start to dissect that, that's when we realize how, how messed up that is. So tell me your experience or thoughts about that and then we can kind of go into it a little bit deeper.

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Michael: Yeah. Well it's interesting 'cause I, I think especially for physicians, right? Where we get a lot of our value and self-worth from our accomplishments and the things that we're doing. When there are these expectations and relationships, you feel like you are kind of earning your value and your worth in the relationship by showing up from this place where you're fulfilling the expectations of the people that you love. And so, I definitely, I think regardless of culture, regardless of how you grew up this shows up in every relationship that we have. One in particular that comes to mind as we're talking about this was a direct result of the match. So as, as we've talked about here before, I grew up in New York and after the match I moved to do my internal medicine and GI training in St. Louis, and my grandmother was so upset by the fact that I was leaving New York, I belonged in New York, and it felt so personal, right? Everybody, you know, anybody that's been through the match knows that this is a contract, an obligation, I, there was no choice at that point. Once you match, you go. It felt like I had disappointed her so greatly because I wasn't living up to her expectation that I belonged to New York, and then I chose to stay in the Midwest and raise my family in Chicago, and that was also a huge disappointment because again, I belonged in New York, in her eyes, and I love my grandmother dearly. And it was really hard to come to terms with the fact that I was disappointing her in that way. And so I, I think this can show up in so many different relationships, not even just with our parents.

Arpita: Well, you know, and it's interesting 'cause you said, well, I love my grandmother dearly and I was disappointing her. And so that's just kind of proof right there that we equate our parents love to getting their acceptance, or our elders love to them accepting us or approving of what we are doing. Sorry, not accepting necessarily, but approving of what we're doing, right? And so when we can start to recognize that there is a separation there, right? How many of you guys truly believe that if you don't have your parents' approval for something you're doing or choosing that they're gonna just completely disown you and not love you anymore? Right? I think our brain tells us that that's gonna happen. And unfortunately in some cultures, yes, that does happen. That's, and a big piece of this, if I go back and watch the Indian movies from like 30, 40 years ago, like that's what they teach in the movies too, right? If you don't listen to your parents and they don't approve you, they're gonna disown you. Inevitably, even in those Indian movies, the women, the girl comes back 'cause she's in love with this man who her dad doesn't approve of, and he comes back, everybody's happy. They all approve of it. It works out at the end. This is such a crazy random example, but my point is, is that a lot of times we make it out to be a lot worse than it actually is because of the fear that has been instilled within us by maybe the thoughts that we're having about what our parents have said to us, what they're going to do. We have to get to a point where we recognize that even if we do exactly what they want, or they wanted, we may never get that approval or acceptance, right? And so it becomes very complicated where the goal here is to really recognize what do you want for yourself? What are you doing that you are authentically being true to you and your desires, right?

So one of the first things that I like to do when I'm talking to, you know, friends or clients or whatever it comes up somehow, is just to ask, what is your ambition being driven by? Right? Is it being driven by fear for lack of approval if you don't do it or don't complete it or succeed? And then if so, what areas in life do you see that in? Right. So number one, a lot of people say career number one. If I don't do this in my career. If I don't achieve this, I'm not gonna have the approval. Another area is family relations. A good daughter-in-law behaves like this, right? A good son-in-law or son or daughter behaves like this. So these expectations that have been set by society that are imprinted in our brain, if we don't uphold that or live up to that, we're not gonna get approval from our parents or whoever. And even the sibling rivalry, right? They're doing this, I need to do that just to be as good as they are. So, being aware of when we are showing up, what is driving the ambition that we have to show up a certain way. Is it truly a energy that you enjoy, that it's easy for you to be in? Or is it one of those

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push-pull energies that is not a positive good feeling? I think that's important to, to notice and recognize. And a lot of that times we just have to be present and think about what's driving our, our desires to be showing up a certain way.

Michael: Yeah, and, and it's an excellent point that you're making, is that it is a choice, right? So the first thing is to recognize why are you doing the things that you're doing? Is it out of obligation or is it out of true desire and want that this is how you want to be showing up in the relationship. And what I'll point out is that whenever we do something from obligation, typically the very next thing we feel is resentment. Because if you're not showing up authentically, if you're not doing the things that you want to be doing out of pure love and desire to promote the relationship, then you're inevitably going to feel resentful for doing these things that you don't want to be doing. So remaining true to you and authentic in the things that you agree to do is so important. Because it gets you more of the life that you wanna be living.

Arpita: Totally. When I go back and I think back to even my childhood, right, like I did a lot of the parent pleasing per se, with how I was performing in school and showing up and getting the awards and like extracurricular activities, all those things, because I, you know, I recognized that it made them proud of me and I made that pride equal their love. I really enjoyed having them feel happy, and I believed that that was our way of showing this mutual love. But as I got older, I recognized things that were important to me. So a perfect example that I bring up a lot of times is who I married, right? I married an Italian man. Very, very different from what the cultural expectations are, and I really had to stand strong with my beliefs of this is what I wanted for myself. I authentically showed up for it and it was not easy, it was not simple. I definitely was not getting my parents' approval for that initially, right? And I had to really do some work around recognizing that I'm gonna move down this path, I don't have their approval, but I'm pretty confident that that doesn't mean that they don't love me. Right? And that's the piece that I think a lot of people get stuck in, that if I don't have their approval, that means they're not gonna love me and that the relationship is over. Sometimes we have to separate and be clear for what we want because we know that that's what we need for ourselves and want for ourselves and the people that are meant to be there. We'll come around and will be there regardless of what decisions you make.

Michael: So you were bringing up at the beginning the difference between acceptance and approval and you know, I, I guess I'm not entirely sure that I'm clear on, on how those two things differ. Can you shed some light on that?

Arpita: I think part of this is acceptance and approval and also condoning, right? And this is kind of where we transition into the kids a little bit, for me at least, but with regards to acceptance and approval, you know, how do we know that we have somebody's acceptance? Are we going, okay, do you accept what I'm doing here? Do you approve of what I'm doing here? A lot of that I wanna just offer that we create for ourselves in our minds. Right? So it's really not the difference between acceptance and approval, it's really the difference between acceptance and condoning. Right? That's my differentiation there because when we accept something is happening, we accept it as happening. It is there. There's not anything I can necessarily do to change it, the situation is here. Am I able to just accept it to be able to be at peace. Versus condoning it, meaning I approve or I'm okay with you doing it and I encourage you to continue doing this. Right? And this is where I really had to learn the difference for myself with my kids, that I can accept what they're doing, maybe partying in college when I really don't want them to do so, without condoning it. I'm not gonna say, Hey girl, go ahead and party out all night and go to the bars and do all that stuff. I'm not condoning it, but I've accepted the fact that it, it probably is happening, right? This is what all teenagers do at this age. So I hope that explained it a little bit,

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but the difference between accepting and condoning and that's really helped me a lot with how I look at a lot of things, a lot of the behaviors that the children do because, they're their own people. I cannot control how they're choosing to show up. I have given them all the tools that they need. I have tried to support them and educate them to the best of my ability to put them in the best space, but ultimately it is their decision for how they're going to choose to show up.

Michael: Yeah, and I think that that is an essential point here, that you can accept your children for their choices, and not necessarily condone those choices. And why this is so important is 'cause your parents can do the exact same thing, right? And so it's kind of this beautiful circle, if you will, when you recognize that it's possible for you to accept without condoning, you know, that your parents can do it just as easily. And you know how you love and adore your kids, and your parents love and adore you in the same way. And when you can again, take the kind of higher level view of this type of situation, then all of a sudden it becomes a lot easier. And then that also makes it easier to show up from love to make the choices out of pure desire rather than out of obligation.

Arpita: Totally. And I, I think the easiest way for me to just say it is that when I realized that I wasn't having that tug of war anymore, right? You know, when I'm constantly wanting everything to go my way in order to give that acceptance or give that approval to my kids, realizing that I can kind of relax in this space of acceptance because it just allows me to feel better, allows me to settle some of that noise knowing that I don't necessarily condone it. If that makes sense. So I am accepting it. I'm not condoning it. And I've said that to myself. I find myself saying it in my head, that's my thought. I'm accepting this, but I'm not condoning this. And that's how I get through it. Because they're gonna challenge you as it is. And as you mentioned, that's the full circle, right? I think I, I had the ability to have the awareness around this once I had kids, because beforehand with my parents, it's, you know, it's just how they are. I have to behave a certain way in order to get that approval. And now being able to shift and see, hey, this is what our kids do. It's out of our control. It doesn't mean that I don't love 'em any, any less or any differently. That's where I'm able to apply it back to my parents as well.

Michael: I mean, I think this is fantastic. I think this is such an important conversation and any last takeaways that you have for the audience when it comes to this topic?

Arpita: I would say if you find yourself driven to behave or succeed or perform in a certain way, but it's not truly feeling effortless or authentic to you, I would ask yourself, who are you trying to get the approval from? And why? Why is it so important for you to have this person's approval? Right? And I think, we call it a thought download, when you just sit there and journal and write about it, that will be very revealing to figure out what is driving you, why is it not you and your ability to be authentically you for yourself, for your own sake. And that, that's something that I think I've worked with a lot. As I mentioned before, The things that are important for me that I feel strongly about, that I know in my inner true gut is how I wanna be. It's easier to stand strong for, sometimes it's when it's the stuff that we're not quite sure about, even for our own sakes, that we get pushed towards moving towards the direction that is allowing us to be accepted by others. So doing a little bit of work there is, is important.

Michael: Yeah. And the journey never ends, right? Each time you do a little bit of work, you uncover more work that needs to be done. And I guess that's the fun part. I mean, for me, that's kind of what the new challenge of life is, is kind of continually trying to uncover kind of what the next thing is. So well, thank you so much for this discussion. I think it's been great.

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Arpita: Thank you. I appreciate your entertaining me with this.

Michael: And thank all of you for listening and we will catch you all next time on the next episode of Doctors Living Deliberately. Take care.

Arpita: Bye

Michael: bye.