SESSION TRANSCRIPT · THE MISSING PIECES OF PERIMENOPAUSE

How to Rebuild Self-Trust After Years of Masking: A Midlife Reset for Neurodivergent Women

with Kori C. Mock · Day 2 · Tuesday, October 27 · The Unnamed Losses

A note on this transcript: it was created from an automatic transcription, and parts of the recording were hard to make out. Those passages have been condensed to their main point. For Kori's exact words, please listen to the session.

I think a lot of us don't even realize what happened until we're well into adulthood: that we've lost trust in ourselves. Not because we necessarily made horrible decisions, or because we genuinely don't know what we're doing, but because somewhere along the way we learned that our own reactions, our preferences, and sometimes even our own perception of what was happening weren't things to trust. And if you're a neurodivergent woman who has spent most of her life masking and people-pleasing, you may have had decades of practice doing exactly that.

So today I want to talk about how that happens, why it can become particularly noticeable in midlife, and what it might look like to start trusting yourself again.

So let me ask you: how often do you make a decision and then immediately start questioning it?

Maybe you've already decided you don't want to go somewhere. You're tired, you've had a long week, and you genuinely just want to stay home. But then somebody asks why you're not coming, and suddenly, instead of trusting what you know, you're trying to justify it. Are you really that tired? Are you being antisocial? Are you going to disappoint somebody? Maybe you should just suck it up and go.

Or maybe someone asks you to do something, and you say yes before you even stop to think about whether you actually want to. And then you're left trying to figure out how you're going to deal with it.

Or maybe someone's tone changes during a conversation. They're a little quieter than usual, or they don't respond the way you expected. And now you're mentally replaying everything you just said, trying to figure out whether you did something wrong.

I think this is something that gets overlooked when we talk about self-trust. We tend to think about it in terms of big decisions, like choosing a career, leaving a relationship, or making a major life change. But self-trust shows up in tiny, ordinary moments. Do I believe myself when I say I'm uncomfortable? Do I trust myself to know when I've had enough? Can I make a choice without needing somebody else to tell me it's okay? Because if the answer is consistently no, something is worth looking at.

I'm the person behind Life After Unmasking, a space for late-diagnosed ADHD and AuDHD women who are trying to figure out who they are underneath all the expectations, coping strategies, and versions of themselves they learned to perform. I'm also a neurodivergent woman, a mom, and somebody who has spent much of her life trying to understand the difference between what I'm actually experiencing and what I've been conditioned to think I should experience.

That's a big part of why I do this work. Getting to a place where you understand your brain and your patterns is incredibly useful. But at some point, understanding isn't enough on its own. You still have to figure out what you're going to do with that information. And that's where self-trust becomes such an important part of the picture.

So here's something I want you to consider. What if you weren't always someone who second-guessed yourself? Think about how many times you've heard things like: you're too sensitive. You're overreacting. It's not that big of a deal. Why are you making this so difficult? Why can't you just do what everyone else does?

And maybe nobody said those exact words to you. Maybe the message was more subtle. Maybe you learned that expressing discomfort made you seem needy, or that asking for help got you treated like you were incapable. Maybe having a strong emotional reaction meant being told to calm down, instead of anyone asking what happened in the first place.

I know for me, being sensitive was often treated as a problem. And when you're someone who feels things deeply, who notices changes in other people's moods, who gets overwhelmed more easily than the people around you, being told you're overreacting doesn't make those experiences go away. It just teaches you to question them.

You still feel the discomfort, and you still notice the thing that bothers you. But now there's another layer: am I allowed to feel this, or am I making too much of it? Over time, that can become almost automatic. You start correcting yourself before anybody else can. You minimize what you're feeling. You tell yourself you're being ridiculous. And then years later, you wonder why it's so difficult to identify what you actually need.

Let's be honest. If you spent years learning that your needs and reactions were unreliable or inconvenient, you're going to have a complicated relationship with self-trust.

Now let's talk about masking. When we talk about neurodivergent masking, I think people sometimes imagine it's just pretending to be something you're not. It can be that, but it can also be much more than that. It can mean constantly monitoring how you come across: micromanaging your facial expressions, your voice, how much you're talking, whether you're making the right amount of eye contact, whether you're acting appropriately.

It can mean sitting in an environment that's incredibly uncomfortable and pretending that you're fine. Maybe the lights are bothering you. The noise level is getting to you. You're exhausted, and you just need a break. But instead of responding to any of that, you're focused on making sure nobody else notices. And eventually you become very good at it. You can appear capable. You can appear perfectly comfortable. Meanwhile, you've been ignoring everything your body has been telling you.

And this is where I want to make an important distinction, because I'm not going to tell you that masking is always bad, or that you should just stop. Sometimes masking can be protective. Sometimes it's a conscious choice that makes sense in the situation. And honestly, not all of us have the same freedom to unmask everywhere.

The problem isn't necessarily that we learned how to adapt. The problem is when adapting becomes so automatic that we no longer recognize when we're overriding ourselves, or when we start believing that the adapted version is the only version of us people will accept.

People-pleasing overlaps with masking, but they're not exactly the same thing. With people-pleasing, there's often an underlying concern about how others will respond to you. Are they going to be disappointed? Are they going to think you're selfish? Are they going to like you less, or not at all? And if you also experience rejection sensitivity, those questions can become incredibly intense.

So maybe you say yes because saying no feels too uncomfortable. Maybe you over-explain because you need the other person to understand that you're not being difficult. Maybe you apologize for something that didn't actually require an apology, or that you weren't even involved in. Or maybe someone seems upset, and suddenly your entire attention is focused on fixing it.

The thing is, you can become so good at managing everyone else that you don't stop to consider your own needs.

I think about this in terms of the automatic yes. Somebody asks you to take on another responsibility, and before you've considered your energy or thought about what else you've already committed to, you agree. Technically, yes, you made a decision. But did you actively choose it? Or did you just react to the possibility of disappointing someone? Those aren't always the same thing.

I'm not saying you should never help people, or that every compromise is a problem. Healthy relationships involve doing things for people you care about. The distinction is choice. Can you say yes because you want to? Can you say no without feeling terrible? Can you tolerate someone being disappointed without immediately deciding you did something wrong? That's where self-trust comes in. Because if every decision is based on how somebody else might feel about you, your own judgment never gets a chance to exist.

So let's look at what happens in these patterns. You notice something. Maybe you're uncomfortable, or tired, or you don't want to do something. But instead of taking that information seriously, you start questioning it. Is this legitimate? Am I being difficult? Is there something wrong with me for feeling this way?

Then you look outside yourself. You ask somebody else. You wait for reassurance. You look for permission. Sometimes outside input is genuinely helpful. I'm not suggesting we should all make every decision in isolation. But there's a big difference between asking for information and asking someone else to decide what you're allowed to want. And the more often you do that, the more you learn that your own knowing isn't enough. So the next time something happens, you trust yourself a little bit less.

Over time, this can shift from describing what happens to believing something about who you are. There's a difference between "I'm anxious about this" and "I'm unreliable." One describes an experience. The other is a conclusion about yourself. And once you start believing it, everything starts to look like evidence. That's a really difficult place to rebuild from, because you're constantly second-guessing yourself.

So why does so much of this seem to surface in midlife? I don't think there's one universal answer. For some of us, it's the hormonal changes of perimenopause, which can affect attention, emotional regulation, and how much capacity we have. For some of us, we've spent decades juggling work, relationships, parenting, caregiving, and all the other expectations that came with them. And for those of us who were identified later in life, we finally have language for things we've been experiencing our entire lives.

So what people once called being lazy or inconsistent might make more sense as executive function. What we thought was just being overly emotional might involve sensory processing or

emotional regulation. And what we thought was simply being a good, agreeable person might actually involve a significant amount of people-pleasing.

Now, I want to be clear that this doesn't mean every part of your personality is a mask, or that everything you've done to accommodate other people was somehow wrong. But it's natural to look back at your life and wonder: how much of this was really me? How much of it was based on what I wanted, and how much was based on what I thought I was supposed to do?

I think that's often where the shift in midlife comes from. Not because we've carelessly decided to put ourselves first, but because we might finally be ready to stop chasing everyone else's approval.

And here's something else I really want you to hear. Trusting yourself doesn't mean you're always going to get it right. It doesn't mean you're never going to misjudge your capacity, or have a reaction you later disagree with. And it certainly doesn't mean you should never ask for help. I think sometimes we have this notion that being trustworthy means never getting anything wrong, and that standard is impossible.

I talked about this in one of my podcast episodes about ADHD. I was supposed to pick up my daughter, and I had lost track of time. The school called, and I could see how disappointed she was. That could have become one of those moments that turned into more evidence against myself. And I did sit in that for a little while. But I didn't stay there. I acknowledged what happened, I worked to understand why it was happening, I recognized that it mattered, and then I started making adjustments so it was less likely to happen again.

That's a very different response from spending years collecting evidence that you can't be trusted. Self-trust is built on knowing that when something happens, you can look at it, take responsibility where appropriate, figure out what to change, and respond.

You can trust yourself and still need support. You can trust yourself and change your mind. Self-trust isn't built on perfection. It's a relationship you develop with yourself over time.

So how do things actually start to change? It's one thing to understand that you've been masking and people-pleasing. But eventually you get to the question: okay, now what?

This is where I use something I call Reality to Agency. It's a four-part process: acknowledge, assess, analyze, and act. The idea is that instead of immediately trying to solve or fix, you start with the reality of what's actually happening.

Let me give you a quick example. Somebody asks you to take on another responsibility, and you feel that pressure to say yes.

First, acknowledge what's actually happening. Maybe the answer is: I don't want to do this, but I'm worried they'll be upset if I say no. We're not judging that, or telling ourselves we shouldn't feel that way. We're just naming what's happening.

Next, assess. What information do I need here? What's my capacity right now? What have I already committed to? Am I genuinely interested in doing this? Do I have the physical and emotional energy for it? What am I noticing in my own reaction? Now we're gathering information, instead of reacting to discomfort.

Then, analyze. What is actually driving this decision? Am I saying yes because I want to, because it matters to me, or because I'm afraid of what will happen if I say no? And what response would make sense, given the reality I'm actually working with?

And finally, act. Maybe you say no. Maybe you ask for time to think about it. Maybe you take on part of it, but not the entire thing. Or maybe you say yes, because it's something you actually want to do. The important part is that you're making a choice based on information that includes your own needs.

That's the difference between awareness and agency. Awareness is understanding the pattern. Agency is deciding what you're going to do about it. You're not trying to become somebody who never second-guesses herself again. You're learning that when those patterns show up, you have a way to work with them. And every time you practice that, you're collecting a little more evidence that you can trust yourself.

Now, I don't want you leaving this presentation feeling like you have to completely overhaul your life. The last thing I want to do is give you another elaborate routine you're supposed to maintain on top of everything else. So I want to give you three things you can experiment with.

The first is to notice the automatic yes. You don't even have to change it yet. Just notice when somebody asks you to do something and you agree before considering what it actually involves. And maybe practice giving yourself a pause: let me check and get back to you. I need to think about that. You also don't have to justify needing time.

The second is to get curious about your second-guessing. The next time you make a decision and immediately start questioning it, ask yourself: do I actually need more information? Is there something I still have to find out? Or am I looking for somebody to reassure me that I'm allowed to make this choice? Because those are different problems, and they don't need the same solution.

The third is to honor one small preference. Not a major life decision, but something ordinary. What do you actually want to eat? Do you want to go somewhere, or stay home? Would you

rather wear the comfortable thing, or the thing you think you should wear? These choices might seem incredibly small, but if you've spent years overriding them, taking them seriously is practice. The goal isn't to prove that you're suddenly amazing at trusting yourself. The goal is to start noticing what happens when you take your own preferences seriously.

And if you've been listening to all of this and recognizing yourself in some of these patterns, I created something to help you take that next step. It's called The Self-Trust Reset, a midlife check-in for neurodivergent women.

I want to be clear about what it is. It's not a routine you're supposed to follow. It's not a scorecard, and it's not something you can fail. It's a short, guided check-in that helps you start looking at where you've been overriding yourself, where you've been saying "it's fine" when it actually isn't, what you've been carrying, what expectations you're still trying to meet and whose expectations they really are, and what one small thing you could do differently if you started treating what you know about yourself as real information.

You can sit down with it for 10 or 15 minutes, or just take one question at a time. Write down your answers, talk them through, or just think about them, however you process best. The point isn't to redesign your entire life in one sitting. It's to start noticing what's actually true, and to give yourself permission to respond to that reality. You'll find the resource on my session page.

If there's one thing I want you to take away today, it's that you don't have to wait until you're completely certain or completely confident before you start trusting yourself. You can begin by taking your own experiences seriously, by noticing what you know, and by making one decision that reflects what you actually need.

Thank you so much for spending your time with me. I hope this gives you a different way to think about your relationship with yourself.
