



## **Kendra Bloom - Using the DOC Principles to Conquer Her Own Pain and Heal Others**

An interview with Kendra Bloom  
on Back in Control Radio with Dr. David Hanscom

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## Kendra Bloom - Using the DOC Principles to Conquer Her Own Pain and Heal Others

- Tom Masters: Hello everybody and welcome to another episode of **Back in Control Radio** with Dr. David Hanscom. I'm your host, Tom Masters. With us today is Kendra Bloom, a somatic psychotherapist. Welcome.
- David Hanscom: Thanks, Tom. I'm very excited about having Kendra on the show. She and I have worked together a lot, and I've known her since she's been about 12 years old, maybe earlier. Her father and my brother-in-law are best friends, and I've just watched her go through all sorts of phases.
- She is one of the best therapists I've ever worked with. She's pulled patients out of pain that I never dreamed could happen. What I'd like to do in this part of the show is have Kendra introduce herself. We're still working together very closely. She still is a person on my website that does the DOC coaching, and so I'm really excited about having Kendra on this show—Kendra, welcome.
- Kendra Bloom: Hi. It's really such an honor to be here, David. I really owe a debt of gratitude to this work, and it's exciting to be here with you.
- David Hanscom: Thanks. I like to just start with where are you practicing now? We worked together in Seattle and you just moved to the Bay area, but where is your practice now?
- Kendra Bloom: Currently I'm part of a really amazing team in Woodside, California. The clinic that I work at is called Helios Wellness and we do integrative psychotherapy. There's a bunch of psychiatrists and naturopaths. So that's where I'm at now.
- David Hanscom: What's your role with that group?
- Kendra Bloom: I do somatic psychotherapy, which is really cool on its own, but also as an adjunctive to regular psychiatric care. But also I do the psychedelic-assisted psychotherapy, so we work a lot with ketamine here. We can get more into that later, but it is a really exciting treatment, actually, specifically for chronic pain we're finding. So I work a lot with helping people prepare, explore the experience, and then also integrate that work over time for anxiety, depression and so on.
- David Hanscom: Great. And to get ahold of Kendra, by the way, she's on my website under Services, it's under DOC Coaching. You'll come right to her website link. She's just been a fantastic person to add under the project that we do. Kendra, can you tell a bit about your background, your training, and how you ended up in Seattle and then we can take it from there?
- Kendra Bloom: Yeah. I have a master's in somatic psychotherapy. My specialty was in trauma and a combination of needing a life change and hearing that there was no somatic therapist in Seattle brought me there about five or six years ago, where I did my process of getting licensed.

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Through that experience, I did a lot of different training. I trained in core energetics and psychophysical therapy, all this really trying to understand the way that psychological, emotional and physical issues came together, and how they worked with one another and could be treated together. That's where we reconnected and started sharing people.

David Hanscom: You moved to Seattle, what? About five years ago?

Kendra Bloom: Mm-hmm (affirmative). Yeah, I think it was almost six, five or six years ago now.

David Hanscom: Then I'm sure you've had some success before you met me, but things changed a bit after you met me. So I think we had talked about maybe two years before you started to listen.

Kendra Bloom: I would say I'm still learning to listen. Yes. But yes, you absolutely changed how I was practicing. I think the DOC framework, specifically the phases of transformation, the awareness, separation and reprogramming gave me a structure that I applied to every patient that comes to see me.

Kendra Bloom: It's something I explain to everyone I work with. It's something I'm always thinking about, even within each session. And it's been just profoundly impactful in what I see in terms of results.

David Hanscom: Are you comfortable sharing a bit of your own journey with anxiety and some of the principle that seem to have made a difference for you, because I've seen a pretty profound change personally.

Kendra Bloom: Thank you. It was actually interesting. I was talking with my partner right before doing this podcast, and he asked me like, "What is your intention in doing this?" I got really choked up, and I realized that in my mind, actually, I feel like this process saved my life. I don't think I would've made it really past 40 because of how much pain I was in.

David Hanscom: When you say pain, do you mean physical pain or mental pain or both?

Kendra Bloom: Not without going into too much detail about my history, when I grew up, I had some developmental trauma, and I was misdiagnosed really early on with ADD and was put on amphetamines. What I think I actually had was sensory integration issues and PTSD, so it just exacerbated those symptoms to the nth degree, in my opinion.

Kendra Bloom: It led to me basically being in adrenal fatigue by the time I was like 33. I had like, no serotonin. My body was just shutting down. And I lived every day in excruciating pain at the time I thought was anxiety, which I think it was in some ways, but it manifested as physical pain in my body.

David Hanscom: Okay.

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- Kendra Bloom: It's just a combination of the two, really.
- David Hanscom: Was it pretty widespread pain?
- Kendra Bloom: Yeah. It was mostly in my solar plexus, that feeling of that nervous energy. But it had become so chronic over time and the thoughts were so chronic over time that there really wasn't a time of day or a time of week or year or month that that really wasn't my experience of the world. It was just constant for me.
- David Hanscom: Without negating the value of many other approaches which are valid, I think we've been really clear that the DOC process is a foundation that allows people to pursue their own journey. But I'm curious: In principle, what were some of the approaches you tried that didn't seem to be very helpful for you, looking backwards?
- Kendra Bloom: I mean, not to mention all these doctors, growing up, that I think missed the mark big time. But I had tried psychiatric meds. I had done 20 years of therapy. I had done meditating every day, exercising every day, reading every self-help book on the planet. I mean, I was a therapist. I was doing somatic psychotherapy.
- David Hanscom: Right.
- Kendra Bloom: But every single one of them framed me as the problem versus helping me understand what the problem was in a way that empowered me to approach it. I think that that was the key turning point for me, where I no longer felt like I was intrinsically the problem, but there was something that was going on that was reflected in these symptoms. Then I could make some change or some headway on versus being who I was.
- David Hanscom: I remember the conversation we had at the restaurant where we talked to you about the book and the DOC project and you just weren't interested, really. I kept bugging you every month or two. I felt like I was nagging, and I was. But there's-
- Kendra Bloom: Yeah. It's one of my favorite things about you, by the way.
- David Hanscom: What is that? Nagging?
- Kendra Bloom: Your ability to nag.
- David Hanscom: Right. I call it persistence.
- Kendra Bloom: I think it is generosity, actually. It's how you feel love.
- David Hanscom: Okay. But I'm curious: I think this is important for the audience, because same thing with me. There are some simple tools that also broke through my

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obsessiveness with living away. Again, I value psychotherapy, but I put all my eggs into that one basket, and that was one of the problems.

Kendra Bloom: Yeah.

David Hanscom: But we had the conversation, so I'd like to just share what the initial resistance felt like to some of the concepts we're going to talk about in a minute.

Kendra Bloom: I guess I just felt a little hopeless. It just didn't seem like there was something else that could be in a book or in a way of thinking about things that would actually change things for me. I think, to be totally transparent, for me it was the framework of the forest fire, needing to come at it from multiple directions.

David Hanscom: Right.

Kendra Bloom: That was a piece of it and then I started treating it at all levels. That really made the change for me.

David Hanscom: I'm sorry. So you think that metaphor helped, of the forest fire?

Kendra Bloom: I think that metaphor helped me because I think it allowed me to ... I mean, I think that in conjunction with just hitting rock bottom, it reached a point where I was just suffering so much that I felt like I kind of gave up. I surrendered and said, "Okay, I'm going to try anything."

David Hanscom: And part of that process was pretty significant anxiety. Correct?

Kendra Bloom: Oh, yeah. I mean, I don't know if you want to say a hundred percent, but I think that that was the thing that was so unbearable.

David Hanscom: So you had the chronic pain and then you also had the anxiety, and the combination of those were really wearing you out. I didn't honestly understand the chronic pain part of it with you. I don't think I had heard that before.

Kendra Bloom: Yeah.

David Hanscom: What about the conversation we had or something else you read or did? What started to flip the paradigm for you? Where did that shift occur?

Kendra Bloom: I mean, I think it was just this one night I called my dad and I said, "I can't do it." I had a full practice. I was in therapy every week. And my life was, it was just felt so hard; things were such a burden. And I just said, "I can't do it."

Then he got me to agree kind of. I said, "Okay, I'll give it two years and I'm going to just do everything I can for two years and then see where I'm at. And that kind of encouraged ... I found this ability to say, "Yeah, okay. I really want to be

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here on earth. I really want to give it my all. I'm going to just really try everything I can.

So I really committed to the process, I think, in a way that I hadn't. I got on some supplements that helped regulate my cortisol and my adrenal system in a way that gave me some air, a little space to work with.

David Hanscom: A little space—right.

Kendra Bloom: And that was, I think, integral and necessary. Then I also found a new spiritual practice and that was really important as well for me. But then eventually down the line, I think that got me about 50 to 60% of the way there. And then ketamine got me about like another 30%.

David Hanscom: Okay.

Kendra Bloom: Now I'm about like 85, 90% pain free.

David Hanscom: Right. And then how about the expressive writing? Was the expressive writing part of what you did?

Kendra Bloom: Yeah, in the very beginning. I think that for me hasn't been as pivotal as it is for you. I think I do find it very useful and I do it, I would say even still like three or four times a week in the morning. I really love it as a practice.

I think the reprogramming and the directing my attention and directing my focus and starting to just have positive sensory experiences even in tiny moments, I think that was potentially really for me the key switch.

David Hanscom: And then in the midst of all those other things going on as far as nutrition and chemical balance, et cetera, how did the DOC concepts add to that or fit into that whole process? Where did those come in?

Kendra Bloom: I think understanding that anxiety was an imbalance in stress chemicals is in some ways what really turned things around for me, because it allowed me to depersonalize it and not ... Anxiety stopped being this ambiguous, confusing, inevitable thing, which even as a therapist, it still felt that way to me. Anxiety is not really understood for most psychotherapeutic models in a scientific way.

David Hanscom: Right.

Kendra Bloom: So this gave me tools that were so profound. I was like, "Oh, I just need to do anything that is going to change my stress hormone levels," so I just made my life completely committed to that end. I was like, "Everything I do is going to be about my stress hormones." Anything that adds stress was out. I stopped dating for a year. It was anything that could take me away from that goal, just, I crossed it out, even if it was ruminating thoughts. You know?

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David Hanscom: Then how about the anger forgiveness part of it? Where did that come into play?

Kendra Bloom: I think I was really fortunate to have done a kind of therapy where you do a lot of anger expression. And then you convinced me to do the Hoffman process. I think, while I don't want to give too much away about, because the secrecy of Hoffman is part of its magic, but you do some anger expression there. Those experiences were really profound, I think, primarily to forgive myself for the anxiety itself.

That was the biggest piece, was self-forgiveness of, "Oh, there's not something fatally flawed about me that I feel this way. There's something really wrong or something that's going on in my body that's not inherently wrong but is out of balance." Right?

David Hanscom: Right.

Kendra Bloom: That gave me some room for self-love that had not been present before. And from that place, it became much easier to love my family and my friends and my now-partner and all these things because I wasn't so blocked from loving me, you know?

David Hanscom: Right, right.

Kendra Bloom: I really hated myself for how anxious I was. I really felt like it was my fault.

David Hanscom: Well, people are going to start reading about this a lot, probably every week in a certain way. But about three months ago I wrote a post called **Anxiety is a Symptom Not a Diagnosis**.

Anxiety just represents elevated levels of stress chemicals, and it is not psychological. The reason why it's so critical is that the unconscious survivor response is far more powerful than your conscious brain. The unconscious brain processes something like 11 million bits of information per second; the conscious brain processes 40.

David Hanscom: So I wrote another post called **Anxiety: Your Bodyguard or Prison Guard**. Every living creature has an anxiety response to survive; it's how we survive. If we didn't have that response, you wouldn't be alive. In fact, the creatures that didn't pay attention to those cues didn't survive. **But it's separate, it's amoral, it's what you do to survive, it's incredibly powerful. But it's what you have; it's not who you are. Who you are is your conscious brain, which is the small piece over here. The first step in this process is simply separate your anxiety response from you as a person. So anxiety's your bodyguard, but when you identify with it as part of your personality and your identity, it becomes your prison guard.**

The separation process, like you mentioned before, is awareness, separation, and then redirecting. ***If you're doing mindfulness meditation just to quell the anxiety, it's not going to work because it's a huge mismatch.*** That's why you have to *allow yourself to feel the anxiety, feel the reaction, and then redirect.* You want to explain that really quickly, Kendra, how you apply that to your patients about the awareness, separation, reprogramming?

Kendra Bloom: I think it plays out in a couple ways. First, is just how I think about the process of healing in general. That you come in and we start to get aware of what are the patterns and the behaviors and the impulses that are really working well in your life? What are the ones that feel maladaptive? And gaining some awareness of their historical origins, because about 98%, we think of our compulsive patterns, our reflections, are distortions of our parents' patterns. Right?

David Hanscom: Right.

Kendra Bloom: So even building some awareness and some psycho-education about what anxiety is, and where these patterns come from, and why do they hurt so bad? And understanding how pain works, emotional pain.

Then as we gain awareness and the ability to track those in real time, so we call this the observer mind. It's like instead of being tossed around in the ocean, I'm on the shore watching the ocean. So it's that ability to have a different vantage point of as the emotional waves come or the onslaught of anxious thoughts or whatever, as they come on, the critical voice, that I at least have another place to stand on to engage with them, rather than being completely swept away in the tide.

David Hanscom: And when you get overwhelmed with these unpleasant thoughts, what do you do now? I mean, what's your basic ... So you have a whole wave of these coming through at you. What would you do right this second if that hit you again?

Kendra Bloom: Yeah. I think it's such a good question. For me, the breath is my salvation.

Really how I get myself back on shore; it's really how I remember there is a shore. And for me, the breath is both a way to come back into my body and engage my parasympathetic nervous system, just even settle things down.

Also, it's this reminder that the universe wants me here; it's giving me this breath and I'm here because I'm meant to be, and this moment is okay and I'm safe. It encourages me to come to myself with some love and some desire to resource and be kind and compassionate, rather than go into more negative, self-hating patterns of, "Oh, I'm having anxious thoughts." I think that reaction to the anxious thoughts in some ways causes the most suffering, we are actually hurting and blaming ourselves for it.



So I think just the breath for me brings a little space where I can be like, "Uh, oh, I'm being anxious." And I get a little compassion, rather than falling prey to that onslaught of self-hate, right, and all that.

David Hanscom: So for the listeners who are not that familiar with my book and the Direct your Own Care (DOC) project, you may wonder why an orthopedic surgeon is talking to a somatic psychotherapist about pain. I'm a surgeon and the idea is let's do surgery to fix a pain, to get rid of the source of the pain. But it turns out that all these impulses are interpreted by the brain.

The only reason something is painful or not is because your brain says it is. I mean, your brain is designed to protect you, and if something's not dangerous, you're not going to have pain, but if something *is* dangerous, your brain is going to say "*pain*."

***Mental pain and physical pain are processed in the same part of the brain, but we can't escape our thoughts, which is a huge problem for human beings.*** So I go way back in the conversation, is that you talk about fighting a forest fire, and I just want you to elaborate on that a bit more.

Kendra Bloom: Yes.

David Hanscom: Where you solve chronic pain is, first of all, feeling safe. It is so critical because it changes your body's chemistry *from a stress profile to relaxation profile*. It has a profound effect on your body's physical symptoms. There are over 30 symptoms of a stressed nervous system, including autoimmune disorders, asthma, all sorts of stuff. So the whole key is about regulating your body's chemistry so that you feel safe, you have a profound shift from stress chemicals to relaxation chemicals.

The road to a solution for chronic pain requires ***first*** awareness—to be aware of the problem and the solution. The second aspect that Kendra referred to is called "fighting a forest fire," describing the idea that no one solution may be possible, but that several together work better for shorter times on chronic pain. Nothing works in isolation. So, for example, sleep is important, stress is important, relaxation is important. But by themselves, they don't work very well and certainly are not sustainable.

The third part, which we both strongly have observed, the patient has to take control. In other words, your unique, your individual chronic pain is complicated. The only person that can actually solve this is you. And that's what I do, it's what Kendra does, is guide you through the process, allowing you to take charge of your own care. What I've seen Kendra do, that I just can't, is allow people to actually sort of connect their mind and body together to feel, right?

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- Kendra Bloom: Right. I just kind of wanted to finish that loop about the breath. I'm sure a lot of listeners are going, "I've tried breathing. That doesn't work." And I think that that's true because there's this other component, the mind-body connection comes in. Because after I've taken a breath and I can orient, then I'm going to start using my tools.
- David Hanscom: Right.
- Kendra Bloom: And that's where I go in with some inquiry, where I can use my intellect. Rather than using it against me, I can use it for me to fire into my somatic, my internal experience. Because that's going to give me information about my emotions, my physiology, my history, as I learn to read my patterns better and better.
- Then that's going to help me know what tools I want to employ. That's really what we do in session is I help people and they help themselves identify the resources and tools that are going to be most useful for them in those different kinds of moments.
- David Hanscom: Well, I'd like to thank Kendra for being on this podcast. We're going to spend the next podcast with her talking about her actual approach. And again, I wish we had time to tell literally dozens and dozens of stories of people that she's pulled out of the hole. They've just been really remarkable. We'll talk about that in the second half. But can you tell people how to get ahold of you, what is your website address.
- Kendra Bloom: Totally. Yeah. I think the best way to find me is [www.kendrabloomtherapy.com](http://www.kendrabloomtherapy.com) Or if you google Helios, H-E-L-I-O-S, Wellness, that'll take you to our website where you can book directly. We are really excited about having chronic pain patients come now, because we're finding such new, breakthrough results with some of this stuff. And so it's exciting work. I feel really hopeful to share this work with people.
- David Hanscom: There's very few practitioners in the country that believe this, and I become a little bit frustrated because everybody looks at chronic pain as something to be managed. Kendra is another one of the strong witnesses that chronic pain is flat out solvable. I mean, people go to pain-free all the time.
- Kendra Bloom: I think, really, the word *miracle* often comes to my mind in what I hear from people all the time in terms of what they thought was possible and then what ends up being possible over time. But it takes commitment. We get out of it what we put into it.
- David Hanscom: Right.
- Kendra Bloom: But I think at least now we're starting to have more of an understanding of what to commit to, and how to really help people move through that process in a different way.

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David Hanscom: Well, Kendra, thank you very, very much.

Kendra Bloom: Thanks, David.

Tom Masters: Kendra, I'd like to thank you for being on the program, sharing your story, and talking about how you employ the DOC principles in your own practice.

I'm Tom Masters, and I want to remind everybody to return next week for another episode of **Back in Control Radio** with Dr. David Hanscom. Please visit the website at [www.backincontrol.com](http://www.backincontrol.com) .

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**Note:** The original transcript of this episode of Back in Control Radio with Dr. David Hanscom has been edited for readability.