

Welcome to *How to Hold a Grudge*. I'm Sophie Hannah, bestselling crime writer, creator and host of this podcast, and author of the world's first ever book on the specific subject of grudges. Many of us believe it's always wrong and bad for us to hold a grudge – but what if our grudges, when handled correctly, can be positively good for us, and for others? What if grudges are actually great: not a cause for guilt, but exactly what we need to lead a happier, safer, more fulfilled life? If you're intrigued and want to know more, you can listen to a new episode of this podcast every Thursday between now and 27 December. Join me and guests to find out how to use grudges to transform your life for the better, and to make the world a more peaceful and compassionate place.

And now ... Episode Three: Sugar-Coating versus Positive Thinking.

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I'm going to start by reading a quote from my book, *How to Hold a Grudge*. This is actually a quote not by me, it's not just something I've written in the book. It's a quote from my daughter, and it's the first one that I've included in the book, because she one day just sat down on the edge of my bed and said this, and I said, 'That's so brilliant, and so relevant to my book, please can I put it in?' And she gave me permission to include it, so here goes:

'People believe that in order to live a happy life that they enjoy, they have to be delusional and sugar-coat everything. They pretend that bad things aren't bad, that mean things aren't mean, that people are good for them, who really aren't. It's better to be realistic, and find a way to cope with the negative stuff. Don't sugar-coat anything – instead, recognize the problem and deal with it. People think that to forgive and forget is the healthiest thing. It's not.'

Now, I found the expression 'sugar-coating' really interesting, because it's not a term that I would have used before I heard my daughter use it. And I think it's really interesting to think, 'What is sugar-coating? How is it different from being positive?' And the more I thought about this, the more I thought, 'Actually, something genuinely positive – so, introducing genuine positivity into a negative situation – might well make a person feel better, but in the context that my daughter was using 'sugar-coating', that would not make anyone feel better. And it certainly didn't make my daughter feel better.

So, let's just look at what sugar-coating is. And, obviously, I asked my daughter what she meant by the word. And she said that sugar-coating is when someone

says something that sounds positive, and sounds as if it might be helpful on the surface, but is actually not really tackling the true issue and is therefore unhelpful. So, an example of sugar-coating might be: if you told somebody that Barbara had been really vicious and nasty to you, and if that person said, 'Oh, don't think badly of Barbara. She probably didn't mean any harm. She's just a bit tactless. Don't worry about it, don't let it get to you. Everything will be much better if you just be kind to Barbara, and forgive her and move on, rather than, you know, making an issue of it.'

That is sugar-coating because it's not acknowledging in any way that anyone has the right to be upset when someone is vicious and nasty to them. On the other hand, if someone were to suggest a genuinely positive and helpful way that you can respond to Barbara having been vicious or nasty, you would presumably want to hear that, and you would know if it was genuinely positive and helpful, because you would feel, 'Yes. Actually, yes. That's a good point, and now I feel better.' So, you can always tell from how you feel. If you're feeling bad about a grudge-worthy incident, and you say something to somebody that indicates you might have a grudge about that incident... If what they say sounds positive but makes you feel worse, then there's a strong chance they're sugar-coating. If what they say sounds positive and makes you feel better, then there's a chance that that is a genuinely helpful and positive contribution.

So, what are the differences between sugar-coating and positive thinking. How... Because, you know, no one would deny that to think positive is a good thing. If you go around thinking negatively about absolutely everything and expecting the worst and assuming the worst, you're not gonna be very happy. But it's how you get to that positive. And if it's a fake positive, if it's not a genuinely positive or helpful thing, then instinctively, you will just know that and it will make you feel worse rather than better. So, is it always easy to tell when the positive advice that you get from people is sugar-coating or genuinely positive and helpful advice?

So, I have identified ways in which you can tell the difference, and I'm gonna go through them now.

*Number One. Sugar-coating lies.* Positive thinking doesn't. So, if you say, 'Barbara was vicious and nasty to me,' and somebody says, 'Oh, she probably didn't mean it. She probably just was having a bad day,' well, that might not be true. She might have meant it. And it's also a lie in another sense. Even if someone *is* having a really bad and a really hard day, we all know that it's

perfectly possible to have bad and hard days without being vicious and nasty to people. The other part of it that's a lie is the idea that we should just not remember it as if it's significant, move on, forgive, not think badly of Barbara. So, often, sugar-coating advice encourages us not to in any way change our thoughts or behavior or feelings about a person.

So, if someone says to you, 'Oh, remember Barbara sprained her ankle last week, she's probably having a hard time, she probably didn't mean any harm,' that may be true, but the chances are that it's not true. It's not an excuse, and what that person is really saying is, '*Don't* change the way you think or feel about Barbara. *Don't* acknowledge that this is an important thing that happened and it matters and you have the right to think differently about Barbara from now on.' It kind of denies the importance of what happened, and it denies it in a dishonest way. So that's Number One.

*Number Two. Genuine positive thinking doesn't.* So, every time someone says to you, 'Oh, don't hold a grudge, don't think badly of so-and-so, give them another chance. You know, just move on, *let it go.*' That's what people often say – 'let it go' – about grudges. Now, it's all very well to say that in some contexts, but if you say, 'let it go,' without having said, 'Yes, that's bad; yes, that should not have happened; I don't blame you for being upset and angry about that. It would be perfectly reasonable for you to change your feelings about Barbara, or your thoughts or your behavior towards her as a result of this having happened ... and then once you've done all those things and checked that Barbara is less able to get to you and harm you in future, then you can let it go and know that you're safe and protected.'

Now, I hope you can all hear how different that 'let it go' is from just, 'Barbara hit me over the head with a hammer' – 'Oh, let it go. Move on.' The latter is a way of saying 'let it go' as in, 'Forget about it. Don't think what you think. Don't feel what you feel.' So, that is very invalidating.

*Number Three. Sugar-coating is disempowering.* Genuine positive thinking and good advice isn't. So, if someone tries to sugar-coat a bad thing that's happened to you, you immediately feel: 'Oh, well, okay. So, it turns out that not only did I have to have that thing happen to me, but now I'm being told that I can't even have the negative feelings and the different thoughts as a result of that thing. I'm just being told that I have to think positive and shower everybody with love. So, I now feel that, not only did I have to suffer that original inciting incident, but I also can't have the feelings and thoughts and changed behavior that I want to have as a result.' And that's very

disempowering, whereas any genuinely good and positive advice would obviously make you feel empowered.

The fourth difference between sugar-coating and genuinely positive advice is... *Sugar-coating denies and resists the negative, whereas genuine positive thinking embraces and welcomes the negative, and turns it into something positive.* So, you'll know if you ever openly express the fact that you were angry about something or that someone did something and you decided that was not okay – decided to have a grudge about it – you'll be able to tell the difference between people who say, 'Don't think that, don't have that reaction. It's bad, it's horrid. Have a nice reaction instead.' Which is, what they always mean by that is, deciding it doesn't matter, deciding you're just gonna forget it and act as though it never happened. Why would you want to remember it? It's just an unpleasant thing that happened... all of that is denying and resisting the fact that a negative thing happened; the fact that you want to acknowledge that and act accordingly. Whereas genuine positive thinking accepts and allows the fact that we *will* have negative experiences. They are unavoidable if you're on the planet with millions of other human beings who you come into contact with every day.

And so, genuinely helpful advice about how to get to a more positive and peaceful state of being just takes for granted that, yes, it was a negative experience. There's nothing wrong with acknowledging that, and nothing wrong with saying, 'This really unfortunate, unfair, unjust, and painful thing happened. And as a result, I felt angry, I felt upset, and I felt wounded and betrayed.' Anything that genuinely wants to be helpful and positive has to first allow all of that, because, otherwise, it's just trying to promote an unrealistic view of the world where nothing bad ever happens, no one means you any harm, nothing ever affects you adversely, you just have to be lovely and jolly and smiley no matter what. So, that is the fourth difference.

The fifth difference between sugar-coating and positive thinking is that *sugar-coating is cowardly and positive thinking is brave.* So, how might that look in a real situation? I'm gonna take a scenario that actually happened to somebody I know. A friend of mine who had been single for a long time suddenly found a new boyfriend who adored her, and they embarked on a relationship which was really happy and going really well, and they quickly became a sort of solid couple. And her best friend couldn't handle this. Her best friend couldn't handle the fact that this friend who she'd had total access to, who hung around with her all the time and spent every free moment with her, suddenly had a boyfriend who was competition. As the friend saw it, this new boyfriend was

someone who was gonna take her friend away from her, and she was jealous and paranoid. She maybe thought her friend would neglect her from that point onwards. So, she immediately started to be really bitchy and borderline slanderous about the boyfriend, constantly slagging him off to her friend, accusing him of things he hadn't done, finding fault with quite harmless things that he did and said... trying to paint him as a really bad and negative person, in the hope of persuading her best friend to dump him.

And her best friend understandably objected to this, because she didn't think it was fair or nice or reasonable or helpful for her friend to be, you know, really quite outrageously slagging off her boyfriend who'd done nothing wrong. So, that is a good example of cowardly and brave, because in response to that scenario, a sugar-coater would say, 'Oh, don't hold it against her for being nasty about your boyfriend. She's just jealous, it's just because she loves you so much. Don't hold a grudge. Just be extra kind, extra nice. You know, shower her with love and don't take offence, and obviously, you know, you're in this privileged position where you've got this great boyfriend and she hasn't got a boyfriend, so it's totally understandable. And the solution isn't for you to, you know, be angry about it and have a grudge about it, the solution is for you just to be extra reassuring. She's only doing it because she really loves you, and actually it's a sign that she really does care about you.' That's what a sugar-coater would say. Now, that is cowardly because it's failing to recognize the genuinely toxic aspect of the situation.

And so, genuine positive thinking about that situation would be, yes, to acknowledge that possibly the friend is jealous and that's why she's behaving as she is. But also, it's not acceptable, the way she's behaving, and no really good true friend would want to – or should want to – ruin a potentially happy relationship that's showing every sign of going well. And yet, well, you don't want to cut off the friend. You don't want to say, 'Well, because she's been horrible about my boyfriend, that's it. She's out of my life. I'm just gonna condemn her and cut her off with no hope of a reprieve, or never giving her another chance.' Well, you might not want to do that. In the real situation that this example is based on, the woman with the boyfriend did not *want* to lose her best friend. It really upset her that her friend was being so horrible about her boyfriend, and she very much wanted to save the friendship.

But the cowardly and dishonest sugar-coating approach which lots of people put forward of 'Don't take it personally, don't mind, don't think it's bad and wrong, just understand that it's jealousy and be extra nice and reassuring'... that's a cowardly approach because it basically says, 'In order for this

friendship to survive, you have to kind of shy away from the truth and pretend that nothing grudge-worthy has happened.' Now, the braver option would be to say, 'This bad thing has happened and this bad behavior is happening, and it's completely unacceptable. And yet, I still want to pursue this friendship. I don't want to lose this friend. I want to try and make this work and sort it out. And yet, in this situation where I've got a new boyfriend and a new relationship and I'm really happy about it, I now know that my friend's response to that will be a concerted campaign to slander and discredit and remove the boyfriend. So, I now need to be brave enough to pursue this friendship while knowing that and like and love and accept this friend, even knowing that she has the, you know, potential and capability to behave in this destructive way.'

Now, the braver option is to face up to that fact. And then, once you face up to it, it might not be what you want to think. Lots of people prefer to think that everyone is lovely, and any non-lovely things they do is just... you know, it's not their fault and they're a poor thing, they did it because of this and that, and that takes responsibility away from them. And if you go that cowardly route and think, 'Okay, well, this is just... she's at the mercy of, you know, emotions she can't control. Therefore, I'm not gonna hold it against her at all, I'm not gonna get angry, I'm not gonna blame her...' The reason I call that cowardly is because it then enables you to carry on liking and being friends with that person by avoiding the actual truth.

Now, the actual truth in many, many situations is that you do love the person, you do want them in your life, and yet they are capable of doing you great harm. [laughs]. Now, I'm not saying that in order to depress anybody. But I just think, you know, the brave option is to face up to that reality, and that's where grudges really come in handy. Because you can have someone still in your life and protect yourself from any potential harm they might do by having those grudges about them, where you think, 'Okay, in this situation I can completely trust this person and I feel safe with them. If *that* were to happen, on the other hand, if I were to suddenly start a new relationship...' Or maybe, you know, in some relationships it's another trigger that would cause the bad behavior to start... If you've got a grudge about that, based on the truth – and a true assessment of the situation – then you're much better equipped to deal with it.

The sixth difference between sugar-coating and genuine positive thinking is that *sugar-coating will insist upon a positive outcome*. And it's a positive outcome that is sometimes false. Obviously, right? Because if you're gonna insist on a positive outcome to every situation, well, not everything *can* end

well. Not every relationship can continue happily forever. The aim of a sugar-coater will always be to get that happy ending; to have you saying, 'Yeah, you're right. Even though Peter set fire to my house, I'm going to forgive him. He didn't mean it. He sprained his ankle last week and he was in a lot of pain. Happy ending. I don't think badly of him. I don't need to remember that he did this. I've just moved on and let it go.'

Genuine positive thinking and genuine positive advice has to include the possibility that you're gonna decide that in this case there can't be a happy ending. You know, let's say my friend got that negative, sort of, very aggressive response, not only when she started a new relationship but in fact when anything good happened to her. Let's say she got a new job and her friend was so jealous of that that she started trying to get her fired, and then she went on a nice holiday and the friend was so jealous that she tried to arrange for the waiters at the hotel to give her food poisoning. Now, at a certain point, the sugar-coating is not gonna work there. 'Oh, she didn't mean it. Oh, she's got a headache. She's jealous, you have to understand, you have to move on...' At a certain point, genuine positive thinking might include the thought, 'It's no longer a good idea to have this relationship with this person in my life.'

*Number Seven. Sugar-coating can be weaponized. Positive thinking can't.* So, if someone is giving you genuinely helpful, optimistic, positive advice about how to improve your situation, you will never feel as though that is being used as a weapon against you. If you're on the receiving end of sugar-coating, you can often feel that somehow 'niceness' and the admirable aim of being nice and being forgiven is somehow being used as a weapon against you.

And I've got a brilliant example of this from my own life. A few years ago, maybe about two years ago, somebody tried to kill my dog. I should qualify that. They didn't actively try to kill him, but they were deliberately negligent about his safety in a way that could easily have caused his death. And can I prove that they did it deliberately? I mean, probably not in a court of law to every judge's satisfaction. But I can certainly know with great certainty in my own mind that they did it deliberately. They would have quite liked it if something bad had happened to my dog. So, I mentioned this to a third party, and the third party immediately sort of said, 'Well, why would you assume the worst? I mean, if you can't absolutely prove it, then, you know, you should forgive the person and assume that they definitely wouldn't want to harm your dog.'

That had the appearance of good advice which, if I could follow it, might make me feel better. But actually, what that person – the third party – was doing was using the idea that forgiveness is good, that if you can't prove that somebody has done something wrong, then you shouldn't assume they have... all of which are great ideas which I agree with. But in this situation, what I was saying was, 'Hey, someone tried to kill my dog.' And the response was *immediately* – I mean, there wasn't even a pause for, 'Oh my God, how terrible, really? God, that must have been a shock' – none of that. It was just, 'You shouldn't think that, you shouldn't believe that, you should think this. You should forgive. You shouldn't be so horrible as to believe that someone is trying to kill your dog.'

And that is a common thing with sugar-coating. It's weaponized and it's used to guilt people who have justifiable grievances and qualms about people and situations into abandoning them and thinking, 'Oh, well, I want to be a nice person so I'd better not. I'd better not say or think this thing.'

And, so, linked to that is the eighth difference between the two things. *Sugar-coating sides with the grudgee. Genuine positive thinking either doesn't take sides or, if anything, sides with the grudge-holder.* So, if someone says to you, 'You shouldn't assume that someone tried to kill your dog. Why would they do that? They wouldn't do that. It's a bit negative for you to think they would.' That will make you feel – and it certainly made me feel – as though the person in question was siding with my grudgee rather than with my dog, which quite frankly was the person I thought they should be siding with, or rather, the dog I thought they should be siding with.

Genuine positive thinking and good advice... If that advice is gonna suggest that you should move on or forgive someone, maybe it will do it in a way that first acknowledges that it can understand why you are upset in the first place. And, so you don't feel as you do when you get sugar-coating directed at you, you don't feel that the person you're talking to is siding with your grudgee against you. You know, it's quite a common thing that if you tell someone about something awful that someone else has done to you, and if you then go on to say that as a result of that awful thing that you now think less of this person, sugar-coaters will accuse *you* of, like, being the horrid one or the trouble-maker. I guess it's kind of like a form of victim-blaming, but technically you'd have to call it 'victim forgiveness recommending.'

So, for all those reasons, sugar-coating is not something that you would want to happen to you if you had a grudge. If you had a justified and sensible grudge that you'd learned good lessons from, that was inspiring you, you wouldn't



want somebody to come along and say, 'Don't think those nasty thoughts. Think these nice thoughts, instead.' That is a fairly guaranteed way to make sure that you have even more angry thoughts.

And the word *should* is really relevant here. Sugar-coating uses the word 'should' a lot. 'You shouldn't think this. You should think that, instead.' Genuinely helpful advice of how to be more positive and how to solve a problem will accept that you feel and think whatever you feel and think, and will take that as the starting point, and will never tell you that you shouldn't feel or think something about a situation that's affected *you* and not them.'

So, I spoke to Anne Grey and Helen Acton about the difference between sugar-coating and genuine positive thinking, and I asked them what they thought about how best to deal with negative feelings and allow them and embrace them in a way that's likely to actually lessen their effect, and not enflame them.

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So, warm welcome back to psychotherapist Helen Acton and meditation teacher Anne Grey. I want to ask you about sugar-coating. Have you in your therapeutic practices seen any damage done by sugar-coating? Do you have people you work with who try to sugar-coat their negative feelings and then cause more problems for themselves?

**AG:** *I wouldn't necessarily see it in those terms, because the way that I work with people is by encouraging people to express whatever they need to express. So, very often they'll need to tell a story, and in a very similar way to the way that you've identified with your grudges, Sophie, they'll need to tell a story. Maybe their life story, or a story of particular incidents or circumstances in their lives, and I think it's very important that they express that and express exactly how they feel about that. So, I would never encourage somebody to sugar-coat their experience; what they've experienced and how they felt about it.*

But do you ever encounter people who try to sugar-coat their own... like, when they're telling their story, you can hear that they're trying to sugar-coat to deal with their own negative emotions.

**AG:** *Yeah. And so, as a therapist, I would – I would trust that I could enable the person – that the person could feel safe enough in that environment to be able to express whatever they need to express, in a way that felt true to them, and authentic. Because, if they've felt like they've had to – for example, if they've*

*felt like they've had to be positive – I mean, I've worked with very many women going through the experience of breast cancer (maybe literally a couple of thousand people over the years) and some of them will say that if one more person tells them to be positive, they might not be responsible for their reactions. Because in a lot of the time, they just can't feel like that. I mean, people will say, 'Oh, you're lucky because X was caught in time – or you've only had to have surgery – or you've only had to have one lot of chemo', or whatever it might be. And people think, 'I don't feel lucky.'*

Yeah.

**AG:** *And so if people have read self-help books where there's been ... if you like, maybe they've misunderstood an invitation to be positive and felt like they had to sugar-coat ... then I would trust that they have the opportunity to be truly authentic, because that's the only way that they'll be able to have the experience of being able to really allow that to be there and allow the next stage of the process, which is to allow that to move, and to move forward into actually how they want to feel.*

Yeah. What about you, Helen? Do you have .... Do you have clients who try to tell you why, actually, it's not so bad for them and they should be feeling happy and they can't understand why not? They're sort of sugar-coating their own experience.

**HA:** *Absolutely. It makes me think of clients who come to their first psychotherapy session, and sit telling me what is a painful story, with a big grin on their face all the way through the first session. And there's always this sort of dissonance there when that happens, but it's always meaningful. And the moment I comment on that or observe it with them in some way, that mask breaks, nine times out of ten, and it's replaced by something real.*

Yeah.

**HA:** *And the real emotion begins to come through and then we can begin to do something helpful. And usually, where we look at what that grinning mask is, it is something they've learnt about sugar-coating. Either somebody has told them, as Anne says, you know, 'Be positive. That's the way through,' or they've picked up an idea that to be liked you've got to be positive all the time, you've got to smile all the time.*

Yeah. Yeah.

**HA:** *And it can be a really new experience for someone to come to therapy and have someone value the negative feelings they're feeling. I really do value them. I'll tell them that; I'll tell them that what they might call negative feelings – though I wouldn't, but they are as welcome in the therapy room as anything – as a box of tissues on the table. And I think that this sort of idea of sugar-coating is a real imposition on people. Again, as Anne said, you know, people with breast cancer are being told, 'Be positive, that's the way through it.' It's an imposition.*

Yeah

**HA:** *You know, it's something which is very intrusive. Because instinctively, people – you know, they might smile, make themselves feel grateful, they might do any of those things, but the real feelings are still there. And it doesn't feel good, it doesn't feel authentic, and it doesn't feel helpful, and then people feel like they're failing. They're told to be positive, they can't be positive because their situation's too awful, and then there's another layer of failing.*

*And I think, also, there's something about the Paradox of Change, which we see often in psychotherapy, is that... I'll see people who come and they'll say... you know, if I'm kind of encouraging them to express and to stay with their feelings of sadness or anger or bitterness or whatever it is, and somebody might say, 'But if I feel it – you know, if I talk about it – it will get worse, or it will, you know, it will just stay with me.' And the Paradox of Change shows that, actually, the more we can stay with those feelings and begin to accept them – get into a relationship with them – the more likely they are to change and shift, and something can move.*

Yeah. And, I mean, sometimes sugar-coating, if it's in a situation not of something like an illness or something that's befallen someone, but in a situation where someone feels they've been wronged by somebody or ill-treated, a form that sugar-coating can take is where, you know, you might be telling someone, you know, 'This really annoying thing happened to me. I was walking down the road and somebody came up and yelled in my face and deliberately tripped me over.' And if the person you say that to says pretty much anything other than, 'What a rotter! I'm not surprised you're angry,' then you're gonna feel that you're being sugar-coated. So, if somebody says, 'Oh, well, you know, he was probably having a really bad day. Don't judge him too harshly,' or something like that, then often – I mean, this is one of the problems

with sugar-coating – is it can often feel as though the person who's doing the sugar-coating is kind of taking the side of the other person.

**AG:** *Yeah.*

**HA:** *Absolutely. It's a way of saying, 'Your experience doesn't matter as much as me feeling okay about this, me defending that person, them feeling okay about it. In some way, your feeling that you have right now is the least important thing here.'*

Yes! Yes, exactly. Exactly. It's also worth bearing in mind that the sugar-coater might not realize they're doing anything wrong. Often, a sugar-coater can have the very best of motives. I know one particular sugar-coater who just genuinely wants to cheer everyone up. She doesn't like unhappiness – she doesn't like her own, she doesn't like anyone else's – so if you say to her, you know, 'I've just lost all my worldly goods and have realized I have to live under a bridge forever, because she will want to make everything okay so much, she'll say, 'Ooh! Bridges are lovely!' [*laughs*], you know, or something like that.

So, I think there's a real difference between types of sugar-coating. There's the type which is genuinely just trying to say something positive, and not realizing the effect it'll have, but then there's the more malign form of sugar-coating, which is basically a veiled version of 'Stop complaining because your complaint is inconvenient for me.'

**AG:** *I mean, it's interesting. I don't know how many people will be interested in this, but what we're talking about is a homeopathic principle.*

Ooh!

**AG:** *Because when we... if somebody is suffering, physically or emotionally, then the homeopathic philosophy is that we need to go to that suffering, we need to acknowledge that suffering and almost intensify the suffering [*Sophie laughs*] very slightly. So, if somebody says, 'Oh, I walked down the street and this person was really horrible to me,' then... [*Sophie laughs*] the homeopathic response would be to say, 'Oh, that's really horrible, that must have been horrible for somebody to come up and say that to you.'*

Yeah. The mischievous homeopathic response would be to say, 'Yeah, they probably really hate you and did that deliberately!'

**AG:** [Laughs] *So, the principle is that by going to that, then the person is able to say, 'Yes, it was horrible, but in fact, you know what? They probably were somebody who was having a really bad day.' They're able to then go to the point where they're able to say what maybe the sugar-coater was saying to them, because somebody's acknowledged—*

Yeah.

**AG:** *--acknowledged how they're feeling and said, 'Yes, it's valid, of course you're right to feel like that – of course. So, it's like, then the person's then able to say, 'Okay, I can – I can – I can take a deep breath here and see that, yeah, actually, it was that other person. They were having a really bad day.*

**HA:** *Absolutely. Psychotherapeutically, the same thing. You know, somebody feeling heard in that way – you can somehow feel something relaxing in them, and then, as you say, something opens up. They might be able to see things from other perspectives, whereas, sometimes with the sugar-coater... You know, you'll get your friend who'll say bridges are great, actually – obviously, with the best intentions in the world from that person – the person on the receiving end of that is going to become more entrenched in their position. It forces them to say, 'No, but I don't want to live under a bridge [Sophie laughs]. This is not what I want.'*

Yeah.

**HA:** *You know, it narrows their position...*

Yeah.

**HA:** *... rather than opening up the possibility of looking at things in different ways.*

Does either of you think that part of reason sugar-coating is so common – and I think it is so common, I think it's everywhere – could a reason for that be that when someone hears a person express that they've been treated badly and are angry about it, it makes the sugar-coater feel defensive and sort of brings to mind all the occasions when *they* were mistreated and didn't make a fuss? And so, in the back of their mind, they're thinking, 'We don't – we don't make a fuss. I don't make a fuss and so I don't want you to, either,' because almost – if they acknowledge the validity of that person's grievance or grudge story, then they immediately feel hard done by because all the things that have been done

wrong to them have always been sugar-coated and never got the acknowledgement they deserve.

**HA:** *I think that can certainly happen in families, you know, where the culture of the family is, 'We don't make a fuss.' Things get swept under the carpet, things get sugar-coated. You know, you have a pair of siblings, one sibling feels a grudge about something and feels a bit hard done by ... if the other sibling allows that to come out – allows that to be a valid response to the parenting – then what about all the things that happened to them that didn't get...? You know, I think in families there's often a culture of 'We don't rock the boat, we don't complain.' And I think, as a society, we have a real problem with the way we classify some of these emotions – you know, that anger's a negative thing. So many clients come to therapy having been brought up in families where there's conflict avoidance, so they've never learned how to deal with conflict, never really learned how to process anger, never learned how to process some of these things ... That's what I have to say about that.*

*[Laughter]*

Okay. Well, Anne?

**HA:** *Sorry I didn't really answer your question.*

**AG:** *Well, I've just got some more on that, which is that I think it's... I like to think that there are kind of stages, you know, so the person who's had the grudge, who's had somebody shout at them in the street... if they say, 'I've just had this horrible experience where somebody shouted at me,' and somebody says, 'Pull yourself together. It's not that bad, they didn't punch you,' you know, it's like... then that person feels diminished by that. The emotion hasn't been acknowledged. But if we're allowing them to have that experience of feeling upset and shocked and angry, then just by allowing it, it can move on. That's what I'm saying.*

*And this is the important thing. For me, with the way that I work and the way I wish to live myself, I don't want to hold on to anything. You know, if I have had hurts, and of course we've all had hurts in the past, I don't want to feel like those are affecting me now. If I feel like I'm still affected by anger or upset or sadness or any of these things from the past, or fear and anxiety for the future, I want to do something now that can assist me with that coming back to how I want to be. Because, we talked – Helen talked in the last podcast about the view of human nature. My view of human nature is that actually, our basic –*

*our true state, our true, natural state – is to actually experience peace and happiness. And so, that’s what I want to experience. That’s what I want to get back to, so the whole process that you’re talking about is a process to me. Like, so the experience of the anger, in expressing it, being assisted with that by somebody who’s being understanding, compassionate, that’s a process. That’s an important step along the way to return to where I want to be.*

Yes. And I think it’s interesting, actually, because I’ve now heard both of your... well, I’ve heard... that’s your view of human nature, and you were talking in the previous episode that we all did about the existential... is it existential?

**HA:** *Existential, so, yes, the existential ...*

And that’s a sort of like a slightly bleaker...

**HA:** *Much bleaker! Much, much bleaker. It’s...*

Yeah. And I think I’m – I don’t know to what extent do you agree with their view of human nature?

**HA:** *Not entirely, but...*

But a bit?

**HA:** *Quite a lot, yeah, quite a lot. I don’t believe that anger is something to be got rid of. I don’t believe that negative emotions are something to be got rid of. I don’t believe there is a peaceful state to get back to, so Anne and I don’t agree on that.*

Well, I think I am almost exactly in the middle of your two positions. I think I am – honestly, and I’m not just saying this because I’m the host of this podcast and you’re my two guests; I’m not just saying it for peace-promoting reasons. I genuinely think that I’m half-and-half, because my natural state is peace and happiness, but then other people come along. *[Laughs]*

**HA:** *Well, as Sartre said, ‘Hell is other people,’ so, you know...*

Yeah. And because of that other people coming along factor, I can see where the existentialists are coming from too.

So, that is all we've got time for on this episode, but I hope you will both come back for future episodes and more grudge chat. Thank you very much, Anne Grey and Helen Acton.

**AG:** *Thank you.*

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That's all for this week. Thanks for listening. Please write a review if you'd like to share your thoughts. I won't hold a grudge if you don't because that would be an *invalid grudge*.

If you have a grudge which you'd like me to analyse in the next season of this podcast, please email me – I'm [sophie@sophiehannah.com](mailto:sophie@sophiehannah.com) – or tweet me at @grudgesaregreat. Remember, just because I'm currently the only person attempting to be a grudge guru, that doesn't mean I've thought of everything. I'd love to hear your ideas.

If you want to read all of my grudge-related wisdom, as well as my personal top ten grudge stories, all of that is in my book, *How to Hold a Grudge: From Resentment to Contentment – The Power of Grudges to Transform Your Life*.

Thanks again for listening, and I'll talk to you next week, when we'll be looking at grudge types: the common and the rare. See you then.