



**The Athena Wellness Podcast**  
**Episode 176 - How to Support Your Mental Well-being with Biz Cush**  
**January 22, 2023**

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**[00:00:05] Kathy Robinson:** Welcome to *The Athena Wellness Podcast*, the show that invites you to take a seat around the community fire and listen to stories that inspire. I'm your host, Kathy Robinson, author, coach and founder of Athena Wellness, a company that's dedicated to supporting you on your journey to live more wholeheartedly.

**[00:00:30] Kathy:** Today's episode is brought to you by The Athena Wellness Academy, your resource for wholehearted living.

The Academy's featured offering is an online course called, *From 'Type A' to 'Type Be,' How to Mindfully Descend the Corporate Ladder and Invite What's Next*. This course is perfect for you if you're contemplating or navigating a professional transition, and it's available as a self study or with a small cohort of students facilitated by me, Kathy Robinson.

To learn more, I invite you to go to [AthenaWellnessAcademy.teachable.com](https://AthenaWellnessAcademy.teachable.com) or click on the link in the show notes.

**[00:01:21] Kathy:** Hello and welcome. Thanks so much for joining me.



Today's episode is both a wellness conversation and one of personal transformation that comes from honoring and caring for ourselves. It focuses on how to make healthy choices that support our emotional, psychological, and social well-being. In other words, our mental health.

I'm joined today by Elizabeth Cush, who is a Licensed Clinical Professional Counselor and a life coach. She also goes by the nickname, Biz. Biz is also the host of *The Awaken Your Wise Woman Podcast*.

Here's what we cover:

- The difference between therapist and coach;
- The practice of being comfortable in your own skin;
- The importance of honoring the self;
- Lessons learned from navigating transitions with compassion; and
- How to connect with your inner knowing.

I've included links to Biz's websites in the show notes so you can learn more about her offerings, newsletter sign-up, and podcast.

Now onto the show. I hope you enjoy this important conversation on mental well-being.

**[00:02:40] Kathy:** All right. Biz, welcome to *The Athena Wellness Podcast*. Thank you so much for being here today.



**[00:02:47] Biz Cush:** Thanks, Kathy. Thanks for having me. I'm excited to jump in and chat.

**[00:02:53] Kathy:** Same here. Please, share a bit about who you are and what you do.

**[00:02:57] Biz:** I'm Elizabeth Cush or Biz Cush. I am a Licensed Clinical Professional Counselor licensed in Maryland and Delaware. I'm also a life coach for women. I have been in the mental health field for probably 18 years-ish. Started off doing crisis counseling primarily for domestic violence and sexual assault survivors and victims through a local hospital and then went back and got my Master's in Counseling because I felt really called to do more than crisis work and really be able to work usually typically over a longer period of time with clients, really see the healing versus just being there in the moment of crisis.

I'm also a mother. I have three grown boys. I have a dachshund who is about to be 15 and still acts as if he's a puppy.

[laughter]

I'm married. That's pretty much me.

**[00:04:09] Kathy:** All right. Well, 18 years ago, you got into the mental health field. Would you have ever imagined that there would be such demand now in 2023?

**[00:04:18] Biz:** Oh, my gosh, I tell you, during the pandemic, I was concerned that going over to a fully virtual platform because I was seeing people in person



mostly. I had a couple of virtual clients but I just assumed that things would drop off. People would have too much going on in their life. But over the last few years, it seems like the phone just doesn't ever stop.

**[00:04:45] Kathy:** Do you feel that it's the conditions that we're in now or did the conditions unearth some of the things that were there and make them more apparent?

**[00:04:58] Biz:** Yeah, I think it's probably both of those things. What really resonates with me, too, is I think that because the pandemic, COVID, was really a collective traumatic experience, we've never had to quarantine like that before. And I think it activated a lot of people's trauma that maybe had been there dormant. They were doing okay and then having to be forced into this very restrictive, if you chose to be, very restrictive life was traumatic for a lot of people.

I think that took a while for me to fully understand like, oh, okay, this is stuff that's resurfacing or surfacing because we're constantly in this trauma-based reaction all the time. "Is it safe? Am I going to get sick? Is the world safe?" Yeah, yeah.

**[00:06:01] Kathy:** It brings up some big questions about our own impermanence, about safety, about what we thought. I think maybe that's it. I think maybe we go through life feeling like there's almost this facade of we create these structures to "keep us safe" and then they could all go away in a minute, and what do we do? How do we respond?



So, are you seeing a rise in resilience or are you seeing like there's just a lot of healing that needs to be done?

**[00:06:36] Biz:** I see both. I think what has surprised me the most is how, now, this time, after we're no longer quarantining and obviously, the effects of the pandemic are still very relevant, but a lot of relational issues where maybe you and your husband or your partner had been in a relationship and things were okay. But now, after being quarantined, being together for a long period of time, some of the fractures became more apparent. And even though I don't work with couples, working with individuals who are working through couple issues, I really have seen a lot of that work.

I think couples feel more reunited again or helping the individuals feel more united again and seen in those relationships. And I think just helping clients figure out what normal is going to look like now.

I do have a lot of clients that still have some fragile health issues. For them, it doesn't feel like it's over and everybody else is going, "Woo-hoo, the pandemic is over," and they're still concerned for their own safety and their health.

**[00:07:55] Kathy:** It was almost like this period of time has been like truth serum. Like there was nowhere to hide. It was just like, what was became very apparent and you had to work through it. And so, lucky to have folks like you who were there to be some sort of a support network that we desperately needed.



You have said that being comfortable in your skin profoundly changed your life. Can you tell us a bit about that and how that has impacted your work and your ability to help and connect with people in times like this?

**[00:08:29] Biz:** Yeah, it's funny to use that phrase. I know I used it. But there was a time where I literally did not feel comfortable in my own skin. I was very sensitive to fabric. I was very skin sensitive and if I was anxious, it would just almost feel that I wanted to get out of my skin. I am a trauma survivor myself. Having worked through a lot of the healing that I needed to do has just helped me literally feel safe and comfortable in my skin but also feel connected to who I am as a woman, as a human, as a person.

I think being able to meet people from that place in a healing capacity is really, really important because I don't want my stuff, whatever I'm bringing into session, I don't want that to be impacting the client. That's not to say I don't ever bring up my own stuff in because I can get emotional. I can feel the pain from others but it's best if I know where my center is to be able to help other people.

**[00:09:46] Kathy:** Sure. What a profound metaphor too, this whole idea of skin and healing. From what you're describing, it was the perfect sentence fragment to be able to describe that.

You've mentioned both therapists and then now doing some coaching. What made you want to expand and how does that differ? I've been coached, I've never been in therapy, so just help me understand that a little bit. Who would benefit from what type of practice?



**[00:10:14] Biz:** Yeah, I think they're both really valuable pieces of a person's life. I think that you can get value from both.

I would say therapy is more, you're coming to, one, maybe heal trauma. Often, that's what my clients may not really recognize what's happened to them in the past as traumatic. And so that's, I find it helpful that I can share, "Well, this was really a traumatic event for you." So I would say it's often symptom management is what they're coming for. Like, "I have anxiety, I am depressed, I'm having panic attacks, or I don't sleep at night. I worry all the time."

Where coaching, I see it more as a shorter term and also a specific, "I need to work on this aspect of my life so that I feel more aligned." "I'm working toward a goal, a specific goal," versus, "I just want to feel better."

**[00:11:23] Kathy:** Mmmm, so almost the latter with coaching, it's more about the alignment and the accountability versus maybe some things that need to be healed because it's showing up in a way that is not helpful. Is that fair?

**[00:11:38] Biz:** Yes, yes.

**[00:11:39] Kathy:** The image I have in my head is you putting on different hats, depending on who's sitting in front of you. How does your mindset have to shift to be able to help different types of clients?

**[00:11:52] Biz:** Well, the key for me is to be very clear about who is a therapy client and who is a coaching client.



For instance, I had a call from someone in my field who was looking to get coached. As we talked, it became very clear that therapy was what they needed because of them sharing, "I had a trauma history and I'm finding it showing up in my work. And so I really need to work on helping me help my clients better, but also help myself." Well, we lived in different states and so I could not be their therapist because as a therapist I can only work with people where I'm licensed.

So that was kind of an easy decision or an easy way to help them see that this is what they needed to find a therapist that was near them. But I think being very clear that if it is symptoms if there is a significant trauma history that has not been healed sufficiently, not that it has to be fully healed, but that they've done some work on personal healing so that we can work together as coach and client.

**[00:13:07] Kathy:** Yeah, and it's incredibly helpful from practitioner perspective for somebody coming to you that they might not know, as this person did not know thinking, "Hey, I'm going to be taking this great step for myself," but it was actually something else that they really needed.

In your work, you do speak to the process of honoring the self. Can you speak to that and why that's so important?

**[00:13:32] Biz:** Yeah, so I have been, as far as a therapist, but I think it also blends really well with coaching, what's called Internal Family Systems therapy.

The whole premise is that we all have a self. We all have that soul, that wisest part of us that is more grounded, is aligned with our values and our compassion and





our love, I think often. And that when we can access that, sometimes that means we have to access it through therapy, through healing some of these wounded parts of us.

When we can be fully present in our self-energy, one, it helps us feel more connected to others because we are coming from a very grounded place, centered place. But for me, too, to know that there is this part of me, the self, that I can always come back to when I'm feeling-- because I still get anxious. I still have trauma symptoms occasionally where something gets activated and I feel like I'm trying to reheel some stuff that maybe got pulled up again. But it's always, it's just a great sense to know that inside me, inside everyone, we have this part of us that is so loving, compassionate, kind, caring, creative, all the things.

That it helps me see my clients in a very holistic way. So if they're coming to me saying, "I had a horrible day yesterday and my inner critic was so loud. It was just screaming at me all the time that I just woke up feeling really bad about myself." It helps me say to them, but also for myself, "There is this one part of you that is so critical and yet I also know there is this beautiful, safe, loving, kind, compassionate part of you that I can work to help you access," which then will help quiet this other part that can be so destructive.

**[00:15:50] Kathy:** Something just came to mind as you were speaking. As we've gone through lockdown and this collective trauma, do you think those that have made it through with a bit more ease have a clearer connection with that part of themselves versus those where maybe the inner critic is louder than anything else? Is this a big leap here or do you think that's true?



**[00:16:18] Biz:** No, I think you're probably right. I think generally people who, whatever work they've done or whatever their life has been up to now and they have more connection to that self-energy, yeah, you do, you can - it's not to say life's a breeze, but it's easier to come back to center if you know where center is.

**[00:16:40] Kathy:** Yeah, well said. Let's talk about how we can get in touch with that self, that inner knowing. It's something that I came to later on in life, maybe we all do, I don't know. But I think once you start to go down that path, it's almost like there's a point of no return because it's like, this is the good stuff. [laughs] Who knew all this stuff was here?

So can you talk a little bit about that self-discovery and what folks might be able to do to start to be able to not only listen but to pick up on some of those whispers?

**[00:17:13] Biz:** Yeah, hmmm. I think one really, really big piece, which I think our western culture is not very good at teaching us how to do, is to be quiet with ourselves, to give ourselves space to hear, to listen, to go inward. I know for a lot of people that can feel very uncomfortable, the stillness, the quiet.

For me, my meditation practice really shifted how I am with myself, I guess. It helped me notice that I can have a very harsh inner critic. I can be incredibly unkind to myself. And being able to hear that and be like, "Do I need to have that relationship with me? No, maybe I can shift that."



It creates space for change. I think that's true, too. The quiet can give us the opportunity to recognize where maybe we want to do things differently. I think therapy can help. Being a therapist, I'm a huge advocate for therapy. I think life coaching, too, or coaching, can be incredibly helpful because having an outside perspective on you, as a human, and whatever that coach or therapist perspective might be, just gives you some insight into yourself too. Because we can get so caught up in our own stuff that we don't always see ourselves objectively.

**[00:18:50] Kathy:** I think when we first start to walk down that road, it can be a little confusing sometimes because it's hard to differentiate the ego, like, "Is this really my inner voice or is it not?"

How might someone start to sort through that? So, there's an understanding that there's an awareness, that there needs to be some quiet, and suddenly we start to hear some things. How do we start to work with that to know, is that really true or is that something else?

**[00:19:21] Biz:** You know, that's a great question. And I think that the more we're listening, the better we're able to tease apart what's really true. I mean, what came to mind for me was I think a lot of us, or at least I believed that my inner critic was really important because it helped me get things done. It made me not procrastinate. It made me be a good person. And yet as I followed the path of self-compassion, that work, that practice, I began to realize that I would've never ever said those things to other people that I was saying to myself often.



I think just learning and practicing, meeting myself with the compassion that I was giving to others, just opened up so many other doors for bringing compassion into those spaces.

I'll be totally honest, there was a period of time when I was overdrinking, when I was using alcohol to manage my own mental health stuff. I wasn't actively really working on-- I think I was seeing a therapist, but I was half in and half out. Really, was not in necessarily the best mental health space that I could have been, and the self-compassion work...

And so then, if you overdrink, then you're criticizing yourself the next day, or you're feeling terrible and you're hungover and you're telling yourself, "You're such a loser, how could you do this to yourself?" And my self-compassion work really helped me meet me with compassion, like, "Oh, my gosh, this thing happened yesterday, knocked me off course." I then did what I used to do all the time, I went back to this coping mechanism that definitely wasn't so healthy for me. But it helped me shift that dynamic, it helped me shift that place of that's not the skill I want, I want to learn something new and how to take care of me.

I think being able to use the compassion, the space, so the sitting with the discomfort when it feels really hard, and not going automatically to the critic, to the harsh inner voice, really helped shift a lot inside for me in a lot of different areas of my life.



**[00:21:53] Kathy:** I think that you hit on so many important things there. The one that really stands out is this idea of making the decision of instead of numbing, I'm going to sit with this.

And that's a huge step back. There's so much fear in just being with that. And then you find when you do, and you can tell me how it was for you, that it does shift and it does dissipate. Where you think you're going to be there and you're just going to be in this miserable place, but once you make the decision to just, "Okay, I'm not going to do what I usually did. I'm going to sit here. Yes, it's uncomfortable. Yes, I would love to have a drink right now," whatever the mechanism might be.

Then it shifts, then it moves. Maybe you move, maybe a different emotion happens. How was that piece? Because that seems to be the fear, "It's going to be painful if I sit here."

**[00:22:46] Biz:** Oh, absolutely. It's going to be painful. I'm going to have to feel that pain, and will drinking, or whatever it might be, help me numb that. Sure, it does in the moment for that brief period of time, but it comes back, the discomfort, it doesn't go away.

For me, it often manifests as anxiety. And so as I learned to sit with how hard the anxiety was, it made it easier to be with it and better understand it and heal the areas of my life that I needed to heal, so numbing wasn't the first option.

**[00:23:28] Kathy:** Mmmm. You work quite a bit with women navigating midlife. Can you tell us a little bit about some of the things that they're working through?



Are there certain themes or trends or things that you're seeing? Is there a commonality in some of that work?

**[00:23:46] Biz:** Yeah, I think the most profound commonality that I can totally relate to is coming to this point in midlife, where they've recognized that so much of their energy has gone into caretaking of others' needs, whether it's children or even pets, or partners, or family members, friends, whatever it might be. That all that energy was going outward.

And the energy and self-care, which I feel like that's a tough word sometimes because everybody's talking about self-care, but taking care of our own needs in the moment, I think for many women in particular, that has been something that is like, "Okay, well, at the end of the day when my to-do list is done. When I've cooked all the things or run all the errands or taking care of all the other people's needs, then it'll be time for me."

But at that point, you're exhausted. You're burnt out. There's no energy left and all you want to do is fall into bed and go to sleep and start the next day in the same way. So I think a lot of the work that I do is to help clients recognize the value of taking care of themselves.

Not only does it benefit you, but it benefits all the people in your life too. If you're well cared for, if you're learning to listen to yourself and really know what you need, it helps you better work and serve and be with the people in your life.



**[00:25:29] Kathy:** Do you see regret in the women that you work with at midlife at all, or is it more of, "It's more me-time now"?

**[00:25:41] Biz:** I think some of it is regret. But I think for most of the women it's, "I don't want to put myself on the back burner anymore. I'm recognizing that I need to put me first some of the time."

I think that there can be some resentment around the people that are very willing to cross your boundaries and get you to do all the things because you always did. When you're suddenly creating boundaries, or working through the discomfort of even thinking about creating boundaries, that takes care of themselves.

That's a lot of what I see. It's - How do I get past this sense of guilt or shame about not putting everybody else first?

**[00:26:29] Kathy:** What's so fascinating about that I never really realized this before is that I really feel like that's a generational shift.

So I think the generation before us, and probably the one before them, it was more regret because women had a very different role in society and were watching their daughters being able to do a whole bunch of things they were never "allowed" to do. There wasn't room for that. So I think that generation, the greatest generation, if you will, probably, early boomers, it was more of that regret of, "I didn't get a chance to..."

And now what we're seeing is, "Okay, you got the permission to do all of these things, and now you can have it all." What we're seeing now is the exhaustion of



trying to cover all of those bases and putting ourselves last, which I think is progress in some way.

And I wonder... I've got great nieces and nephews, I wonder what their thing is going to be when their time comes. Because these are generational themes that we're talking about. But it really does feel like there has been a shift there, and I think that's really healthy.

**[00:27:44] Biz:** Yeah, yeah, I would agree. That's interesting. I hadn't really thought about it in terms of generationally, but I think you're right. I think for women of my generation, our generation, that a lot of being able to have it all meant you were still doing all the things you did at home for everybody else and you had a career. You had a really do all. And, of course, each relationship is different and the balance of that.

**[00:28:14] Kathy:** In that bucket, I had caretaking and expectations, there were these expectations. I think there was something about coming into your 50s, at least in this stage of life where it's like, "You know what? Those are all going out through the window, let's rewrite this script!"

But there's freedom in that. And that's the work that we get to do, to be able to give that kind of permission of, yes, there's nothing we can do about that. We can heal it. We can work with it. We can do all of those things but look forward, it's a blank slate. You get to write that. There's something very uplifting about that.





You've mentioned self-care, and so I'm curious how you take good care of yourself. What are some of the things that you do to keep you in line so you can help others as you do?

**[00:29:02] Biz:** Well, I am actively in therapy myself, which is huge, so I can really fully take care of my own stuff that shows up. With clients we tend to-- it's impossible not to get triggered by people. That's just relationally, it happens. To be my best self, I'm also in therapy.

I also have quite a few coaches that just meet different needs for me. I have a coach for my coaching business. I have a coach for my own alignment. I love consultation. I have a group that I meet with to go through cases that are difficult, therapists that we support each other.

Just for me as a human - meditation, I walk as many times a week as my schedule allows. I walk around my neighborhood but in nature, too, no headphones. I just try to pay as much attention as I can to be in the moment, my mindfulness practice.

And really learning, still learning how to recognize what I do need in the moment versus just saying, "Sure, whatever you want to do," which was, for years, my go-to, "I don't care. Whatever you want to do." Probably there were parts of me that really did care. And so being able to speak up for what I need when I need it.



**[00:30:38] Kathy:** I love the fact that there's support that you give, but you also have the support. I have found that, too, that especially with coaches, depending whether it's a business coach or whether it's a personal one, that you're finding people that can point you in the most direct way of getting to where you want to go. Then you can't waiver because you've got that deliverable in two weeks or whenever that next conversation is.

It is incredibly helpful, even for people who are self-motivated. It's pushing that boundary, that comfort a little bit of like, "No, you can do this." Whether it's a mastermind or a coaching situation, I've found that, too, to be quite helpful when it's a new horizon that you're exploring and it's really helpful to have others that are like, "Oh yeah, I've been there and you'll get there. Let me show you how." Right?

**[00:31:31] Biz:** Yeah. And I think especially, coaches and therapists who are doing a lot of this work virtually, it can be lonely if you don't have that community. If the people in your sphere or across the country are in different states to be able to have that support and camaraderie and connection for the work we do.

**[00:31:58] Kathy:** I'm curious just for your own midlife journey, how do you feel that you've changed so far? Then looking forward, what is it that has you really excited that maybe when you were 20 years younger wouldn't have even been on your radar screen?

**[00:32:16] Biz:** Ooh, that's a good question. So far, I would say my personal journey in midlife has helped me really identify my values and really use those to make the decisions, spend time with the people, do the things that really matter to me.



I think what's surprised me over the last, I think probably beginning with the pandemic and still flowing through, I'm not quite sure how it'll all settle out. But really recognizing that I can be an overscheduler or overdoer, filling up my time, saying yes to things where I'm really needing space for creativity, for fun, for time off. That, yes, making money is great, but having a lot of free open space is really great, too.

**[00:33:28] Kathy:** Yeah, there's a lot of ways of earning and time is one of them. As a former corporate type, it's like there's such value in that and it is a privilege to be able to choose, to be able to work those levers.

**[00:33:47] Biz:** Absolutely.

**[00:33:49] Kathy:** But I don't think we give ourselves credit for the non-monetary ways that can enrich our lives. And I know for me personally, that is one of the things that came out of lockdown. Because for 33 years, I was on an airplane for work. To be home and to see the seasons change and to take those walks that you mentioned without anything - I was calling them presence walks - that you're just being and noticing. And to have the social cover to do that.

Maybe that's what we're doing as coaches is giving people the cover to be able to make some of those big changes that came out of something like a pandemic. Of like, "You don't need a pandemic to be able to do that." And, "How might we be able to do that in smaller increments, but in ways that are just as nourishing to be able to tap into those natural rhythms?"



It took me almost three years to figure that out. We're programmed. When you're on somebody else's schedule, you're programmed. So it took a while to deprogram. But I think it's very helpful for folks that are in the therapy field and in the coaching field to be able to be that mirror and say it's okay.

**[00:35:05] Biz:** Yeah, and I would say, looking back at my 20-year-old self, I'm not sure my 20-year-old self had any idea of what my adult self would be like. That's not true. I always knew I wanted to be a parent. I knew I wanted to be in a committed relationship, but beyond that, as far as career, I did not have a clear path of what that would look like.

I would say even into my 30s, I didn't know. I've shared with you. I didn't get my master's in counseling until I was 53. It took me a while to figure out me, but it was worth it.

**[00:35:50] Kathy:** Having that background helps with people who are coming to you who feel like, "Well, gee, I'm just figuring it out." It's like, "We're all just figuring it out."

I think that's probably the great myth, is that we think everybody else has it figured out. And I've come to learn nobody has it figured out and we're making out individual paths as we're walking. That's what it's all about. Once you know that, I think you can relax into it a little bit and just enjoy it. Of like, "You know what? This is actually pretty cool that I get to do that rather than being so regimented."

Yes, we had the energy when we were in our 20s and it was a good time.



**[00:36:23] Biz:** Yes, we did.

**[00:36:24] Kathy:** I wouldn't change it for the world.

**[00:36:27] Biz:** Yes. I would agree.

**[00:36:29] Kathy:** Please share a bit about your offerings, where people can find you, how might people reach out to you.

**[00:36:37] Biz:** If you are a resident of Maryland or Delaware, you can find my therapy site. It's [progressioncounseling.com](http://progressioncounseling.com). You can also just Google my name. I think usually, I come up. I have a podcast, *Awaken Your Wise Woman*. And then my coaching website is [elizabethcushcoaching.com](http://elizabethcushcoaching.com).

**[00:36:59] Kathy:** I will link all that up in the show notes. And I thank you so much for this wonderful conversation. I think it's been really insightful, hopefully very helpful to those who are listening. Thank you so much for your time today.

**[00:37:11] Biz:** Oh, thank you, Kathy. It was really great. Thanks.

[music]

**[00:37:16] Kathy:** Thank you so much for joining me today. I know there are many ways you can spend your time. Thank you for choosing to spend it with me. Until our paths cross again, be kind to yourself and show your Warrior Spirit some love.



If you know anyone who could benefit from today's episode, please pass it on. And many thanks for supporting the show by subscribing and leaving a review. It means a lot and it helps others find their way to our circle.

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Until next time, be well!

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**[00:38:19] [END OF AUDIO]**