This is Be Known, and I’m Kerrah Fabacher. You’re listening to episode \_\_\_\_48\_\_. We were made for relationship, but so often our relationships are broken. And when our relationships are broken, *we* are broken. One of our deepest human desires is to be known, but we often have lost ourselves along the way. This is a podcast to help you get your relationships back to a place of wholeness. A place of authentic connection, where you feel truly known.

So come on in and sit a while. Let’s exchange fear for love and finally see what good relationships are made of. And let’s see what kind of healing happens here.

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**48: Reach Out and Touch**

For as long as I can remember, I’ve been a touchy person. One of those people who hugs and snuggles and touches all the time. I’ve had to learn that not everyone welcomes my *touchiness*, that maybe not everyone likes or needs touch as much as me.

But I love touch. And, for the most part, I’m super comfortable with it. High fives and hugs and back rubs and side hugs and holding hands. I’m here for all of it. Actually, no, scratch that. I’m not here for it if I don’t feel emotionally or physically safe around a person. But if I feel safe, you bet I’ll be cool with a big bear hug.

Touch has always felt like connection to me, like healing.

Now there are some forms of touch that aren’t cool with me. I’m a married woman! Don’t you come up to me and kiss me or you know, anything like that. Goodness. I also HATE it when something or someone touches my face. I cringe and pull back super fast if they do. Even my Hubbie, y’all. Masks have been really hard for me because I hate the feeling of something on my face. It feels suffocating.

I also hate if you come up from behind and touch me. This girl doesn’t like to be startled. So don’t do that to me. I won’t be nice if you do. Nope.

But most touch, yep, I’m here for it.

It’s something I need. I think back even on romantic relationships in my past, and the amount of shame I felt for giving into touch that I probably shouldn’t have. Immature Kerrah only knew that touch felt like connection and love. She didn’t really know how to turn that off.

And I’m not going to be mad at *her* anymore for it.

When I don’t have touch, goodness, I’m not okay. My depression and anxiety get significantly worse. My loneliness, too. I even feel it in my body.

Touch deprivation or touch starvation is a real thing, y’all. My friend Mary B. Safrit and I talked about this over on her instagram several weeks ago, and I couldn’t stop thinking about it. You should go listen to that conversation and her perspective as a single person living alone. I’ll put her Instagram handle in the show notes.

Touch deprivation is when we’ve gone a period of time without any touch (not just sexual, but platonic or even familial touch).

As I’ve counseled over the years, I’ve seen the hurting *and* healing power of touch. I know many of us may have a complicated relationship with it. Maybe we were physically or sexually abused or assaulted. Maybe we were severely neglected in childhood and never knew what touch even could be like. Maybe we didn’t really have any friends growing up. Maybe the only touch we’ve known has been sexual. Maybe our trauma has distorted our view of healthy touch.

And geez, what about the trauma of Covid? If Covid-19 has done any damage (and it has done a lot), it has seriously deprived us of touch.

And touch deprivation can get dangerous. The authorities are telling us to socially distance ourselves, but maybe they don’t realize how much human beings need touch to survive. We need the actual presence of another person and we need some touch.

You may not need as much as touchy Kerrah, here, but we *all* need it.

Here’s some quick facts about touch.

When we don’t have touch, we can feel:

More stressed

More anxious

More depressed

Our bodies release higher levels of the stress hormone cortisol. Our blood pressure is higher. Our heart rate is higher. Our immune system is down. We have more muscle tension and sleep problems. Our digestive system can also be affected.

When we *do* have a healthy amount of touch:

Our nervous system is calmer.

Our immune system gets a boost.

Our heart rate decreases and our blood pressure does, too.

Oxytocin is activated, which the chemical we need for bonding.

Stress is reduced.

Pain is reduced.

Healing in our bodies is improved.

Our mood improves.

Our depression can get better, and so can our anxiety.

We sleep better.

We don’t feel as lonely or isolated.

This is just *some* of the science here.

Can you hear how important touch is to our physical health and our mental health? Even to our relational health. We NEED touch. Badly.

Some of you may not think you need it much or have sworn it off, but friend, listen to me, *you* need it, too. Your body needs it. Your soul needs it.

Like we need water or food or exercise or sleep, that’s how much we need touch. We won’t talk about how to become more comfortable with touch after trauma today. But a great book is called *The Body Keeps the Score*, by Bessel vanDerKolk. He talks about this a lot. There is too much to put into a short podcast episode on that subject, but healing is possible. It *is* possible to become okay with touch again after trauma.

One client I saw for years always was very clear about not being okay with touch. She was a trauma victim. We never touched. I respected her *no*. But in our last session, she reached in a gave me the biggest bear hug and had tears running down her face. Just knowing that she felt safe enough to hug me and that her relationship with touch was beginning to heal, was enough to move me to tears, too. It was beautiful.

Healing is possible.

If you feel weird about touch, like I said earlier, you don’t have to be super touchy like me. But you can get some touch. You can give high fives, a side hug if front hugs feel weird. You can sit close to a friend, lean your head on them. If you’re feeling super comfortable with someone (I’m talking platonic here), you can hold hands, play with hair, run their arm, rub their back. I know some of this may be triggering to you. Be kind to yourself. Don’t force yourself to do something you aren’t comfortable doing. It takes time. And that’s okay.

Trauma can be a big part of this story, but I also think in our western American culture, we have become so individualized that we write off the need for touch. Because if we need touch, that means we need others. And we don’t need others. Nope. We only need ourselves. We can hug ourselves and touch ourselves. We won’t be at the mercy of another.

But this kind of extreme thinking is toxic and dangerous. Because we need touch. The strong people and the weak people and everyone in between. It means nothing about who you are as a person. It just means you *are* a person.

And goodness, let’s do better at showing grace. And kindness.

I also know that some cultures and people groups within our larger American culture invite touch more than others. So when we are fighting to have healthy touch in our lives, we are fighting our culture (possibly), our family of origin, our past friendships and romantic relationships, and any trauma. I also think we are fighting back from purity culture, but that’s an entirely different conversation, too.

So what if touch feels scary or anxiety-provoking or uncomfortable? What do we do? Because we now know how much we need it despite our history with it. So how can we go about getting it?

Well, again, be kind to yourself. Get to know your body and yourself. Get to know your own limits and what feels okay and what doesn’t. This is the power of consent, honestly. Get to know your touch needs. And then start with your safe people. Practice telling them, “I need a hug” or “Can you sit next to me for a little while. I need that.” Or simply reach in for the hug. Also practice saying something like, “I don’t feel comfortable with hugs.” Know yourself. Know your limits. Know your needs. And honor those limits and needs. And practice initiating and receiving touch with your safe people. Never with the unsafe ones.

But never deprive yourself. If you aren’t in a situation where you can get much physical touch from another human, cuddle with your pet or snuggle under a weighted blanket or hug yourself.

Nothing can replace human touch, but get it however you can.

“After a while you welcome any kind of touch.” - Margaret Atwood, *The Testaments*

I hope that you’re healing from whatever pain in your life that has led to you having a strange or tense relationship with touch. And if you aren’t, I hope you’d consider getting some professional help to work through it. Because you need touch. You need it badly.

— Enter Music—

Let’s end today parts of a blessing from John O’Donahue. It’s called *For the Senses.*

May the touch of your skin

Register the beauty

Of the otherness

That surrounds you.

May your listening be attuned

To the deeper silence

Where sound is honed

To bring distance home.

May the fragrance

Of a breathing meadow

Refresh your hear

And remind you you are

A child of the earth.

And when you partake

Of food or drink,

May your taste quicken

To the gift and sweetness

That flows from the earth.

…

May your soul beautify

The desire of your eyes

That you might glimpse

The infinity that hides

In the simple sights

That seem worn

To your usual eyes.

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Thanks for sitting a while with me. I trust that working toward healing from any touch trauma and be being brave enough to reach out and touch someone will help you take a step toward wholeness so you can finally see what good relationships are made of.

Don’t forget to follow (or subscribe) to the podcast so you never miss an episode! In the description of the episode, you will now find the links and resources mentioned.

The full transcript for this episode can be found on the podcast page on my website, [kerrahfabacher.com](http://kerrahfabacher.com).

A big thanks to my friend Robert Hargrove for creating the music for the show, and fellow hope\*writer, Alana Dawson, for being a great editor.

Until next time friend, I’ll see you soon.