

LOVE IN A F\*CKED UP WORLD PODCAST  
EP13 7 STEPS FOR DE-ESCALATING A CRUSH

Dean: I'm Dean Spade. Welcome back to Love In a F\*cked Up World, where we talk about how to build and sustain strong relationships because our connections to each other are what our resistance movements are made of.

For this episode of the podcast, my friend Morgan Bassichis is back to talk through one of the tools from my book. The tool is called Seven Steps for De-escalating a Crush. This tool came up in my interview with Weyam a few episodes back, and in general I've heard from a lot of people that this is one of the more useful things in the book, so we decided to make a podcast episode about it.

Crushes are a really common experience, and they can be very fun and enlivening, but they can also sometimes make us feel out of control in ways that don't align with what we're really aiming for. Sometimes it's not the right time to have a crush on someone, you or they are not available, or for some other reason it's not aligning with your values or what you want in your life.

So I wrote this tool for those instances where you're looking for ways to de-escalate the intensity of a crush. I'm grateful to Morgan for talking through this tool.[00:01:00]

Welcome back to the podcast. Today I'm with my beloved friend of more than two decades, Morgan Bassichis. Morgan is a longtime abolitionist and anti-Zionist organizer, and also a somatics coach, somebody who is deeply studied in radical politics and radical personal transformation, who has taught me so much and whose influence is all over my book.

And so we're gonna talk through this tool together. Welcome Morgan.

Morgan: Thank you Dean. I am very excited to hear about these steps 'cause I only thought there was steps to escalating a crush. I didn't know there was any steps to de-escalating a crush. This is just great to know there's like a back staircase or, or you can go back.

So first, can you say like, why did you write this tool? Why was it important to think about steps for de-escalating a crush?

Dean: So part of why I wrote this tool, Morgan, was I feel like there's like a cultural idea that when love strikes, there's nothing you can do. And just like this kind of narrative that like, you know, once Cupid's arrow has entered your heart, you must follow it.

And there's a kind of like [00:02:00] disempowerment or powerlessness narrative about having a crush or falling in love. And people use it a

lot to justify unethical action. Like I have to keep writing you messages even though you've told me to back off because I am in love with you and you need to understand that.

Or I have to, without any real like process or care, depart from our relationship and go directly to this other one because this is just happening to me. There's a kind of like way that we tell ourselves that it's happening to us. And I think that can feel really bad inside also, like I'm tortured by my love for this person who's not available, who's not interested in me, and I'm just stuck in that place.

And so I have a craving for us all to feel a little more like we could find some wiggle room for choice when we have an excitement or attraction to someone. And I just noticed in my own experiences of that and of supporting friends who were going through that, that there were some ways that we could potentially get a little space from those strong feelings.

So that is what led to this tool. [00:03:00]

Morgan: I feel like this cycle, the crush cycle, is one that I know so intimately and it feels sometimes like going through the washing machine. Like you're like, you're convinced: I've become really...I'm like, "this is it". And then it's like all it needs is just one conversation with that person in the light of day and you're like, wait, who did I even think you were?

Who did I even think I was? What was I thinking? So I wonder if you can walk us through these seven steps. So start out with the first step to de-escalating a crush.

Dean: Yeah. So the first thing I recommend people do is just to write down somewhere what is the reason this feels like something I want to de-escalate or stop.

Like just even to try to remember that, because when we're caught in the excitement of it, it can be hard to remember like, oh, this person has told me to back off. Or I'm not available right now, or this person's not available right now or, 'cause there's some other stuff we're doing together this would really complicate it in ways that I think won't be good. Whatever the reason is, just write that down.

Morgan: Okay, so write it down. Find a good reason why you wanna de-escalate it, not why someone else wants you to de-escalate it, but why you do. And what's step number two?

Dean: Step number two is to just [00:04:00] record for yourself - write it down - what the current crush practice looks like. So just noticing that it is a practice, that it's not just something that's

happening to you, it's actually something you are practicing. So like when do you fantasize about this person? Is it when you're on the bus? Is it when you're in class? Is it when you're listening to music? What are the recurrent thoughts about the situation that fit into sort of a romance myth narrative?

Like you might be thinking, I can't help these feelings, or this is the one right person for me, or this situation is tragic and inevitable, or I'll never feel this way about anyone else, like this person is special, or I have to find out how this person feels about me. And then inside that, you know, wanting to figure out (if that's what I'm practicing, and I'm telling myself those stories), what is pleasurable about this? What is unpleasant and stressful about it? Just like letting myself be real, like, check in, do an inventory of why am I doing this? What's it like? What, if anything, am I doing that I might regret later? Just again, getting sober about this. Ugh, I'm lying, or I am not doing things that need my attention, or I am following them around, or I am misleading [00:05:00] them because I'm not actually available or whatever.

And then, am I using this crush to meet some particular need? Like I do this when I'm bored at my job, or I'm doing this to avoid my partner or my family. I'm doing this 'cause I don't feel sexually alive and this is stimulating that, or I'm doing this because it's the way I get away from things when I have to visit my elderly parent.

Like, what is it that I am using this for? And just being real with myself about that.

Morgan: Oh wow. These questions are good. And just to say back to the bundle of questions I heard it's like, well, how's this crush manifesting for me in terms of how am I practicing the crush? What's pleasant about it or satisfying? What's unpleasant or not satisfying? What might I regret later? And then am I using it to avoid anything? Is that...

Dean: Yeah.

Morgan: Yeah. Well look at us, practicing active listening. Okay. You tell us about the third step, please.

Dean: Yeah, the third step is really important. What is the dream or vision I have for my life beyond this obsession? What do I want instead?

This is kind of like, for the sake of what am I gonna turn this down a bit, let it go a bit? Like what do I really wanna have? So it might be something like, I [00:06:00] wanna have fun, creative sex with my partner, or my partners, or myself. Or maybe I want to leave my existing relationship in a loving, graceful way.

Or maybe I wanna feel excitement and generosity and interest in my existing relationships instead of directing it all at this new person. Or maybe I wanna feel desire without shame, or maybe I wanna have a life with honesty and not deception. Or maybe I want less jealousy and envy in my life, or I wanna have clear discernment rather than inflated projections about other people. 'Cause I wanna make choices that are based in reality. Or maybe I wanna feel really secure and supported in my friendships. Or maybe I wanna feel that embracing my desire for excitement, sex, and romance is not at odds with my principles, values, or integrity. Or I wanna show up for my community and friendships by being an honest, reliable person without any deception or sketchy business.

Or maybe I wanna feel peaceful and serene knowing there's not any drama. Or maybe I wanna be more comfortable being alone. These kinds of things. Just finding the one sentence about what I really want that's different from what I'm getting by pursuing this crush, can help ground us when we like keep being drawn back into [00:07:00] "that seems so sparkly over there. Oh wait, there's something I really want".

And I can feel that when I reread the sentence. I've often kept something like this in my pocket, like put it in my pocket little sentence.

Morgan: And this is something that you want that's not in the crush. So this ties into why I wanna de-escalate it?

Dean: Exactly. What do I want instead of this crush that it's not helping me move towards?

Morgan: And then sometimes we can get caught into the feeling that I got through the crush. It feels like I can only get that through the person. But really that feeling was a clue of what I want in my life, that I'm reminding myself I'm capable of feeling that feeling. And with that person, I felt that feeling. And I wanna keep cultivating that independently and elsewhere and in every room of my house, not just like as if it's only possible with this person.

Dean: Yeah, like an example might be like if somebody has a crush and they are in a monogamous relationship and it's telling them, you know what, I want a certain sexual aliveness. I wanna either figure out how to get that with my partner, or I wanna figure out how to change my relationship, or get out of my relationship so I can have that. Like not staying obsessed with the crush about [00:08:00] it, especially if that's leading you towards cheating or leading you towards misleading the crush person, making them think you're available when you're not. Anything like that. But instead like, oh, what does this tell me about my life and what I really want? And how can I work on getting that

instead of sticking around in something that's not quite getting me there?

Morgan: Okay, so Dean, now here we are at step four. Tell us about it.

Dean: Step four is identifying what I'm calling a hotspot, right? Hotspots are the particular times, places, situations that are precursors to the obsessive thinking or the action that I'm trying to move away from or de-escalate. So like what are the forms of communication that tend to escalate this crush for you? Are there certain forms of communication where you crossed the lines you meant to hold?

Like you're texting the person late at night, or you're communicating when you're intoxicated? Or you're communicating through social media or you're talking in person alone? Like are there certain kinds of communication that are like pushing me over the edge? Are there certain feeling states like when I'm bored or when I'm drunk, or when I'm lonely, or when I'm insecure, that tend to lead to the fantasizing or acting out the crush?

What could I do instead when [00:09:00] those come up? Or are there specific actions that are motivated by the crush? Like I'm going to certain places hoping I'll see this person, or I'm reaching out to certain people, or I'm like trying to plan a certain kind of, you know, meeting with my activist friends because I'm hoping this person will come? Like I'm doing things that are all like feeding the crush that I can curtail.

So what are these kind of hotspot activities and feeling states that are places where the crush gets turned up or enacted?

Morgan: I feel like for me, holidays are big hotspots. Like they're such times of escalated feelings where you're like in abnormal routines and it can, yeah. So I, thanks for helping me realize that holidays are intense. I don't know if anybody of our listeners feel this, but holidays can be emotional. Okay Dean.

Dean: For me it's often boring work, if I've got boring work to do. Like there's certain classes I teach that really just are like, they're just part of my job, but they're boring law classes and reading for them is so boring.

And I'll be like, oh, I really wanna like stop looking at this incredibly boring dry book about something I don't care about and like instead I want to [00:10:00] like text somebody cute. You know? It's just noticing like, okay, is there something else I can do in that moment? What's the redirect? Is it, you know what, let's go make a salad or let's go drink some water.

Let's go pet the dog, or something else that I find pleasurable. Or is it like, you know what, I really wanna get this reading done so I can move on with this other stuff I like, so I'm just gonna redirect myself in a loving way back to the task at hand. Or whatever it is.

Morgan: Yes. This is not an endorsement of law school. As you know, Dean does not endorse law school. Okay. Wait, are we on step number five? We're on step number five. Can you tell us about step number five? We're like nearing the crest. I don't know what the word is, but tell us about five.

Dean: So number five is using summary sentences. So what I found is that when we get caught up in these kinds of emotional processes, like crushes, and if we think it's not working for us, but we're finding it really compelling, we toggle between feeling like a lot of self-judgment, like, oh my god, it's so messed up that I'm doing this, to rationalization. Like I can't help it. They're so amazing. I'm in love with them. Or it's not that big a deal. And so how to figure out how to not go back and forth all the time between rationalizing, which might be [00:11:00] minimizing the behavior and saying it's not a big deal or justifying it.

And then the other side of like, you know, judging ourselves. It's like in that situation, I need a way to return to like a sober assessment of the situation. Just to remind myself of the kind of buzzkill reality that this emotional or behavioral pattern is something I'm trying to break. And you know, it's okay to kill this buzz. It's just about like coming back to what I actually think will make me feel more happy, satisfied, connection, less drama, shame, and conflict. So I believe in writing these sentences down and carrying them around in the pocket to just like snuff out the buzz when I find myself wanting to reach for that high.

So some examples might be (imagine this is in your pocket): Pursuing this person is going to cause drama and disruption. I can take concrete steps to de-escalate my crush. Being friends with this person is just as valuable as crushing on them and avoids the drama. Another summary sentence option: I'm not available. I wanna bring my attention back into my committed relationship. I don't wanna hurt myself or my partner or mislead this person. Another option: I don't [00:12:00] actually know this person. I'm making stuff up about them, making myself feel obsessed and off-center. I can choose to come back to reality. I want to be in reality, not desperate, high or acting out.

Another option: I've been asked to back off. I can choose to do this and respect myself, the other person, and our community. I want mutual, balanced relationships based in respect. Another option: The strong feelings I'm having will pass. I don't have to act on them. I can make choices to fuel them or dampen them. I have a choice here. And a final option: This person has shown me or told me that they're

not available. I can let go and move my attention toward things that will be more satisfying.

Morgan: Put that in your pocket, one hand in your pocket. I might add another one that says, eat a snack.

Let's move on to step number six, Dean. Tell us about step number six.

Dean: Yeah, so the other thing that's important with the hotspots is you gotta make a plan for dealing with them. They're gonna come up again, right? I'm gonna be reading the boring paper again, or you're gonna be experiencing a holiday again, right? And so we make a little plan, like "When I encounter this hotspot (whatever it is) I'll be [00:13:00] tempted to..." And then imagine what you're tempted to do: text the person, or escalate, or make a plan to see them in person, or whatever. "And instead I can..." And then put in for yourself, you know, what the new choice is: I'm gonna go bake. I'm gonna, whatever. So here's some examples that I wrote in the book: When I'm going to sleep, I'll be tempted to fantasize about making out with my crush. Instead, I can listen to an audio book, do a breathing exercise, or think about my adorable cat or dog or iguana. Another option: When I hear about a party that my crush might be at, I'll be tempted to organize my life and my friends around being there. Instead, I can make other plans that night. Another option: When I'm emailing with my crush about our mutual aid project, I'll be tempted to flirt in the email or find a reason we need to meet in person. Instead, I can stick to the logistics in the email and not initiate unnecessary in-person meetings. And another option: When I'm visiting my parents feeling bored and misunderstood, I'll be tempted to text or DM my crush. Instead, I can call or message my best friend or my roommate. I can read a novel, listen to podcasts, bake a dessert, or take a walk.

So just like literally making yourself a little safety plan for these moments when [00:14:00] the temptation arises the most. Maybe it's when you're riding on your long commute to work or school, or maybe it's when you babysit and you get kind of bored with the activities of the mundaneness of childcare or whatever.

But whenever those moments are, when you know you're likely to like dip into the crush sparkle feeling.

Morgan: Okay, so, we've made a plan. And now what's our seventh step to de-escalating a crush?

Dean: The final step is just to be gentle. You know, most of us have tendencies to be overly rigorous about some things, and self judgmental.

Some of us may also sometimes have tendencies to be like too lax or too rationalizing, maintaining a pattern that, you know, we've said we

want to break. So just being like, what's my tendency here? Am I likely to be too rationalizing or too rigorous? Can I just like err on the other side? Can I tell a friend I'm working on this and ask them to give me some kind supportive words? Like what's the way to not be mean to myself about this little experiment? Like I'm just working on making my life more choiceful and that's a beautiful thing to do and I don't have to do it perfectly.

Morgan: Mm. [00:15:00] That's such a wonderful place to land. As we're going down, seven steps down, onto the ground of like reminding ourselves that this is about having more choices, not less. That it's not about, oh, bad, crush is bad, this is bad, I need to do good. But more like, oh, I get to have options and I get to have all this, all these things that my, maybe my pattern or tendency didn't allow me. Now I get to see what those are like too.

Dean: Especially in like an anti-sex culture, we wanna make sure that this particular tool isn't furthering shame. Or like if you have like homophobic shame towards yourself or anti-sex shame or whatever. Like it's not bad that you feel desire. Desire is wonderful. And sometimes we get in situations where a desire is like irritating for us, or not aligned with making us have our life be the way we're really trying for. Then I think this tool is useful.

But it's not about shaming ourselves out of it, it's just about noticing that we have choice in a place where culturally it is just often narrated that like, you know, you have to follow your instinct [00:16:00] on it. And it's like sometimes it's not the right one, and pursuing it is getting in the way.

Morgan: Right. Right. It can feel like it's happening to us instead of we're getting to have agency. Yeah.

Dean: Whenever I think about anything that involves being more gentle with myself, Morgan, I hear your voice in my head, literally. I hear you saying we're imperfect people doing imperfect work. I hear that a lot in my head. And just also like your whole vibe for our decades of friendship has just been like, there's nothing wrong with you, Dean. And it really, really helps. And I wish everybody had a friend or many friends whose voice they can hear in their head telling them like, it's not bad that you're feeling something strong. It's not bad that you're trying something. It's not bad that you can't suddenly make yourself completely different than you are.

Morgan: I feel like so many people are gonna get that friendly voice through your book. And that really is like, none of this is about saying, I need to fix myself, I need to change myself. 'Cause we're all so programmed to think that. We're so programmed to think that we're broken, that we need to be fixed. And I love that you're giving us gentleness [00:17:00] and choices.

Thank you.

Dean: Yeah. It's not a self-improvement project, it's just a project of trying to feel more liberation, trying to feel choice.

Morgan: You need to trade in...

Dean: What were you saying?

Morgan: I was make a joke about trading in your old model, but I didn't quite land it. And that's okay because it doesn't all go as planned.

Dean: No, it doesn't.

Morgan: Like our crushes.

Thank you for teaching us how to de-escalate them.

Dean: Morgan, thank you so much for having this conversation with me. It's really fun. I appreciate it.

Morgan: Thanks, Dean.

Dean: Thank you so much to Morgan Bassichis for talking through the Seven Steps for De-escalating a Crush Tool with me.

If you found this useful, we'd love to hear from you. The best way to connect with me and the podcast is through our patreon: [patreon.com/deanspade](https://patreon.com/deanspade). It is a very interesting space in which I'm posting a lot of content that I won't post on more hostile social media sites, and where people are meeting each other through message boards and talking pretty deeply about the podcast and the ideas in the book. It's really quite sweet and I hope you'll join us. It's free to join. You can also reach us at [00:18:00] [LOVEINAF0CKEDUPWORLD@gmail.com](mailto:LOVEINAF0CKEDUPWORLD@gmail.com), and the U in fucked is a zero.

Thank you for joining me for the latest episode. This podcast is based on my book of the same name, Love in a F\*cked Up World, which is out now from Algonquin Press. I hope you'll pick it up from an independent bookstore in your community today.

Love in a F\*cked Up World is hosted by me, Dean Spade. It is produced and edited by Hope Dector. Thank you to Ciro, Eugene, Derekh, Kelsey, Lindsay, Jessica, Raindrop, Nicole, and everybody else who's helped with this podcast. Our theme music is "I've Been Wondering" by The Ballet.

We need each other more than ever, and I hope this podcast offers

tools and ideas that can help us build strong relationships and strong movements. I hope that you will keep listening, subscribe and share this episode with somebody in your life.