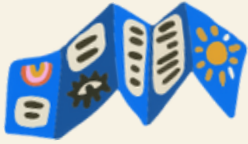




DISCUSSION GUIDE



A LISTENER'S GUIDE TO A LITTLE EASIER a podcast for stressed parents

*You can dance in a hurricane,
But only if you're standing in the eye.
- Brandi Carlyle*

Parenting can be incredible, and incredibly hard. Even when stress is caused by things you can't control, like your children, your circumstances, and systemic failures, there are still shifts you can make in your mindset and habits that can help you cope.

- We all know 'you can't pour from an empty cup', but often we believe that advice doesn't apply to us. What would happen if you gave yourself grace?
- How might you adjust your expectations - of yourself and your kids - to find more acceptance and joy on this path?
- What helps you get unstuck? What small step can you take to prioritize your own well-being today?
- Where would you like to end up after listening to this series?





EPISODE 1

What About Us?

To care for kids, we need to care for parents

We're wired to do everything we can to support our kids. When they struggle, we feel intense pressure to make things better. Falling into the trap of "doing more" can leave us feeling worn out and resentful. Simple mindset shifts and strategies can have a huge impact on the quality of our lives. When we feel better, we can be better parents and find more joy along the way.

- Do you ever feel overloaded, overwhelmed, and overlooked as a parent? What is that like?
- Even though our parenting paths are different, what areas of overlap did you find in these stories and your life?
- Has the pandemic changed the way you think about mental health?
- Did the conversation on diagnostic labels resonate with you? Do you find them helpful or harmful?
- How would you like to feel as a parent? What would make things a little easier - right now - for you?



EPISODE 2

Secret Feelings: Opening ourselves to the tough emotions of parenthood

There's no such thing as a bad emotion. In our society, we're brought up thinking anxiety is bad. Anger is bad. Happiness is good. I'm a believer that all emotions are data, all emotions are information. - Marc Brackett, PhD

As parents, we all have feelings we don't like to admit to ourselves – let alone share. Giving ourselves permission to own all those feelings can help us flourish and model for our kids how to do the same.

- How do you relate to the “secret feelings” you heard in this episode?
- What would change if you gave yourself permission to feel?
- What layers of grief can you (and your parenting partner, if any) acknowledge? Is there a person you trust who can help you move toward acceptance?
- What expectations are you willing to let go? How could you shift your mindset to “swim alongside” your child?



EPISODE 3

Burnout: Tips for solving the stress cycle

So that's the key. It's not about avoiding stress -- of course, that's impossible. But when you find yourself flooded with stress hormones, it's about finding an adaptive way to get rid of them safely. - Amelia Nagoski

Burnout can sneak up. Trademarks of parental burnout are overwhelming exhaustion, feeling ineffective, and being emotionally distant from your child. Suddenly you're not the parent you want to be. But you don't have to wait for your kids to get easier for you to get healthier.

- Where would you put yourself on the burnout continuum? -- toasted, fried, wiped, burnt?
- When you learned that western countries (those that value individualism) have higher burnout rates, did it change the way you think about trying to do it all by yourself? What does your “village” of support look like?
- How could you lower demands and increase resources for yourself?
- What strategies help you complete the stress cycle? Are there some that work sometimes, and not other times?
- How can you incorporate some of these practices into your regular routine?



EPISODE 4

The Nerve: How your nervous system works and why that matters

Our society is so deeply entrenched in a behavioral lens that it's not the parent's fault, but that's how they see their child's challenging behaviors. - Eileen Devine, LCSW

Sometimes it's hard to understand why we behave and react the way we do. It all becomes a little clearer when you consider our nervous system responses (fight, flight, freeze, fawn) and how the brain and body interact.

Awareness and compassion for our own nervous system is actually our most important tool as parents. - Dr. Mona Delahooke

- How would your perception of your child's challenging behaviors change if you shifted to a Brain-Body / Brain-First lens?
- How could this lens shift enhance your own levels of patience, and compassion?
- When you reframe "self-care" as tending to your nervous system, how does your thinking change?
- How could focusing on co-regulation improve your connection with your child? - For example, if you're facing a tough moment, pause to center yourself first, then consider what's happening inside your child's nervous system before deciding what to do next.



EPISODE 5

Emotional Wifi: How feelings and family wellbeing are connected

We have these relational gifts, but a lot of people don't learn how to use them. How can a parent who's dysregulated regulate kids? And the answer is you can't. - Dr. Bruce Perry

Dr. Bruce Perry, a world-renowned neuroscientist and trauma expert, explained that learning to regulate your emotions means that you can provide scaffolding for your child when they are dysregulated. How we are matters more than anything we say.

- If emotions are "contagious" (Bruce), "like Wifi" (Kendra), "mirrored" (Lovey), or a "story" (Lara) how do you want to feel in your family?
- What triggers you when your child struggles?
- How can you use the RULER method Marc Brackett explained (Recognize, Understand, Label, Express, Regulate) to better understand what you're feeling and the need / message behind it?
- What strategies make it easier for you to tolerate difficult emotions?
- What helps you practice the pause / find your calm so you can co-regulate with your child rather than lose your sh*t?



EPISODE 6

Making Space: Why self-care isn't a dirty word

So we have a culture that has groomed us to be helpers and to say 'yes', and to be there for people. So when it comes to self-care, I think the first door to open is the one that says self-care is not selfish. - Caroline Welch

- What was one important takeaway for you in this episode?
- How could you use mindfulness to give yourself some space?
- Is there a way you could “staple” a simple practice into your day?
- What helps you feel more well, like yourself?
- What is one interest or activity that fulfills you? How could you downsize it to fit it into your life right now?



EPIISODE 7

Good Enough: How to let go of parental perfectionism

I do not want to be a supermom because the pressure of that is just so heavy to navigate. I'm not going to do it because I'm not gonna pass that to my child. We are not the Avengers! - Devon, "ADHD Parent"

It's not that I'm defective. It's not that I'm stupid. It's not that I'm a terrible parent. Parenting is really this hard. So just knowing that you're not alone - Dr. Susan Pollak

- How do you think things might change if you treated yourself in the same way you would treat a close friend facing hard times?
- What would it feel like to try a self-compassion break in a moment when you need it most?
- How could being kinder to yourself impact your parenting experience?



EPIISODE 8

Be a Penguin: Mantu Joshi and the Resilient Parent

All we can think about is 'I just need to fix my kid'... and the paradox is really that when we begin to understand ourselves, when we begin to kind of pull ourselves out of depression, when we begin to kind of find our own wholeness or wellness, that takes care of so many things. - Mantu Joshi

- What tools could you use to ground yourself through tough moments (like Mantu's penguin keychain / touchstone)?
- What would it take to accept your child exactly as they are, right now?
- Resilience isn't just powering through hard times, it's about accepting that your situation will change who you are. How can you find your best self as you live through the challenges?
- What are some of the ways that your parenting journey has impacted you positively?



EPISODE 9

Family Matters: Caring for siblings and partnerships in challenging times

A really, really excellent and appropriate treatment plan is not just that it fundamentally addresses what's going on for the child, but that it takes into account what is doable and manageable and can actually happen in the context of the family system. - Dr. Nicole Buerkens

When a child struggles, they require more of our attention. But the rest of the family has needs, too. Putting ourselves in the shoes of sisters, brothers, and partners can help us appreciate their experience, nourish our relationships, and build family resilience.

- What would it feel like to be a sibling?
- Siblings adjust to their brother or sister's challenges in ways both healthy and not. What can you do to support all the kids in the family? What can siblings do to help themselves?
- If you have a partner, how are your approaches different? What could help you align?
- If you have a partner, what would you write to them in a letter of appreciation?



EPISODE 10

The Village: Creating a community of support for ourselves

We ask way too much of our parents in this society.

- Dr. Bruce Perry

If it takes a village to raise a child, it takes a village to support that child's parent. - Ann Douglas

Independence is super overrated. - Jeniece Dortch

- Have you ever felt like you're the only one facing parenting challenges? Why do you think parenting can feel so lonely?
- How can you forgive the people who don't seem to understand your choices and situation?
- Some parents share about their struggles and others keep it private. What's your approach to disclosure?
- What would it take to reach out for support and create the village you need?



EPISODE 11

Find Your Voice: Advocating for your kids

No one tells you that all of a sudden you're going to have kids with special needs, and then you're also going to have to be able to speak up for them and speak up for yourself.

- Felimon / dad

Over time I thought, if I don't stand up, if I don't speak up, she would not be able to receive the services that she's entitled to. -

Oanh / mom

- What helps motivate you to speak up for your child and yourself?
- Advocacy can mean everything from speaking up on behalf of yourself and your child's rights and needs, to making it your mission to ignite systemic change. What kind of advocate do you want to be?
- What helps you find that balance of emotion and reason to advocate most effectively?
- When you think of your narrative, your personal 90-second elevator speech about your parenting experience, what are some ways you can invite hope and optimism into the story?



EPISODE 12

Grow Forward: Transforming stress and trauma into resilience

I have seen so many people overcome their differences and their difficulties. So I don't go to fear. I go to belief. - Dr. Linda Budd

As Dr. Christopher Willard explained, we are just as likely to experience post-traumatic growth as post-traumatic stress. Even if the situation is hard and awful, we can try to prepare for when that growth is ready to happen.

- Parenting can break and build us in transformative ways. What needs rebuilding in your life?
- What are some positive ways that you have changed and grown as a parent and a person?
- Below are some final thoughts. How do they sit with you? What was one really important idea in this podcast that you'll take away and use in your life?

**You are not alone.
Be kind to yourself.
You are enough.
Your wellbeing matters.
Please tell every parent.**