Mel Robbins Keypoints — Family & Parenting

Mel Robbins Keypoints

Episodes in this pack: 20

NYU Professor: Do This for 2 Weeks to Get Your Focus, Motivation, & Life Back

Guest: Dr. Jonathan Haidt
Date: 2026-09-14 · Duration: 0:53:43
URL: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=DFcndrm7ql4

KEYPOINTS

• 2010–2015 was 'the great rewiring of childhood'

Social psychologist Dr. Jonathan Haidt (NYU Stern, author of The Anxious Generation) argues that something big changed when teens moved from flip phones (millennials went through puberty with the Motorola Razr) to smartphones. By 2015 nearly everyone had one. His goal is to return phones to being tools, like a Swiss Army knife you take out when you need it, instead of a constant feed.

• The timeline matters: features, not just phones

The iPhone arrived in 2007 with no app store. 2008 brought the App Store and push notifications, 2009 the share and retweet buttons, plus newsfeeds full of outrage and culture-war content. In 2010 came front-facing cameras and Instagram. Facebook bought Instagram in 2012, and that was when girls rushed onto it. Haidt says 2012 shows a 'very sharp elbow' in girls' mental health, while the change for boys was more gradual.

• Five hours a day replaces friendship rather than enabling it

The average American teen now spends about 5 hours a day on social media, mostly watching short videos rather than talking to friends. That time pushes out friends, sleep, sunshine and books. Kids need a few close friends. Platforms gave them 'quantity at the expense of quality': hundreds of friends they never see.

• Girls and boys are harmed differently but end up 'in the same pit of despair'

For girls, the harm comes through constant comparison about looks, skin, bodies, clothes and 'get ready with me' videos, with everyone commenting. That drove the early rise in anxiety and depression among older Gen Z, born around 1996–99. For boys, the thing to watch is 'quick dopamine' more than social media: from about 2015, games moved onto phones and high-speed porn became available anywhere.

• Boys carry 'a slot machine, a porn theater and a video game parlor' in their pocket

Haidt's image: a boy sits at the bottom of the ocean while 'fishing fleets' drop thousands of baited hooks around him: short videos, memes, porn, games and sports betting that kids get around age limits to use. The result is that boys lose executive function, the ability to make a plan and follow it. Porn addiction also makes it harder for them to talk to, flirt with or date a real girl.

• The biggest damage is to attention itself

Haidt calls the destruction of the human ability to pay attention, focus and pursue goals the deepest harm. Feeds are built like slot machines, with variable rewards that keep you pulling the lever. Screens 'expand like a gas to fill every available moment.'

• We overprotect kids offline and underprotect them online

Haidt summarizes the whole book this way: kids need huge amounts of unsupervised real-world experience but are left alone with anonymous adults online. A Pew report Mel reads from page 90 found that parents, on average, said kids should be 10 to play unsupervised in their own front yard, 12 to stay home alone for an hour and 14 to go to a public park alone. Haidt's group says plainly: no social media until 16.

• Quitting hurts for days, then 'your life comes back' in a week or two

There are about 35 'social media reduction experiments' that randomly assign people to cut use, often to an hour a day, for at least one to three weeks. Almost all of those measuring anxiety and depression find both go down. Dopamine circuits recover when the stimulation stops. The first few days can feel painful, like any withdrawal.

• Treat your attention as sacred

Turn off almost all notifications. Keep only the ones that give real value, such as Uber or Lyft telling you the car has arrived, and drop news, sports scores and everything else. Committing to never missing anything means you're never fully present, so you actually miss everything. 'If you can get larger pieces of it, your life will change.'

EXAMPLES

• Meta's settlement and Project Mercury

The episode notes Meta's roughly $17 billion settlement over claims that Facebook and Instagram harmed young people's mental health, a case Haidt's research helped shape. Leaked documents describe Meta's own experiment, Project Mercury, run around 2018: Facebook and Instagram users who stopped for a week saw their mental health improve. One internal comment called the result causal. Haidt says the planned larger study apparently never happened.

• Arturo Béjar's daughter

Béjar, who worked on Instagram, found that his 15-year-old daughter, who posted photos of restoring classic cars with him, kept getting creepy approaches from men. His internal survey from around 2017–18 found that about 15% of 14–16-year-olds, boys and girls equally, had received an inappropriate approach from a stranger in the past week.

• The college student who got 5 hours back

Haidt describes a student spending 10 hours a day on games and social media. Another 19-year-old moved apps from his phone to a computer, then deleted them, and got back 5 hours a day. He started working out, went out with friends, worked up the nerve to approach a girl in person and ended up in a long-term relationship.

• The eighth-grader's advice to parents

At a recent session with middle and high schoolers in New York, an eighth-grade boy told parents: impose the rules and 'let your kids blame it on you.' Then they can say 'I don't have Snapchat because my parents won't let me.' Mel adds that her daughters lost sleep feeling they had to be available to friends overnight, and the house rule gave them an excuse.

• Mel's own house rules

No phones at the table, not even to look something up. Her husband polices dual screens during TV time ('just go send the email, then come in'). Mel doesn't keep her phone on her body. It charges in the kitchen or bathroom, and when it isn't on her,

she doesn't reach for it.

OTHER RELEVANT

- **Rule 1: no screens in bedrooms, ever**
  Keep computers and TVs in shared spaces. For kids who already have devices, all screens leave the bedroom by 10 p.m., or another set time, and don't come back until the morning trip to school. Overnight is when porn use and sexual predation happen most and when sleep gets wrecked.
- **Rule 2: stories are good, short-form is bad**
  Humans are storytelling animals. A regular movie night once or twice a week, watched together, is good: a two-hour film or a Harry Potter book holds attention. Keep it scheduled, not on demand whenever someone says 'I'm bored.'
- **For adults and older teens, move apps to a computer, then delete them**
  Taking apps off the phone breaks the always-on loop, and deleting them goes further. Expect a few rough days.
- **Take action**
  Haidt points parents, educators and legislators to anxiousgeneration.com and its 'Take Action' section, and to LetGrow.org for ideas on giving kids more real-world independence.

You’ll Never See Your Family the Same After This Episode

Guest: Dr. Mariel Buqué
Date: 2025-12-22 · Duration: 1:12:54
URL: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=YxbJ-vVGncg

KEYPOINTS

• You're not broken; you may be carrying generations of pain

Dr. Mariel Buqué, a Columbia-trained psychologist and author of Break the Cycle, frames many stuck emotional patterns as inherited family pain rather than personal defects. Her hope is that you can exist in your family in a way that feels nourishing, even if relatives lack the capacity to do their own work: take what you can and leave the rest.

• It's never too late to start

'I'm too old' or 'I've always been this way' is, in her words, fear talking. Her oldest patient started therapy at 84. Mel notes she lived one way for 50 years and changed only in the last few, and Buqué agrees that age doesn't determine the healing you're capable of.

• No two siblings grow up in the same family

Birth order and gender change what each child experiences, so siblings can remember the same household very differently. If a sibling doesn't validate your memories, she says, learn to validate yourself rather than expecting it from them. Siblings who do the work together can make the path feel less lonely.

• Eldest daughters are often 'parentified'

She calls the eldest daughter the prototypical parentified child: the fixer who carries family burdens and parents younger siblings before she's ready. That can rob her of the childhood security of depending on others. Healing means deliberately giving herself what she didn't receive.

• Women tend to suppress, and men to externalise

Buqué links women's socialised emotional suppression to stress load and to conditions where women are over-represented, such as lupus, rheumatoid arthritis and some metabolic conditions. This is her view of a connection, not a simple cause. Men more often show anger outwardly, with hurt and grief underneath. At one point only about 3 of her 75–80 patients were men.

• The first step is naming the truth

Acknowledgement means taking family secrets 'out of the closet' and from under the rug. Confronting a parent comes much later: many clients want to bring their mother into the first session, but she says both people's nervous systems need preparing first.

• Nervous-system regulation is the first task of generational healing

She says small practices throughout the day engage the ventral vagal 'rest' response and settle the stress response. The aim isn't fixing your family but making you steadier in the same environment.

• The real sign of change is buying back one second

She says the brain can take in a triggering comment and bring it to conscious awareness within about 250 milliseconds. A one-second pause therefore gives you the choice between the familiar fight, flee, dissociate or collapse and a response that fits your values. You know you're breaking a cycle, not just talking about it, when you can do this.

• Hold compassion for parents, celebrate small wins, grieve the rest

No one has a perfect parent; it's a myth. Acknowledge what they could give and grieve what they couldn't. You can't expect a 70-year-old mother to heal at your pace, so notice micro-moments of insight or acknowledgement and let the rest go. Parents can feel guilty about not keeping up, too.

• Estrangement is sometimes needed, but often best as temporary protection

She thinks today's boundary culture can tip into walling off anyone who doesn't validate us. Protection matters, but often it works best for a period while you sort yourself out, before deeper conversations.

• You also inherit strength

Her concept of an 'intergenerational higher self' layers ancestors' wisdom and intentions on top of your own. Mel reflects that she comes from a long line of hardworking women who were breadwinners, a reminder to look at what you were given, not only what you missed.

EXAMPLES

• Imposter syndrome in her Ivy League doctorate

In her first semester, as a Black Latina immigrant from a working-class background, she faced hurtful comments about her background and nearly quit, doubting she could survive six years. Her mother, whom she describes as flawed, told her she came from a long line of people who persevered. She writes that imposter syndrome was 'an inheritance from generations of being marginalised', not her truth.

• Her sister's '4K' view of their mother

Now in their 40s, Buqué's sister often says 'I understand Mom now.' Behaviour they once labelled toxic and cut off from, they now see 'in 4K' as the inside of their mother's lived reality.

• Mel's husband's shutdown

After almost 30 years of marriage, Mel says her husband has only recently understood that his going quiet and self-isolating hides anger and pain from childhood. He isn't a yeller, while she admits she is.

• Mel from 'volcano' to calm

After three years of nervous-system work, Mel says she's a different parent to her two adult daughters and feels 'in a second marriage' with her husband. She used to be a 'barfer of emotions'. Now she finds staying controlled far more powerful, because people tune out screaming. Buqué says trauma leaves a loss of control, so regaining it shifts everything.

OTHER RELEVANT

- **Five minutes of deep breathing**
  Not three breaths: at least five minutes, she says, so your nervous system can catch up. Out of 1,440 minutes a day, take five.
- **Rocking**
  Her favourite regulating movement; she says rocking triggers the parasympathetic calming response.
- **Practise tools before the family gathering**
  Build mastery when relatives aren't around, then use them at the table, such as a subtle breath when something triggering is said. Everyone else may say the same things; you are what's different, which disrupts the dysfunction.
- **Share it across generations**
  Mel suggests sending the episode to parents or siblings, especially the men in your life. Buqué's message to a parent who receives it: you can create a different legacy than the one you were handed.

The Real Reason Boys and Men Are Quietly Giving Up & What They Need to Hear

Guest: Jason Wilson
Date: 2025-08-18 · Duration: 1:13:46
URL: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=0LM4-TqhiaA

KEYPOINTS

• Many men are losing an internal war while looking fine

Jason Wilson has mentored boys and men for 22 years at the Cave of Adullam, a martial arts mentoring program in Detroit. He says most men he knows are fighting depression, unresolved anger and childhood wounds behind a 'Superman cape' that is strangling them. If they lose that inner battle, it turns into external wars: divorce, distance from their kids, or giving everything to work and coming home with nothing left.

• Boys need healing, not scaring straight

His program began as discipline-based, including scared-straight work, until he realized retraumatizing boys can't heal trauma. He shifted to a safe space that still pushes the boys but lets them share what's heavy. His line: 'You cannot defend what hasn't been disciplined.' Many fighters are 'a black belt in the dojo but a white belt in life,' able to choke someone out but unable to handle job stress or a wife's emotions calmly.

• Anger is the surface; dig to the hypocenter

His 'earthquake of emotions' exercise treats anger as the visible damage at the epicenter. The real cause sits deeper. When a boy wants to fight him, he says, 'Dig deeper, Christian. It's not me.' That boy then cried about his father dying and then his grandfather. Men default to anger or silence because both look strong. Hurt, sadness, loss and even a wife saying she misses them all come out as anger.

• Men use 8 crayons out of 64

His crayon analogy: men stay in the eight-crayon box and use about four, while women draw from 64. When a partner asks for violet, he only has purple. The fix is to name the hurt instead of the anger. For example, saying 'When you don't trust me with the finances, it hurts, because my father never trusted me with responsibility.'

• Tired often means 'I need rest', not sleep

He reads from his book: sleep is an unconscious state, while rest is 'a conscious state of freedom from anything that wearies the soul.' Performance-based living and slogans like 'no pain, no gain' wear men out. You wouldn't send a quarterback with a torn Achilles back into the game. He calls it self-maintenance rather than self-love, because men understand maintaining things.

• When worth equals work, men stop caring for themselves

If you're only valued for what you provide, why see a doctor, take a nap or ask for anything for Father's Day? He watches older couples where the wife is lively and the husband is on a walker after a lifetime of proving himself. He used to jump up from naps when his wife Nicole came home. 'I'm good, nothing's wrong' can be a warning sign, and men hugging at funerals and saying 'stay strong' teaches each other that weakness isn't manly.

• The masculine male versus the comprehensive man

The masculine male hides his emotions behind a facade and is only the provider and protector, which leaves him exhausted, angry and isolated. The comprehensive man expresses emotion without fear of judgment and makes room to be a nurturer, a 'human being, not a human doing.' His example: an ex-Marine friend with severe PTSD who was helped by a Shih Tzu. Jason loves flowers for what they do for his mind, 'but test me if you want.'

• Run toward what hurts most

His assignment for men: accept you're worth more than what you do, practice saying 'no' and 'not now' (the living room can be painted next month), then go deep into the childhood wounds that show up in arguments. He recommends intensive off-grid retreats. He healed his father wound at one called the Crucible. 'You're not tired of living, you're tired of not living.'

• Young men are scared and lack mentors

With 20-something sons who seem to be failing to launch, he says the world tells them to 'be a man' without showing them how. Gaming or building something that doesn't pay may be the only wins they can find. Instead of criticizing, surround them with men. If dad is too busy, ask an uncle or cousin to take him to work, even if you have to pay them.

EXAMPLES

• A family history of violence

His grandfather was lynched in 1936, a pain his aunts and uncles never released. His mother's first husband beat her and hit Jason's older brothers with the flat side of butcher knives. His brother Larry was murdered in 1973, and his mother told Jason that without him she would have taken her life. He cites men dying by suicide at 3.5 times the rate of women.

• 78% improved a letter grade without tutoring

He describes an in-house finding that over 78% of students raised their GPA by one letter grade, just by being allowed to express what was weighing on them and learning to breathe. He says it helped even boys with ADHD symptoms who couldn't sit still for two minutes.

• The car in the grocery store parking lot

After 26 years of marriage, Jason expressed himself to Nicole without yelling for the first time. Later, she slammed a door after calling him 'the most emotional man I ever met.' He nearly went back to his old angry self, then decided, 'I'm not going back.' They still do intensive marriage therapy.

• The friend who looked at his gun

Two days before the interview, a joyful-seeming friend told him he had considered taking his life and hadn't called because 'I know you got a lot going on.' Mel shared that men at Chris's Soul Degree retreats almost universally say they come last, and that she says about 95% of inquiries come from women.

OTHER RELEVANT

- **End the day with the four Rs**

  Reflect, release, reset, rest. Keep what you need to reconcile, like being sharp with your daughter. Release anything toxic, then rest. 'That's what tomorrow is for.'

- **Keep a childhood photo of your partner**

  He looks at a photo of Nicole as a child during conflict, because it's often the 8- or 10-year-old talking. He suggests wives do the same: 'Is this little Dave right now?'

- **Reach shut-down sons with presence**

  Respect their world. Lie down and read in his room without a word, or take phone-free walks. Ask yourself 'what could I live with?' before deciding to just let them be. Fathers and sons can sit knee to knee, holding hands and looking into each other's eyes. The father usually cries first.

- **Open the door without forcing it**

  Send him a reel that might strike a chord. When he opens up, listen as you would to a best friend, say little, and 'never try to change the weather' with 'it's not that bad.' When he raises a concern about the kids, validate it instead of automatically siding with them.

You Learn This Too Late: Understanding This Will Change the Way You Look at Your Relationships

Guest: Dr. Aliza Pressman
Date: 2025-07-28 · Duration: 1:21:49
URL: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=M4KtRNFlQuw

KEYPOINTS

• Getting parenting 'largely right' takes a few simple, science-backed habits, not perfection.
Developmental psychologist Dr. Aliza Pressman, who directs the Mount Sinai Parenting Center, says the research boils down to small things done more often than not. Mel admitted she feels she 'royally screwed up' her kids, because the 56-year-old she is now isn't who she was at 29, 30 and 34 when they were born. Pressman's message: these principles apply to every relationship, including with your own parents, your partner and your friends.

• The five principles: relationship, reflection, regulation, rules, repair.
Relationship is connection, the umbrella for attunement and attachment, and 'kind of everything.' Reflection means thinking about and understanding what's happening; Pressman calls it an unsung hero because it creates a pause. Regulation is managing your own emotions and actions. Rules are boundaries for physical and emotional safety, yours and other people's. Repair is for when you mess up, which you will, over and over.

• Kids borrow your nervous system, so start with your own regulation.
Parents often come to her saying their child needs more self-control. Pressman redirects them to what they can control: how is your regulation going? A child developing a sturdy nervous system needs one nearby that has capacity. She says parents who work on themselves see their kids' self-regulation improve over time.

• Best parenting advice: all feelings are welcome; not all behaviors are.
A toddler can feel rage but can't hit their brother. A teen can be furious about being told no but can't steal the car to go to the party. Kids need to know there are no wrong feelings, while limits on actions stay firm.

• Early childhood matters a lot, but it isn't destiny.
Early attachment shapes how we love and experience being loved, Pressman says, but relationships keep changing and 'there's always hope.' She also says parenting is the most powerful environmental influence on a child. A child in the worst circumstances who has one steady, loving, safe parent is very differently placed.

• Temperament differs: orchids, tulips and dandelions.
Drawing on Thomas Boyce's research, which she says to take 'with a grain of salt,' Pressman describes a range. Orchid children bloom beautifully in great conditions and struggle badly in poor ones. Dandelions do fine almost anywhere. Siblings can differ, which is why the same approach doesn't work for every kid.

• The resilience myth: being sensitive to your child isn't coddling.
Parents tend to swing between two extremes: ignoring hard feelings so kids 'learn,' or clearing every obstacle. Neither builds resilience, she says. You can be as attuned as you like to your child's feelings while still letting them face difficulty. Clearing the path is like trying to control the weather; kids need to learn to check the sky and put on their own raincoat.

• Over-sacrificing for your children doesn't help them.
Pressman highlights Carl Jung's line, 'The greatest burden a child must bear is the unlived life of its parents.' She criticizes the 'martyrdom' in how we praise mothers who 'gave up everything.' A parent with no life of their own is often miserable, and kids feel that weight.

• Repair is the parent's job, even with adult children.
You can't have a close relationship without repair, and you can't repair without first messing up. If your own parents hurt you, Pressman says reconnecting is their responsibility, never the child's, at any age. What is yours to decide is whether to offer forgiveness and compassion, which you can do even if they're gone.

• High-conflict co-parenting harms kids.
Pressman says research shows that more conflict between co-parents, especially when kids are pulled into it, is linked to worse intellectual and emotional development and weaker executive function. Trashing your ex insults half of who your child is.

EXAMPLES

• A four-year-old afraid God was angry
Pressman's daughter, now 18, once came to her terrified because she'd had a 'horrible thought' about her sister, who had broken something. Pressman told her she's allowed to feel and think anything; what matters is how she acts. The girl was hugely relieved. Pressman found it sad that a four-year-old didn't know she was allowed to think 'I hate you.'

• A week of noticing meltdowns
For a child who melts down constantly, Pressman suggests spending one full week changing nothing, just noting what comes before each meltdown and how you respond. Often the pattern is that meltdowns happen when you're rushed and spinning inside. The fix starts with slowing yourself down, so the child meets you where you are.

• Introducing a new partner after divorce
Pressman says research suggests waiting about a year with young kids, and admits nobody likes that answer. With joint custody you can date freely on your own time. If it becomes serious enough that you're planning to marry, you can move it up.

• A repair script after a bad divorce
If you badmouthed your ex, Pressman suggests telling your child at any age: 'That was about me. I was having a really hard time, and the way I talked about your parent wasn't your fault and wasn't okay. I'm so sorry; that wasn't your burden to carry.' Then keep working on it.

OTHER RELEVANT

- **When your partner isn't on board**
  Share resources in a spirit of 'I found this interesting, what do you think?' rather than 'I know better than you,' for example by sending them an episode or an article.
- **Pause before you react**
  Every pause before responding to your child counts as reflection and regulation in action. Pressman says self-compassion about your own parents' limits helps you let it go and do a bit better.
- **Let kids handle the weather**
  Instead of removing every obstacle, let them notice the problem and solve it with your support, the parenting version of letting them put on their own boots.

What Every Dad Should Know: Lessons From Literary Legend James Patterson

Guest: James Patterson
Date: 2025-06-12 · Duration: 1:04:58
URL: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Mbad2F4fvCc

KEYPOINTS

• Many dads feel lost, and fathering starts with believing you're lovable.

James Patterson, who has sold 400 million books and has 67 number one New York Times bestsellers, says many men are overwhelmed and no longer the breadwinner they expected to be. What changed him was realizing he could love someone deeply and that 'this core guy is actually lovable.' He believes that if more men got there, they would have better lives, and so would their kids and partners.

• Being a parent is the most important job you'll ever have.

Patterson says that looking back, nothing else compares. Simply realizing that, and letting it drive you, is in his view the most important thing a person can do. He wrote his dad book to be read in about an hour because 'a lot of guys will not read the 400-page book,' and he calls compressing information one of his gifts.

• 'Be there': attention, not just showing up.

One of his writing tricks is a note at the top of the page that says 'Be there,' meaning put the reader in the scene. He applies the same to parenting. Life is full of distractions, from the internet and Netflix to Zoom calls with the in-laws and the NFL draft. You can't always give full attention, but whenever you can, set other thoughts aside. To a kid spotting you in the audience at a school show, 'you're the miracle.'

• Saying 'I love you' is a strength, not a weakness.

Patterson's only memory of hugging his father is on his father's deathbed. His message to the 'I'm not an I love you kind of guy' dad: 'Says who? Who passed that law? Your dad. Your dad's dad.' You can change at least a little, and say it often enough that kids stop groaning when you hug or kiss them. He and Mel ended by saying it to each other.

• Help your child be fully themselves, not 'so-and-so's kid.'

Patterson and his wife Sue focused most on making their son Jack comfortable being Jack, accepting that who he was at 12 could change. With famous-adjacent classmates at prep school and college, Jack's friends who didn't lean on their parents' status were the healthy ones, Patterson says.

• Make a plan for your life the way you outline a novel, but stay open.

Patterson writes 50–70-page outlines, unlike writers such as Michael Connelly and David Baldacci who don't. He isn't a slave to them, though; sometimes he decides a villain he meant to kill off should come back. He says life works the same: have a plan, don't obsess over it, and be open to change.

• Aim for better, not perfect.

Patterson's test for a hard day is whether today is better than yesterday in some way, even if a lot isn't working. He encourages dads to argue with the book, cross things out and star what works, since picking up two to four useful ideas is a win.

• The messy years go fast.

Legos on the floor and diapers to change are hard. Patterson says that 15 or 20 years later 'you'd give a million dollars to have that experience back.' His book includes a funny chapter on changing diapers ('hold your nose') and a more poignant one on how quickly it all passes.

• Read to your kids, and know that early reading is in crisis.

He and Sue fund literacy work. He says reading aloud boosts brain power and gives kids new worlds, though he admits it isn't everyone's thing. He argues many schools adopted reading methods that don't work, and says fewer than half of kids are reading well in many states, including Massachusetts.

EXAMPLES

• A phone call before the war

As Patterson's father was about to go off to war, a stranger named George Hazelton called from Port Jervis. George's parents had just told him he was adopted, and he said, 'I'm your brother.' That's how Patterson's father learned he had a brother. His father had grown up in the Newburgh poorhouse.

• The grandfather in the bar

After the war, the uncle tracked down their father, who had abandoned them and was known as a drunk. Patterson's father refused to go: 'I don't want to meet the bastard.' The uncle went alone, sat in a small bar by the Hudson for about 20 minutes drinking a Coke and watching the man, and left without introducing himself. Patterson only recently learned his grandfather's name was Robert.

• Jack's surprise message

Mel secretly recorded Patterson's son Jack, who said his father's greatest strength was 'helping me confidently be my own person.' Jack had sometimes felt trapped in his dad's shadow; people even called him James, which isn't his name. He said being seen only as someone's kid 'can really eat at you.'

• A reading program that raised scores

Patterson described a University of Florida program, largely a return to phonics, now in about 13 Florida counties and popular in Canada. He says it took some schools from around 10% of kids reading at grade level into the 50s and 60s, and can reach the 80s. He sat in classes for an hour and found the kids genuinely excited. He's making a documentary about it.

OTHER RELEVANT

• Your own 'Be there' note

Pick one daily window, like dinner, bedtime or the drive to school, where your phone is away and your attention is fully on your kid.

- **Break the 'not an I love you guy' pattern**
  Say it daily, out loud, even if it's awkward. Patterson's line: 'Was that so hard? If it was, say it again.'
- **Not a dad? That's okay too**
  The book has an essay, 'You're not a dad, and that's 100% okay,' for uncles, mentors and father figures, who can apply the same ideas.

4 Signs of Emotionally Immature Parents & How to Heal

Guest: Dr. Lindsay C. Gibson
Date: 2025-05-15 · Duration: 1:11:12
URL: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=wLsp_67xi4U

KEYPOINTS

• Emotional maturity has three parts

Clinical psychologist Dr. Lindsay Gibson, author of Adult Children of Emotionally Immature Parents, defines emotional maturity as being able to handle your emotions, think objectively (including about your own behaviour), and stay emotionally connected to others. Emotional immaturity is the reverse: emotions take over, self-reflection is poor, and people disconnect. At the core is egocentrism, the sense that 'all roads lead to them'.

• This is about seeing your parents clearly, not blaming them

Gibson writes that the mission isn't to betray your parents but to see them objectively. Most signs of emotional immaturity are outside a person's conscious control, and most such parents have no idea how they affected their children. Mel says people tend either to blame their parents or excuse them, and Gibson's approach lets you understand your history and change how you show up.

• Emotionally immature parents often find emotional depth destabilising

Gibson says these parents often seem exhausting or superficial and stick to safe topics like the weather because their defences are fragile. Asking them to engage with your feelings is like asking them to keep a hand on a hot stove. It's destabilising, not just uncomfortable, so they change the subject, make excuses or turn it back on you. She says seeing this helps you take it less personally: they might if they could, but they can't.

• They're often highly sensitive, while calling you oversensitive

These parents may say 'why are you getting so upset?' but are, in Gibson's words, among 'the most emotionally sensitive people on this planet'. Children who are often blamed develop exaggerated guilt about expressing themselves, and their first thought becomes 'what did I do wrong?' They feel morally obligated to give the parent what they want, even at a cost to their own health.

• The four types: emotional, driven, passive and rejecting

Emotional parents run the house with their moods, and everyone tiptoes around them. Driven parents are compulsively goal-oriented and treat children as extensions of themselves, whether that's about the Ivy League, sports, church or looking 'normal'. Passive parents are often the kids' favourite: warm and playful, but they don't protect. Rejecting parents act as if children are a nuisance.

• Each type leaves its own mark

Children of emotional parents become hypervigilant mood-readers who assume partners need managing. Children of driven parents struggle with perfectionism, procrastination, and guilt about resting. Children of passive parents don't feel worth protecting and learn to put up with bad behaviour. Children of rejecting parents learn the best relationship comes from not bothering anyone. Many end up feeling selfish, 'too needy' and secretly insecure.

• Feeling you can't make yourself understood is often their problem, not yours

Gibson says if someone wants to understand you, it doesn't matter how you say it, and if they don't, it doesn't matter either. She cites coach Jenny Walter's term 'brain scramble': losing your words when the other person looks like they're listening but isn't engaging. Conversation relies on emotional resonance, so the mismatch feels unsafe and knocks you off track. Better communication skills won't fix it.

• 'Healing fantasies' can keep you stuck

Gibson says emotionally deprived children all form a fantasy about how they'll finally get what they need, built around 'if only': if only I were more selfless, more attractive, richer, more famous. Or the parent will change when they're older, less stressed, or have grandchildren. The hope is understandable because these parents can be loving and quick to help when you're sick. But expecting them to suddenly become mature distorts reality; the rescue has to come from you.

• Expect grief, and shame, on the way to healing

Recognising what you needed but didn't get brings grief, which Gibson says actually gives you something solid to stand on. Getting there often means passing through shame first, since people tend to feel a bad experience says something bad about them. Many have also been talked out of feeling compassion for themselves.

• Repair is the real sign of maturity

Mel says she was an emotionally immature, volatile parent, the 'emotional' one to her husband's 'passive' one, and that her kids never knew which mood she'd wake up in. She argues that maturity isn't never losing it but calming down, owning it and repairing. Gibson agrees: self-reflection plus empathy make you want to go back and repair. Mel says apologising to her kids has brought them closer.

EXAMPLES

• The 91% poll

Mel asked her Instagram audience of 8.5 million whether their parents were emotionally immature: intense outbursts, punishing feelings, relying on the child for support, or being emotionally unavailable and critical. 91% said yes. Gibson wasn't surprised, saying people crave validation for things they've been told aren't really happening.

• Everyday examples of emotional immaturity

A mother answers her daughter's breakup with 'your father does that to me all the time'. A parent withholds approval when a son chooses writing over a 'successful' path. Guilt trips when you can't come home or drive them somewhere. One mother, told that criticising an aunt was hurting her daughter's relationship with her, replied, 'Who else am I going to talk to?'

• The quiz on page 26

Items include: my parent overreacted to minor things; was uncomfortable with emotional closeness; used me as a confidant

but wasn't one for me; only gave sympathy when I was sick; got defensive at polite disagreement; made sharing my successes deflating; wasn't self-reflective; thought in black and white. Mel said she could tick many boxes as a parent herself.

• The closed door and the dad on the bed

One of Gibson's clients ran to greet her rejecting father every evening, and it felt like 'throwing myself against a closed door'. Another's passive father would sit on her bed to comfort her after her mother exploded, but never stepped in while it was happening.

OTHER RELEVANT

• Lower your expectations, and stay connected to yourself

Accept that time with them will probably be draining. Go in as an 'anthropologist' observing a tribe, and repeat the mantra 'detach, detach, detach' whenever you feel the urge to over-explain. Keep a running inner commentary, or squeeze your arm, so you don't zone out or feel erased.

• Find the right amount of contact

Gibson says walking into your parents' home is like stepping into a time machine back to childhood. Choose limits that let you stay yourself, such as a two-day rule, no overnight stays, or meeting on neutral ground.

• Journal one question each night

Gibson's prompt for anyone wanting to grow up emotionally: 'What do I wish I hadn't done today?' Then ask what the next slightly better step would be, not to erase it, just to improve on it. She calls this 'the royal road to profound change'.

• Set boundaries in your own style

You don't have to become blunt. 'Gee, Mom, I'm so sorry, I know you're disappointed, it just won't work this time' still counts. Gibson's parting advice: you matter as much as anyone else, others will affect you emotionally, and you came 'factory equipped' to tell who's good for you.

What Every Mom Needs to Hear Today

Guest: Jesse (Mel's studio manager)
Date: 2025-05-05 · Duration: 1:00:10
URL: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=2U3wQ82ZIdE

KEYPOINTS

• There is no 'right' way to give birth, and trusting your child is the first lesson

Jesse, Mel's studio manager and video editor of four years, was 36 weeks pregnant with high blood pressure. She felt she had already failed because her doctor said she wouldn't go into labor naturally and would likely be induced. Mel's reframe is that the baby has her own spirit and will come 'when she's damn ready.' She says 40 weeks is a guesstimate; her daughter Sawyer came two weeks late and had to be delivered with vacuum and forceps. Mel's warning: if you fixate on getting it right, your child will sense your anxiety and feel responsible for it.

• Fear after pregnancy loss is a sign of mental health, not weakness

Jesse had lost two pregnancies before this one. Mel cites a reframe from Dr. Lisa Damour: being nervous after experiences like that shows you're mentally well. Mel says you can be nervous and trust your body, your doctors and your baby at the same time, and that holding space for both is what parenting is.

• Parenting is holding space for your experience and your child's

Mel defines the job as comforting a struggling child while believing you can guide them and that they can learn from life with you beside them. 'If you stay in that lane, there's nothing to get right.' She applies the Let Them Theory too: let the baby come when she's ready, and let yourself feel what you feel.

• You will mess up, so apologize

'There would be no therapists if parents did not screw up,' Mel says. She describes being a shouter with a short fuse who took work stress out on her kids, 'wildly fun and then wildly pissed off.' That left her daughters on edge, wondering which mom they'd get. She has since apologized for the volatility, for the fighting with Chris during financial struggles and for the drinking.

• The 'parental mismatch': what kids need versus what a parent can give

Crediting Dr. Nicole LePera and Dr. Russell Kennedy, Mel explains that sometimes what a child needs is beyond what a parent's skills or circumstances allow. She uses T.D. Jakes's image, from a conversation with Oprah: a 'quarter-cup' parent can give everything they have and it will never feel like enough to a 'gallon' child. Mel says it's worth acknowledging that your own parents may have been emotionally immature, carrying their own trauma, or under stresses you didn't see.

• Be a guide, not a dictator

Mel says 'we're a ski family' or 'everyone here is a doctor' is your vision, not guidance. Make it safe for kids to feel what they feel and try what they want, whether that's music instead of sports or a partner you don't like. She cites Dr. Stuart Ablon of Harvard Medical School and Mass General Brigham and his collaborative 'with them' approach: ask 'What do you want to do about it?' and 'How can I support you?' The goal is a kid who leaves home equipped and wants to come back.

• Protecting your child's trust beats sharing what they told you

Mel says the fastest way to make sure kids never tell you anything is to pass along what they share, especially to other parents, because it gets back to school. If a child says 'don't tell Dad,' she explains that she and Dad are a team. She asks permission to tell him, or offers to go with the child to tell him together, and promises they won't be in trouble. She says the kids have always agreed, and it stops them playing parents against each other.

• Separate destructive guilt from productive guilt

Destructive guilt is society saying you're mothering wrong: you should be breastfeeding, you shouldn't be working. Productive guilt points to a value. Working to pay bills and keep a roof over your kids' heads, as Mel and Chris both had to around 1999–2007 without family nearby, is something to be proud of. Years later, Mel's guilt about missing field-hockey games while giving speeches told her she had met her financial goal and needed to take on less work.

EXAMPLES

• 'Do you want my advice, or do you just want me to listen?'

Jesse remembered Mel asking this when daughter Kendall came tearing upstairs upset. Mel calls it the single most important question a parent can ask. It stops you from jumping to solutions, signals you trust them to know what they want, and in her experience about 99% of the time kids just want to air it out.

• The party Mel accidentally exposed

One of Mel's kids told her about high-school drinking at a party. Mel casually mentioned it to a close friend, assuming she knew. The friend's daughter got grounded and blamed Mel's daughter, and Mel says it took a couple of years to rebuild that trust.

• Oakley's fear of throwing up

During a period when their son was changing schools and his dyslexia was still undiagnosed, he developed intense anxiety about vomiting. Mel describes leaving a Broadway show with Ben Platt mid-performance during his panic attack, and an airplane episode that ended with him throwing up in the airport. She often met it with anger. Recently she cried and apologized to him, saying she thinks she made his anxiety worse.

• Kids waking their parents for the bus

During the worst financial stress, when the kids were about 10 and 8, Sawyer and Kendall would get themselves ready and tap Mel and Chris awake in chairs where they had been drinking all night.

• Jesse's update five weeks postpartum

Jesse was induced at 37 weeks because of her blood pressure, eight days after recording, and calls the delivery 'perfect.' The induction fell a year and a day after her first miscarriage, which she sees as a full-circle moment. She's running on two hours of sleep and says that without fear she can be a guide to her daughter.

OTHER RELEVANT

• Build a night routine to rescue your mornings

For listener Kelly, who cries on her way to work, Mel suggests getting kids in bed by about 8 p.m. Then pack the lunches, backpacks and work bag and set coats and boots by the door; she estimates that buys about 30 calm minutes. Be in bed by 9:30 and wake 30 minutes before your child to exercise or plan, because 'the second your child wakes up, the day is no longer yours.'

• Use boundaries, not balance

Mel compares it to a Lego kit rather than balancing it all. For example, go home at 3 or 5, put the phone and laptop away, then work for an hour after the baby goes down. Expect about six months of blending before you find a rhythm. She adds that showing your child a mom with ambition is a gift.

• A script for guilt and perfectionism

Hand on heart: 'I'm doing the best I can with the resources I have. I'm a good mom.' If all you have is 60% and you give 60%, you gave the 100% you had.

• Parents of adult kids: it's never too late

Mel says apologizing clears the slate and her kids have been very forgiving. Use 'let them' to stop judging grades, motivation or partners, and 'let me' to decide how you show up. She cites Dr. Robert Waldinger's long-running Harvard Study of Adult Development: a happy, healthy life is about relationships.

Harvard Psychologist Shares 6 Words That Will Change Your Family

Guest: Dr. Stuart Ablon
Date: 2024-12-16 · Duration: 1:26:57
URL: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=j6sSGT30WEg

KEYPOINTS

• Six words: "Kids do well if they can"

Dr. Stuart Ablon, Harvard Medical School professor and founder of Think:Kids at Mass General, says his whole approach flows from this sentence, and it applies to adults too: spouses, coworkers, in-laws. The common belief is that kids do well if they want to, which leads us to pressure people into wanting it. In 30 years he says he has never met a kid who prefers doing poorly to doing well.

• Challenging behavior is a skill problem, not a will problem

Ablon cites about 50 years of neuroscience research showing that people who struggle to manage their behavior lack skills, not motivation: problem solving, flexibility and frustration tolerance. Trying to motivate someone when motivation isn't the issue doesn't work and can make things worse. He stresses that none of these skills correlate with intelligence.

• The strongest predictor of change is the helping relationship

Across therapy, schools and other settings, Ablon says the only reliable predictor of helping someone change is the quality of the relationship between helper and helped: collaboration rooted in empathy, understanding and non-judgmental acceptance. The approach was tested first in residential treatment and correctional facilities before homes.

• There are five skill areas behind most hard behavior

These thinking skills live largely in the prefrontal cortex: (1) language and communication — knowing and saying what's bothering you; (2) attention and working memory — holding several "open files" at once, which all problem solving requires; (3) emotion and self-regulation, including impulse control; (4) cognitive flexibility versus black-and-white thinking; and (5) social thinking, from joining a group to reading how you come across and taking another's perspective. They overlap; a concrete thinker may struggle to empathize, and black-and-white thinking can make emotions spiral.

• Consequences work least on the people they're used on most

Consequences only work if you can stop and think ahead, which is impulse control. People with poor impulse control act first and get hit with consequences later, so piling on more doesn't change behavior. Ablon notes that well-behaved people aren't trying hard; the ones working hardest are those for whom it doesn't come naturally.

• Rewards and punishments can do real harm

He describes thousands of studies, with kids and adults, finding a strong negative relationship between external motivators and internal drive: people become motivated to get the reward, not to reach the goal, and may behave unethically to get it. Every reward or consequence also implies "you're not trying hard enough," which damages self-esteem.

• Discipline originally means to teach

Ablon notes the origins of the word revolve around teaching, not punishment, and punishment is a poor way to teach. If behavior is about skills, discipline becomes skill-building. He calls this "relational discipline": using relationship rather than power and control.

• Trauma and chronic stress delay these skills

Brain imaging shows that childhood trauma or toxic stress delays development in the five skill areas — Mel lists racism, poverty, absent parents and abuse as examples. Punitive responses add more stress, which escalates behavior, which brings harsher discipline, creating a cycle. Being trauma-sensitive means treating behavior as skill, not will.

• Adults can still build these skills

Ablon calls the idea that adult brains can't change "nonsense." It takes repetition and practice, but he says he has never seen anyone, even in the most severe cases, who couldn't improve a skill incrementally. Mel shares she has worked on her own all-or-nothing thinking.

• Pandemic-era skill gaps are making "adulting" harder

Ablon now sees more young adults than ever. In his school work, fifth graders look more like third graders and 22-year-olds more like 19- or 20-year-olds, despite heroic efforts by teachers and parents. Ultimatums to non-launching kids often produce "dissociative compliance": agreeing to anything just to end the talk.

EXAMPLES

• The sticker-chart letter

A Boston Public Schools girl who both "exploded" (screaming, flipping desks) and "imploded" (crying, leaving class) was put on a sticker chart. Asked in writing how it was going, she wrote that her brain was idiotic and she messed everything up. Ablon, visibly emotional, said she was already more motivated than anyone; the chart told her she wasn't trying.

• The prison guard's turnaround

When Ablon first presented at a prison, a respected senior guard said the ideas might fit 5–10% of the young people there. A couple of years in, the guard told him maybe a couple were sociopaths, but 95% or more were struggling with exactly these skills.

• The toddler photo

A mother of a hostile 15-year-old brought in a photo of him asleep in the car at age two. It reminded Ablon the kid who wants to do well was still in there. His advice to discouraged parents: watch your kids sleep to restore faith.

• "If you give a dog a name..."

His grandfather, who lived to 106, told him that if you give a dog a name, eventually it'll answer to it. Treat a kid as lazy and unmotivated and over time they start acting that way.

• Dez Bryant's note to himself

Mel reads the former Cowboys receiver's phone note about breaking generational curses: don't yell at your kids before bed or school; you become the voice in their head. Ablon suggests full healing may require forgiving his parents by remembering

parents do well if they can, while explaining is not excusing.

OTHER RELEVANT

- **Pick a plan for each specific problem: A, B or C**
  List the specific situations where problems happen, not behaviors like "disrespect." Plan A imposes your will and builds no skills. Plan C strategically drops the expectation for now, so you stay in charge. Mel likens it to "Let Them." Plan B is collaborative problem solving toward a mutually satisfactory solution.
- **Run Plan B with three ingredients in order**
  First, empathy: get their concern on the table. Second, share your concern, not your solution, using "and," not "but." Third, brainstorm together. Only one adult concern means Plan A; only theirs means Plan C. This follows Dr. Bruce Perry's "regulate, relate, reason"; if they get upset, return to empathy.
- **Empathize with four tools only**
  Ask questions, offer tentative educated guesses, reflect back in your own words, and reassure: "I just want to understand" or "I know there must be an important reason..." Ablon spent about five years studying recordings to find these.
- **Listen to your kids about screens before talking**
  Kids often share your worries about addictive algorithms, so start by hearing their concerns and work together against the apps.
- **Name your real worry about money**
  With adult kids, translate "I'll pay for you forever" into the real worry, like "I'm worried you won't feel successful" or "we'll run out of money," and make them co-authors.

The Simple Tool That Will Transform Your Family Dynamic

Date: 2024-11-25 · Duration: 0:56:14
URL: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Pw1ohFfCPsg

KEYPOINTS

• Your family isn't changing, but one person can shift the dynamic

Mel's starting point is that parents, siblings and in-laws are who they are, and people only change when they want to. Because families are interconnected, changing your own approach, energy and mindset can send positive ripples through the whole group over time. "It only takes one person in a family to change absolutely everything."

• Think of your family as a spider web

Parents and grandparents sit at the centre, and everyone is linked by strands of history and expectation. When someone taps one corner, such as an annoying message in the family group chat, the whole web shakes. Mel says the system isn't necessarily fair, but it's reality: you're connected whether you speak or not.

• Family criticism hurts more because everyone has a stake

Families tend to be harsher to your face than friends because your sadness or struggles ripple through everyone. Pushing you about your partner, job or health is often how they show care, but it lands as judgement. Mel says remembering that it comes from a shared stake helps you respond with less heat.

• "Let them" steps you back from the web; "let me" puts you in charge of yourself

"Let them" means you see the web without getting tangled in it: let your mom be disappointed, let your stepbrother bait people about politics. "Let me" means focusing on what you control: what you say, what you do, what energy you bring, and which conversations you join. Adults aren't responsible for managing other adults' emotions. Mel's one exception is that parents and stepparents are responsible for helping a child feel seen, heard, safe and supported.

• Decide what kind of relationship you want, and own it

Step one is choosing what you want to feel with your family, whether more fun, connection or peace, and taking responsibility for it instead of looking to your mother, sister-in-law or parents to change. Mel says expecting others to stop guilting you or playing favourites hands them your power. A guilt trip is like any road trip: you decide whether to get in the car.

• Use "frame of reference" before reacting

Credited to her friend Lisa Bilyeu, founder of Quest Nutrition and host of Women of Impact, the tool asks you to step into a relative's shoes. Picture parents whose friends all have family nearby while their kid lives far away and visits three or four times a year. Of course they pressure you. It's also their first time being human, and their first time being a parent or grandparent.

• In debates, listening comes before persuading

Most family arguments over politics, religion or diet are really power struggles about who's right. Mel cites research that people don't change their minds when you try to convince them; they dig in. They become open only when they feel heard. She separates petty debates from views that deny your fundamental rights, and says how you respond to bigotry from a relative is a deeply personal choice.

• Blended families sit on unprocessed grief

Mel says a divorce hits the web like a hurricane. Stepchildren and your own kids are grieving a life they didn't choose, and family events keep bringing it up. A new partner competes with kids who may now see their parent only half the time. Divorced parents need to "triple down" on prioritising their kids, accept that the kids may not like the new person, and sometimes see them without that person.

• Before cutting someone off, consider repair

Mel is frustrated by what she calls a trend of cutting family off without a conversation, an apology or the benefit of the doubt. She acknowledges that narcissistic personalities and real harm exist. Still, she asks whether holding a grudge is truly what you're committed to, and reminds listeners that you can always apologise, admit what you'd do differently and ask for a do-over.

EXAMPLES

• The old dynamic in Chris's family

Chris is one of three brothers who competed at sports and skiing, in a family where success was measured financially. Gatherings with a lot of drinking often ended in tears, fighting or someone storming off. Some of that eased after Chris's father died about 14 years ago, but an underlying disconnection remained. Jokes often targeted Chris, whose success is in his work with men and as a death doula, while Mel is the breadwinner.

• Mel used to be the difficult sister-in-law

Loud, opinionated, competitive and insecure, she joined in the debating and needling. As she worked on calming her own nervous system, she began walking away from the jabs without responding. Not rolling over, just deciding they weren't worth her energy. With no target, the needling faded. About two years ago, a brother-in-law told her, "Mel, you've really changed."

• Cindy's two sons

Mel's friend Cindy, a grandmother of four, has an older son who is a staunch conservative and likes to egg on his younger, liberal, creative brother. That happens in the group text and at the rare dinners they share. Her wish as the matriarch: "the politics would stay in another room."

• Ten Christmases

Mel's father is 80, and her grandfather died at 84. She says she's lucky if she has ten more summers and Christmases with him, and that realisation motivated her to lean in now. She also admits to being the aunt who forgets birthday cards and is last to reply in birthday texts.

OTHER RELEVANT

• Opt out of the old dynamic

Stop engaging in political needling, leave the table when an adult acts like a child, and let disappointment pass without trying

to fix it. Mel finds that when adults are given space to feel their emotions, the tension often eases.

- **Bring what you want more of**

Mel brings things the family can bond over, such as family Olympics, a big puzzle or a dance mix. Make the plans, ask the questions and start your own traditions, even if nobody thanks you. Do it because of who you want to be, not out of guilt.

- **Drop the rope**

Family conflict often feels like tug-of-war, with everyone fighting to be seen. When you let go, others often soften too. "People can only meet you as deeply as they've met themselves," so adjust your expectations accordingly. Accepting your family as they are isn't surrender; it's how you take back the power to shape what comes next.

How to Make a Decision You Won’t Regret Later

Date: 2024-09-12 · Duration: 0:39:48
URL: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=isLA-Ge9aS0

KEYPOINTS

- **There is a clock ticking that you cannot see**
  Mel builds the whole episode around a quote she saw and reposted: "There is a clock ticking that you cannot see, so love whoever loves you and enjoy your life." Her dad just turned 80, and she did the math: if she is lucky she gets maybe ten more of his birthdays. That arithmetic is what made her decide she would not miss a single one, even when the logistics were absurd.
- **Being a good daughter in your own eyes beats being one in theirs**
  Her first insight is that there is a big difference between someone else thinking you are a good daughter or son and you knowing you are one. When you act to win someone else's approval, guilt runs the show. When you act in a way that makes you proud of yourself, you are acting on your own values and the guilt has nowhere to land.
- **Doing things out of guilt turns the other person into the villain**
  Mel points out that "I should," "I have to" and "they'll be mad" are signs guilt is driving. Doing something because you feel guilty is the same as saying you had no choice, which quietly casts your mother or father as the bad guy. Her fix: choose what you do and do not do on purpose, and own the decision. She admits it took her almost 55 years to figure this out.
- **Under the scheduling tension is usually sadness, not anger**
  The back-and-forth of "don't come," "come later," "three nights isn't worth it" can make you crazy. Mel's read is that underneath sits grief, hurt and loneliness: families who live apart are sad they do not see each other and do not know how to say it. Parents who never did that inner work tend to express it as petty friction, and knowing that gives you patience to tolerate the dance without quitting on the visit.
- **Stop waiting for a holiday or big event to see people**
  Her second insight: you do not need an anniversary, holiday or long weekend to see family. If you live far away, waiting for the perfect window means years slip by. With hybrid work, she notes, many people could simply go for two days midweek.
- **When you want to visit, announce it rather than asking permission**
  Do not call and ask, "When would work?" Say, "I'm coming, here's the weekend." You will either hear "amazing" or hesitation. If the date clashes with their friends visiting, that is fine: you can still come and get a hotel. The point is not to sit around waiting for an invitation.
- **When you want them to come to you, you must actually invite them**
  The caveat to the previous point: people often assume an "open invitation" is understood, then resent loved ones for not showing up. Mel learned her parents were not planning to join the family's annual beach week because nobody had explicitly invited them. Busy-looking families get read as too busy, so a real invitation means specific dates, who is coming, where they will stay and "please bring the dog."
- **Step into your parents' world to understand their choices**
  Ten days at home showed Mel her parents' daily life: neither child lives in town, while most of their friends have at least one kid nearby, so they have built a support system among friends. That reframed her mother's "don't come that weekend" — the long-planned visit from friends mattered because those friends are their local family.
- **People are who they are, and most become more so with age**
  Her final insight is that you have to love people for who they are, not who you wish they would be. Most people grow more rigid as they age. Mel realized a lot of the friction came from her trying to manage her parents, when what they needed was acceptance, including of their marriage, which is not her job to fix.
- **Hoping someone will change blocks the relationship from improving**
  Mel credits therapist Dr. Ramani with the idea that one of the biggest obstacles to healing, and to any relationship changing, is the hope that someone else will change. Once you accept who a person is and is not, you decide how you want to show up regardless of how your effort is met. In Mel's experience, the moment she changes how she shows up, the relationship improves.

EXAMPLES

- **The 80th-birthday planning dance**
  Getting five people from southern Vermont to western Michigan meant a 16–18 hour drive or two flights, inside a three-day window around her daughter's LA job and her son leaving for college. Her parents said don't bother, come in September, three nights isn't worth it, and they had the twins' 16th and friends visiting. Mel went alone anyway, for herself rather than out of obligation.
- **A $7 balloon arch, a crown and four inflatable costumes**
  Her dad insisted on no party, so Mel had Amazon ship to her parents' house a 120-balloon arch, "Happy 80th" plates and cups, a birthday crown he wore all day, and four inflatable pickleball costumes: a flamingo, a cow, a rooster and an elephant. Her mom invited his golf buddies for a surprise. Mel's lesson: do not wait for permission to create a celebration.
- **The pickleball injury and back surgery**
  Her dad, a former orthopedic doctor, had been hiding a badly hurt back from pickleball. With no radiologist on site to read his MRI, he drove himself to his old hospital to find one. Surgery was scheduled within the week, so Mel cancelled work and stayed ten days in her childhood bedroom. He is now banned from golf and pickleball for six months.
- **The beach-house invitation that never happened**
  For five years Mel and her husband have rented a Rhode Island beach house the first week of July for her parents, brother, his wife and their twins. This year her brother tipped her off that their parents were not coming because they hadn't been invited. Her first reaction was disbelief; her second was seeing that, from their side, no call meant it probably wasn't happening.
- **Her childhood best friend moved home**
  While there, Mel saw her best friend from elementary school, Jody, who had just left Santa Barbara and moved back to White

Lake, Michigan, to live with her aging parents. Both have talked for years about the grief of living far from family, and it pushed Mel to plan a return trip before year-end to discuss options with her parents now instead of hoping for the best.

OTHER RELEVANT

- **Run the pride test before a family obligation**
  Before saying yes or no, ask, "Will this make me proud of myself?" rather than "Will they think I'm a good daughter?" If you go, go because it reflects who you want to be, and if you decline, own it. Either way you stop blaming the other person.
- **Read petty tension as unspoken missing**
  When a parent snaps "don't bother" or "do what works for you," consider that it may mean "I miss you and wish I saw you more." You do not have to make them say it the evolved way; just do not let the surface friction stop you from making the effort.
- **Use two scripts: "I'm coming" and a real invite**
  For visiting: name the date and offer a hotel if needed. For hosting: give dates, guests and logistics, especially for older relatives who must book flights.

The Ultimate Advice for Your Next Chapter (After Your Kids Have Left Home)

Date: 2024-09-09 · Duration: 1:11:10
URL: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=tLfs31mURpA

KEYPOINTS

• Focus on your wings, not the empty nest

Recording alone at home just after her youngest, Oakley, left for college, Mel says she hates the term 'empty nester' because every 'empty' (stomach, tank, wallet) means lack. She prefers 'bird launchers' and reminds herself the kids will fly back in and out. Her core line: it's not time that changes things, it's what you do with that time.

• Sadness and loneliness now are a healthy response

Mel compares it to Olympians after the Games. You've trained for at least 18 years, through college application stress, the 'season of lasts' and the 'season of firsts,' so feeling sad, lost or unsure what to do with the time is mentally healthy. She says you deserve a gold medal whether or not you bought the dorm headboard.

• Change means plowing a new path through snow

A major transition isn't only emotional; your brain, body and nervous system are unlearning old patterns and learning new ones. Mel's image is waking up to two feet of fresh snow and having to clear a path, which feels like being knee-deep with only a spoon. Feeling bad doesn't mean it is bad.

• Choose words that validate rather than alarm

Silence is the sense in overdrive for Mel; she now longs for the barking dogs. 'Unnerving' literally describes your nervous system losing an old pattern. Saying 'this quiet is so unnerving' amplifies distress, while 'I'm learning how to be with the quiet' frames it as normal adjustment.

• You and your child are on parallel tracks

College, the military or a first job means sensory overload for kids: new smells, food, textures and a roommate who may not sleep through the night. The advice you'd give them (it takes time, go put yourself out there) is exactly the advice you need. Parents may have it harder, living in the old chapter's environment while kids have a whole community built to support them.

• Your adult child isn't the solution to your discomfort

Reaching out whenever you're bored or sad is an 18-year pattern. For the first 30 days, Mel's experiment is to wait 30 minutes before texting. If they're not texting, that's good: they're busy plowing their own path. If they called crying every day, you'd eventually tell them to get out of the dorm, so model that yourself.

• Give it a month or two, and get out of the house every day

Mel notes parents' weekends are usually about a month in, and a sleepaway camp director told her camps run at least three and a half weeks because kids need about three weeks to get past homesickness, which simply means you miss something you love. Fill your calendar with an exercise class, friends, cooking, a class or house projects.

• Challenge one: you're more than a parent

Mother and father are roles, not your reason for being. If you know what you postponed (a career, a book, school, art), start now and never say you're too old; Mel started her podcast at 54. If you don't know, ask your kids what they'd have you dedicate the next five years to, make improving yourself your purpose, or volunteer.

• Challenge two: avoided relationship issues surface

Without kids in between, couples may feel like roommates or face swept-under-the-rug fights. Mel jokes that the empty nest reveals rotten eggs. You can't change a spouse; a relationship needs two people who want it and will do the work. If they won't, assume they won't change and make yourself happier, which raises your standards. Single parents must actively build friendships and a love life rather than isolate.

• Challenge three: a struggling child

Stop being their 'human Google,' since colleges have staff whose job is to help. For anxiety, Mel cites Harvard's Dr. Luana Marques: the more someone avoids what they fear, the bigger the anxiety gets, and rumination entrenches it. Validate feelings, then ask what one thing they could do right now, such as talk to their RA, go to the health centre or explore campus.

EXAMPLES

• Move-in day and the $500 Walmart run

Mel drew the line at a dorm headboard, but still spent about $500 on everything from socks to twin XL sheets. Oakley rode in silence on his headphones. Daughter Sawyer, 25, lofted the bed and stacked drawers in a cement room in 90 minutes, and the 'medal ceremony' hug ended with 'Mom, you're embarrassing me.'

• The quiet house after an anniversary trip

After a busy work week and a night away for their 28th anniversary, Mel and Chris opened the door to scary silence. She announced she'd move wherever the kids ended up, New York or Los Angeles, and Chris kindly said they could move anywhere she wanted. She admits that even as a senior, Oakley mostly grunted goodbye and ate on his own.

• Mel's mother and the pay phone

In her first semester, Mel had a full-blown homesickness panic attack and called home collect from the dorm pay phone daily for two weeks, until her mother told her to stop calling and make friends or she'd be at community college after Thanksgiving. By that afternoon Mel was 'a completely different person.'

• "I'm on my second marriage, just with the same person"

Mel and Chris saw a couples therapist even though things were good, because parenting had eroded their connection. She loves the line as a goal.

• Kathy's nest poem

Mel's friend Kathy Adzich, whose daughter roomed with Mel's at USC, texted a reflection comparing parenting to building a nest. It ends with her feeling guilty about enjoying the stillness yet lonely, unsure whether to rebuild the nest or soar, and certain she is 'good enough just the way I am.'

OTHER RELEVANT

- **Plan things to look forward to**

  Mel invited friends for each of the next four weekends and booked trips to Nashville in November and in March. She's no longer tied to a sports calendar.

- **Use your new freedom**

  Try being vegetarian, eat dinner earlier, join a CrossFit gym, a book club or a language club. Leave the kid's bedroom alone for now, since they're back in a couple of months.

- **Volunteer for perspective**

  Chris volunteers with hospice as a death doula. Mel says sitting with the dying reminds you that you haven't died, so stop acting like you have.

You Learn This Too Late: This One Idea Might Change Your Entire Life

Guest: Dr. Shefali Tsabary
Date: 2024-06-20 · Duration: 1:37:13
URL: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=dZccHfhhtXY

KEYPOINTS

• Control comes from your own anxiety and sense of unworthiness

Clinical psychologist Dr. Shefali, a pioneer of conscious parenting, says the urge to puppeteer your children, partner and life comes from inner anxiety tied to feeling unworthy. Children who feel constantly controlled conclude they must be broken. Her central invitation is to release control, because neither children nor life can be controlled, and trying to control them produces more chaos.

• Parenting is about the parent waking up, not fixing the child

Most parenting advice offers scripts to manage a child's behavior. Dr. Shefali says no script works if you're disconnected from yourself, because the child absorbs the disconnection. The child isn't broken, so there's nothing to fix. The relationship is a mirror of your own unhealed self, especially the inner knowing you lost in childhood. That's why she says "screw the carrots" strategies: get aligned with yourself first.

• "I just want my child to be happy" is still control

Parents who drop the Ivy League dream often move on to happiness as the goal. Dr. Shefali breaks down the sentence: "I" is ego, "want" is desire, "my" is possession, so it means wanting another being in a state that works for you. When the child isn't smiling and grateful, the parent panics and starts fixing. Mel admits she did exactly that that morning after seeing a "cringy" post from one of her kids.

• The hidden script: "I sacrificed, so you owe me"

Dr. Shefali believes parents often have children partly to fill their own sense of unworthiness, to bring home a trophy that says "See, I'm worthy," while claiming pure selflessness. Children then grow up believing they owe loyalty, duty and obligation, which she says explains a lot of adult guilt. She calls this objectification the most toxic parenting pattern, and the first objectification many people experience.

• A parent's job is unconditional presence and acceptance

Everyone wants to be seen and told they're good enough as they are, even if their path doesn't match your script. When parents tend to their own self-esteem instead of drawing worth from their kids, children feel free. "How your child is faring in the world doesn't give you a grade. How you are faring does."

• Seeing your own childhood clearly is the first painful step

Realizing you were "a puppet to my parents' fantasies" hurts, but it's where change begins. Next comes compassion: your parents acted from the level of consciousness they had, and likely weren't parented well themselves. Then you start in the present, whatever your age. She validates children who are being emotionally abused, but tells adults past about 21 that it's time to release their parents and parent their own inner child.

• Boundaries are about your behavior, not theirs

Begging someone to respect your boundary makes them the keeper of your dignity. A true boundary is what you'll do: leave, remove the Wi-Fi, stop buying the junk food. With little kids, be creative; she used to tell her three-year-old the park was closed in the evening. "You have two legs for a reason." With red-flag behaviors like drugs or drinking, she says parents should step in rather than wait.

• Screens have become substitutes for presence

Dr. Shefali links rising anxiety and depression in young people to parents who use screens to soothe their own anxiety and then pass the habit on. She blames what she calls the "parenting industrial complex" more than individual parents. She treats devices like alcohol or a vape in the house and suggests cutting back on activities. She calls social media exposure to strangers' scorn and judgment something kids aren't equipped to handle.

• A midlife crisis is an invitation

By midlife, many people have checked off most of society's list and still aren't happy. Kids become teens who treat you as "a chauffeur and a wallet" and then leave. The "now what?" is a chance to tear up the borrowed prescription and design a life from your own inner knowing. It will happen whether you welcome it or not.

EXAMPLES

• Mel's mother and "I gave up everything"

Mel's mom got pregnant with her in college, dropped out, and has told Mel and her daughters, "I gave up everything for your mother." Dr. Shefali says most parents say this more subtly at dinner: "Aren't you happy? I took you to the beach, I enrolled you in dance." Mel admits "you owe me, I paid for that" is the pattern she most wants to break in herself.

• Mel invited her daughters' criticism

Mel told her adult daughters, both in therapy, to talk about everything she did wrong: where they felt unseen, where she was controlling or checked out. Dr. Shefali says owning your imperfection frees children: they always knew it wasn't them.

• The basket in the kitchen

Mel's family puts phones in a kitchen basket, so the basket enforces the boundary. Dr. Shefali suggests starting with screen-free time, even five or 30 minutes a day, building to an hour, and letting kids be bored, frustrated and annoyed while everyone goes through withdrawal.

• Parents whose adult children have cut them off

Dr. Shefali works with many parents whose adult children have stopped talking to them. They may never get the ideal relationship back, but they can still be a source of unconditional love: leave a note on the doorstep, send flowers every Sunday, leave a meal, expecting nothing back. When they reconnect, she suggests owning their unconsciousness in a letter without pushing for a response, because "your child owes you nothing."

OTHER RELEVANT

- **Swap lectures for curiosity**

  When she wants to control her adult daughter, Dr. Shefali tells herself that if she isn't curious, she should zip her mouth. Look at your child as if they're the most amazing person on earth. People go to phones for safety and soothing, so become the presence that's more appealing than the phone.

- **Meet an adult child's real developmental need**

  Connecting with a young adult means supporting their need to leave, take risks and fail, not keeping them close for your comfort. Holding on with guilt clips the wings you worked to grow, and robs you of your own next chapter.

- **When someone you love is in a toxic dynamic, do "both-and"**

  Say: I love you and I'm here, but I can't take part in this dynamic. Stay as long as you can, and if it hits red-flag territory, step back so they can sit with why you left. Staying and pretending props up the dynamic.

4 Surprising Secrets of Successful Relationships (What I Learned From a Fight with My Daughter)

Date: 2023-11-23 · Duration: 0:44:22
URL: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=l_jqrs9p5lI

KEYPOINTS

• A distant, angry teen may not actually hate you

Listener Chelsea feared her 17-year-old son hated her after a rough few years of breakups and a lost friend group she felt she'd handled badly. Kendall, 23, suspected he's carrying a lot of negative emotion from losing friends, and his parents are simply the safest place to put it. Oakley, 18, echoed Mel's line at home: we treat family worst because deep down we know they aren't going anywhere.

• Start repair with a real apology

Oakley said that if his parents had meddled in his friendships or dating life, he'd want a plain apology for getting into his business. It shows a parent is human, makes mistakes and doesn't think they're above it all, and it acknowledges the hurt. Mel calls that the non-negotiable first step.

• Space often brings appreciation

Kendall has watched college friends who fought constantly with their parents come to appreciate them once they left home. She admits she was furious in high school over parties she couldn't attend, people she couldn't see and opinions she didn't want — slamming doors, raising middle fingers. Years out of the house and a college graduate, she now sees those rules as attempts to keep her safe and set her up for success, and says she'd do the same as a parent.

• Many family fights are about mismatched energy or a disrupted routine

Mel's first lesson from her fight with Kendall: you're rarely angry at the person. One of you is quiet and the other is bouncing around like the Energizer Bunny, or someone has wrecked the morning routine that makes you feel like yourself, and the pent-up frustration lands on whoever is in the way.

• "Let them" means not trying to change someone's mood

Apart from one immature moment of throwing her boots on the bed, Mel let Kendall be annoyed, make her bed in a huff and stew in the car, without trying to fix it. She says staying neutral and unhooked defuses things faster. Kendall's caveat: the person being "let" usually gets angrier before calming down, like a kid in a tantrum, and a calm parent in the corner can feel infuriating in the moment.

• Never hold gifts over someone's head

Mid-fight, Mel nearly blurted out everything she'd bought Kendall the day before, including the running shoes she was wearing. She stopped herself and calls it a breakthrough: as a child she felt love came with strings and had to be earned through compliance. If you do something nice, do it because you want to, not so the person owes you obedience.

• Don't let guilt make you do what you don't want to do

Kendall offered to take an Uber so Mel could get organized; Mel insisted on driving, then drove angry with her elbows up. Kendall's point: once you accept a favor someone feels guilty refusing, you get their resentment. Chris noted Mel's "I don't care, I'll get a car" energy didn't make it easy to accept. Mel's takeaway: let them get the car.

• Pause when nothing is actually urgent

Kendall says they acted rushed when they weren't. Unless it's an emergency, breathe and ask for what you need — "Stop doing your makeup and just pick up your stuff for five minutes" — or go cool off in the kitchen.

EXAMPLES

• The morning that went sideways

After a late mother-daughter dinner with Kendall's roommate and her mom, they skipped their 7 a.m. Pilates class. In Kendall's tiny, hot room — Mel radiates heat and had a hot flash — Kendall woke groggy to Mel's belongings everywhere, Mel's suitcase on her bed and Mel chipper and ready. Whispered bickering about bed-making, packing and an Uber followed. Both apologized on air.

• What Oakley can't stand

Asked what his parents do that irritates him, Oakley named one thing: talking to him first thing in the morning. He described filling his water bottle in the kitchen while a parent launches into a conversation and wanting to be left alone. Kendall laughed that it was exactly what had happened to her with Mel that morning, which set up the story of their fight.

• Meeting Reese Witherspoon in birkenstocks

In a New York hotel vestibule around 7:45 a.m., sweaty from a workout, Mel was stopped by Reese Witherspoon, who said she loved her work and had seen her on the Today Show. Mel, rarely starstruck, felt tongue-tied. By the time she checked Instagram, Witherspoon had already sent her a message.

• Red light, green light

Mel proposed a tool from friends Josh and David, learned from their therapist: say "this is a red light moment" when you need quiet, or ask "is this a green light moment?" before diving in. Her family mostly vetoed it. Kendall wants the person needing space to raise it, and wants Mel to read the room first. She also admits "Do you want me to listen or advise?" feels better than unsolicited advice but still triggers her.

OTHER RELEVANT

• For a lonely new kid, expect a year

A listener's freshman daughter moved, had no homecoming date and was comparing herself to old friends online. Mel says belonging at a new school takes a full year; expecting that brings grace. Scrolling old friends' lives is avoidance; every small move counts — a club, creative classes, going to the dance without a date, other new kids, new lunch tables, inviting people over.

- **Old friends aren't moving faster**
  Oakley notes friends back home have had about 10 extra years together. As a senior mentor to freshmen, he's learned everyone is going through something.
- **Bring grace to holiday gatherings**
  Mel's Thanksgiving reminder: relatives may be struggling, had a rough morning or need space.

This Teen Cracked the Code on Anxiety and Teaches You How He Did It | Mel Robbins Podcast

Guest: Oakley Robbins
Date: 2023-11-06 · Duration: 0:52:15
URL: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=7nP7GUVydPE

KEYPOINTS

• Stress is part of life, so stop resisting it

Answering a 17-year-old who wants a stress-free college search, Oakley, now 18 and just done with his applications, says that isn't possible and the process is arguably supposed to be stressful. Accepting stress, then stepping back to breathe, beats rewriting the same essay over and over because 'this isn't good enough.' Mel extends it to job hunts, fertility, dating and searching for purpose.

• No single outcome decides your life

Not getting into a dream school won't stop you from getting the job or living where you want; the school you end up at is usually great, and you can transfer. The bigger cost is spending senior year worrying and missing what Oakley calls arguably the most enjoyable year of high school, so appreciate where you are now.

• Name your boundary instead of hoping people guess it

Oakley told Mel he hears about college essays all day at school and didn't want to discuss them at home. Mel praises him for taking responsibility for the limit and suggests adults do the same: 'my weight is not up for discussion,' or 'please don't ask if I'm dating anyone.' Parents should know junior and senior year are '90% college' in a teen's head.

• Don't keep raising what someone is already anxious about

If your son and daughter-in-law are trying for a baby, they're already thinking about it every day. Mel describes a close friend who never had children and is hurt each time her mother says it breaks her heart. If someone wants to talk about a job search or a house hunt, they'll bring it up; show love in other ways.

• Parent through your values, not through control

On alcohol, Mel assumes every teen will experiment, so she and Chris focused on what they value most: trust, open communication and safety. Kids may try drinking with them first; there's no grounding for honesty, but lying is punished, and getting in a car with a drinking driver costs driving privileges for a year. Banning alcohol, she believes, produced sneaking, lying and binge drinking among other kids.

• During divorce, be honest without details and keep your spouse out of it

Oakley's advice: tell kids you're unhappy, repeat that it's not their fault, take their wishes about which house to be at seriously, recognize they're grieving too, and never vent about the other parent to them.

• You usually already know when to break up

Oakley says what holds most people back is fear of hurting the other person. An awkward hour or tears in a school hallway beat staying with someone you aren't happy with. Staying friends with an ex is possible, but only after space: no post-breakup hookups and no drunk calls, and the friendship won't look like the relationship.

• Confidence is an action, not a feeling

Mel's definition: confidence is the willingness to try. Oakley says middle school is where confidence drops, as bodies change and kids start talking about each other; what helped him was time, realizing nobody is looking at you as closely as you are, theater, and surrounding himself with people who hype him up rather than chasing a cool crowd.

EXAMPLES

• The solo jelly costume

On Halloween, Oakley's peanut butter and jelly duo partner bailed. He nearly skipped his bulky costume, then saw everyone else's and put it on. He spent the day explaining 'it's just the jelly,' loved it, and realized the only one judging him was himself. Mel adds that Chris built confidence the same way by starting men's retreats and a master's in transpersonal psychology.

• The summer camp bullying

At a month-long camp around sixth grade, Oakley's letters went from 'I love it' in week one to 'get me out' in week two, but he didn't say why. When he finally told Mel he was being targeted, she 'became the Hulk' and pulled him out; the camp's investigation ended in a three-page letter from the director admitting it had profoundly failed.

• Gaming as a phone call

Mel and Chris used to fight over Oakley's gaming. Mel's view: on headsets with friends, it's a play date, the boys' equivalent of a three-hour phone call. Oakley suggests an hour or two on weekend days is fine, and only full-day, 9-to-5 gaming is a concern.

• His sophomore-year low

Two years earlier, Oakley was in a dark place and believed he'd feel that way forever. The mindset slowly moved to the back of his mind and faded, which is why he promises a struggling listener it will get better.

• His daily journal

Mel learns on air that Oakley arrives at school 20 minutes early to journal in the car about the previous day, and has for about a year. He'd never show her, and she respects it, along with his room and his twice-daily showers.

OTHER RELEVANT

• Oakley's 'mentors at the table' exercise for anxiety

Sit up straight, plant your feet, rest your hands on your thighs. Take three slow breaths in and out through your nose with eyes open, then close your eyes (not while driving). Picture a long table of mentors, real or fictional. Ask each, 'Do you love me?', then 'Do you have any wisdom for me?', taking the first thought that comes, then ask about love once more and open your eyes.

• Openers for a teen who's always in their room

Oakley: 'I feel like you're in your room a lot recently, I'm curious what's happening.' Mel's: 'You don't seem like yourself.' A 15-year-old is likely on her phone, and that's normal; worry if they come home and never leave the room. A regular family dinner with a high-and-low round opens conversation.

• If a college kid reports bullying, assume it's worse

Mel reads a college athlete telling a parent about team bullying or hazing as a sign they don't know what to do. Ask leading questions: Are you telling me everything? Are you nervous going to practice? Have you told anyone? What do you think you should do?

• Raising favoritism or staying close to siblings

Bring specific examples and say how it made you feel ('I'm starting to feel like I'm not important') rather than accusing parents of favorites. Siblings who rarely talk can stay connected through a family group chat with photos, memes and occasional 'roll call.'

The Ultimate Guide to Friendship, Self-Esteem, & Anxiety W/ My 18 Year Old Son | Mel Robbins Podcast

Guest: Oakley Robbins
Date: 2023-09-14 · Duration: 1:03:17
URL: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=7dKEAoHQ9K4

KEYPOINTS

• When a teen boy goes quiet, it's usually not about you

Mel's 18-year-old son Oakley explains that boys in high school learn that sharing sadness, or even liking someone, reads as weak or 'not masculine,' while anger is acceptable. A son who withdraws is often protecting his place in a social hierarchy, or still processing and not yet sure what he feels, which makes prying especially frustrating.

• After school, let them decompress before you ask questions

After eight or nine hours of classes, tests and social interaction, Oakley wants to greet the dogs, say hi, then spend 10–20 minutes alone in his room. Mornings are worse: he's tired and easily set off. A 20-minute debrief the moment he walks in is the last thing he wants; an enthusiastic hello is welcome.

• Watch for the signal that they're ready to talk

If he walks away mid-argument, don't stop him. When he's ready, he comes back to a shared space, maybe grabs food, and hangs around waiting for a parent to engage. The best opener names what you saw and asks: 'I noticed you're very upset, would you like to talk about it?' Skip 'hey bud,' which can feel condescending, and if he says no, give more space.

• Ask: 'Do you want advice, or do you want me to just listen?'

Oakley singles out this line of Mel's as one every parent should use. Parents instinctively jump in to solve problems, but often a teen just wants to tell you what happened and can work it out himself.

• Cliques are closed and judgy; friend groups aren't

Oakley's distinction: a clique only engages with itself and doesn't let others in. If you're in one, change it or leave; if you're outside one, you can still befriend individual members, who usually have other friends. Popular groups make you feel seen, but in his experience members often trash each other behind their backs.

• Parents are coaches who never step onto the field

Oakley, a senior mentor to ninth graders who presented parent tips at his school, repeats his headmaster's line: coaches can advise, watch and cheer, but cannot play the game. What teens most need to hear is that you're proud of them, you love them, you're there for them, and you like their friends.

• Act like you like their friends, even if you're unsure

Mel explains that if a teen senses judgment, they stop bringing friends home, and then you lose any window into who they spend time with. Invite friends to dinner and get to know them. Oakley mentions a study claiming 97% of a young adult's success depends on their five closest friends; neither he nor Mel names the research, so treat that figure loosely.

• Stay out of minor social conflicts, but not serious ones

Oakley pleads with parents not to contact the bully's parents or the school over teasing; the backlash the next day is worse. The exceptions are clear: racist or discriminatory remarks, anything dangerous, or a child who is becoming depressed or can't cope. Otherwise, keep asking what your child needs, and help them rehearse comebacks.

• Dyslexia isn't a reason to 'try harder'

Mel explains that dyslexic brains are wired differently and reading pathways take longer to form; Orton-Gillingham tutoring is the gold-standard way to train new connections. Helpful accommodations include audiobooks, typing instead of handwriting and getting teachers' notes. Oakley is strong in math but struggled when asked to show his work, because his brain takes shortcuts.

EXAMPLES

• The shorts incident

In middle school Oakley wore jeans daily while hanging with the popular boys. The one day he wore shorts, a friend said his legs looked weird and spread it around. A few guys said 'that's not cool,' and he realized those were his real people.

• Agree with the insult to defuse it

His tactic for teasing: lean in ('yeah, they do kind of look stupid, funny right?'). The bully expects a reaction; when there isn't one, the teasing goes nowhere. He believes people who say hurtful things are usually hurting themselves, but acknowledges it still stings.

• Oakley's anxiety and Mel's breakdown

Oakley's childhood fear of vomiting became anxiety that makes him feel nauseous, and at its worst he skipped dinners with friends. He says therapy and medication helped, with no shame in either. He recalls Mel sobbing on Mother's Day after selling their Massachusetts house, begging Chris to get it back; seeing parents break down, he says, was scary but helpful, because it showed him nobody is happy all the time.

• The barn with two rules

Outside Boston, their narrow farmhouse with a low dirt basement was never the hangout house for daughters Sawyer and Kendall. In Vermont, Mel built an outbuilding with nothing breakable, sat Oakley's friends down and set two rules: leave it as you found it, and make the bunk beds. She posted a step-by-step photo guide, down to the European shams.

• Cell phones: wait on the smartphone

For a 14-year-old without a phone, Oakley says it's helping, not hurting; nobody gets bullied for it. He suggests around 16, the age you can drive, for a smartphone. A flip phone for texting parents is fine earlier.

OTHER RELEVANT

• Curfew is about safety, not control

Mel's rule in rural Vermont, with no Ubers: home by midnight, which means no drinking or smoking, or sleep over. At their house she takes car keys and everyone stays the night. Her strictness comes from losing a family friend to a drunk-driving crash in high school.

• Make chore requests immediate and shared

Teens forget anything asked for 'in an hour.' Ask face to face and right now: feed the dogs, clear the table. Avoid the 'I pay the bills' card; offering to do the dishes alongside them, or saying you need help because you have to go do something, gets less attitude.

• Help kids find their people through shared activities

Clubs and sports put you in a room of 20 people who like the same thing. As a new ninth grader from Massachusetts, Oakley simply walked up to people. At lunch, 'I'm new, you guys look cool, can I sit with you?' works, and a no tells you which group to avoid. The first friend won't always be your best friend.

• Confidence in class and getting teens to listen

Oakley recommends a drama class for projecting and public speaking, and reminds nervous students that classmates aren't waiting for you to mess up. To get your teen to hear this conversation, play it in the car, pick a 10-minute segment, or mention a kid their age is talking.

College Drop Off: 6 Steps to Navigating Any Major Change Like a Pro | The Mel Robbins Podcast

Date: 2023-08-21 · Duration: 0:40:28
URL: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=junoxkPFNnk

KEYPOINTS

• Change is hard for everyone, and so is watching people you love go through it

Recorded on the spot after a kitchen conversation with two colleagues, Amy and Lynn, during drop-off season, this episode is about any transition: college, a new grade, a first job, a move or dating again. Mel's framing is that we struggle with change ourselves and also get triggered when the people we love are struggling with it.

• Getting swept into their distress destabilizes them

Lynn describes herself as an empath who absorbs others' emotions. At her son's first college drop-off he thought he'd chosen the wrong school, and she cried with him and wanted to take him home. Looking back, she says she robbed him of the chance to rise to the challenge. Mel admits the same tendency: she hates seeing people in distress, and her own tears in goodbye moments made things harder for her kids.

• Flip into strength mode at the goodbye

With her daughter this year, Lynn let her be emotional without matching it. She switched off "empath mode" and focused on encouragement — "you've got this" — while understanding the transition was her daughter's. It can feel cold, but it keeps you steady enough to be useful.

• If they spent a year choosing it, give it a year

When Lynn's daughter said after her first drop-off that she'd made a mistake and wanted to come home, Lynn said no, and not after the first semester either: she'd spent a year choosing the school and couldn't judge it without a full year. Mel thinks the same rule works for a new job or a new grade.

• Expecting excitement sets you up to panic

People build changes up in their heads — the next school year or post-college life in New York will be amazing — and then it doesn't feel the way they imagined, so they think something's wrong. Mel says what you imagine and what your body experiences in the moment are different, because everything is new.

• Being upset about big change is a sign you're mentally well

The script all three hosts take away: "Of course you're upset. This is your process for change. You always do this before something that turns out great. It shows me you're mentally well." Feeling turned upside down by a new place, people, commute and rhythm is the appropriate response, and it's temporary.

• Let them borrow your belief in them

Amy's insight from leaving her daughter in Málaga, Spain, for a gap year: in that moment a parent has to believe in the child more than the child believes in herself, so she can borrow that confidence. Not in a shaming way, but "yes, you can." Amy says she needed this as a child and did much better when she got it.

• Build a bridge to the next time you'll see them

Amy points to a technique psychologists recommend for preschool drop-off: link the goodbye to a specific future moment — "I'll pick you up tonight and we'll do this," or "I'll see you at Thanksgiving." Mel says it gives emotional stability at any age.

• Don't make the moment about your own feelings

Mel realizes her goodbye pain is tangled with her own history: she left Michigan at 18 for Dartmouth, never moved back and misses her parents. She admits nudging her daughter toward the East Coast and vows to stop. Amy adds that you should ask probing questions so kids decide for themselves, not to please you.

EXAMPLES

• "No, you can't come back"

At 18 or 19, boarding a plane alone for a semester in Hawaii, Mel told her mom she could always come back if it didn't work out. Her mom said no — make it work. Mel ended up with anxiety and in a psychiatrist's office, but says that answer made her look forward instead of back, and it was the best thing her mom could have done.

• The Container Store detour

Mel's daughter Sawyer had planned her Boston College dorm down to color-coded mason jars, then froze on move-in day, feet dangling from her lofted bed, saying she'd made a mistake. Mel took her to The Container Store, Target and an early dinner to kill time, which she now calls a major mistake. At USC, her daughter Kendall, who had fought hard to get into its pop music program, sobbed and clung to them at goodbye.

• Lynn's own new job

Lynn left a job of 10 years to join Mel's team and was at her first off-site. She hears the voice asking whether she's the right person but doesn't give it permission to steer; she reminds herself she has handled transitions before, and shared that with her daughter so they were going through change together.

• A panic attack on the side of the road

A young woman Mel considers like a daughter called mid-panic: newly graduated, job start delayed, family just moved, grandfather sick. Mel grounded her with one thing she could see and hear, breathing together and a hand on her heart, then told her that being thrown by that much change showed she was well, and that it was temporary.

OTHER RELEVANT

• Use a goodbye script, then walk away

Acknowledge it'll be hard and different, say you believe in them and when you'll see them, hug, then turn and walk away like you mean it. Don't run back for another hug. Mel plans to cry in the car afterward.

- **Narrow their focus on the tearful call**

  Mel cites F-14 pilot Carey Lohrenz's book Span of Control: in an emergency only three dials matter. Ask, "What can you do in the next hour?" Then push them out of the room or cubicle to talk to people.

- **Breadcrumb the calendar**

  Overwhelm can lead to freezing and procrastinating. Help them schedule a lunch, a cafeteria buddy or an event so their week shows forward motion. Mel's plan for her daughter: change sucks for about two weeks, so get into a rhythm.

Repairing a Broken Relationship: It’s Not Too Late | The Mel Robbins Podcast

Guest: Dr. Joshua Coleman
Date: 2023-07-13 · Duration: 1:13:38
URL: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=HQ_f99U6O9w

KEYPOINTS

• Estrangement is a deliberate, usually one-sided cutoff, and it's common

Dr. Joshua Coleman, a San Francisco psychologist and author of Rules of Estrangement, defines it as a complete or near-complete cutoff that one person wants and the other doesn't, most often initiated by an adult child. He cites an Ohio State study finding 26% of fathers and 6% of mothers estranged from a child (other studies put mothers closer to 10-11%), and estimates about 27% of US families have an estranged member. He notes definitions vary, which muddies the research.

• Culture shifted from role to self

Drawing on sociologist Anthony Giddens's idea of the 'pure relationship,' Coleman says ties are now judged by whether they serve an individual's happiness and goals, rather than by roles like 'good adult child.' Estrangement has always existed, but never before has cutting off a parent been framed as good for mental health or an act of courage.

• The main pathways: abuse claims, divorce, in-laws, therapy and mental illness

Adult children most often cite emotional or physical abuse, neglect and differing values. In his study of 1,600 estranged parents, about 70% had divorced, which can lead kids to blame one parent or compete with step-families. Others include mental illness in parent or child, a son- or daughter-in-law who says 'choose me or them,' and therapists who diagnose a parent from afar.

• He believes some therapists push clients toward cutoffs

Coleman says parents show him letters stating 'my therapist says you're a narcissist and can't change,' from therapists who never met them. Childhood trauma is real, he stresses, but he thinks the culture now over-assumes it behind every adult problem. Mel notes they may differ on how much childhood trauma drives adult behavior.

• Over-closeness and pursuit can trigger the break

He cites a University of Virginia survey finding most parents expect to be best friends with their grown children, which many adult children don't want. Texting and social media let anxious parents intrude anywhere, and the most common line in estranged children's letters is 'respect my boundaries.' When a parent responds to normal distance by acting hurt or critical, it can become John Gottman's pursuer-distancer dynamic.

• Five common mistakes estranged parents make

Expecting it to be fair (which breeds victimhood and resentment); using guilt, which he says no longer works in North American culture, though cultures with filial duty tolerate it more; returning fire with fire; assuming every unanswered text is personal; and treating repair as a sprint. He adds a sixth: half-hearted amends like 'I'm sorry you feel that way.'

• Reconciliation happens largely on the estranged person's terms

Unlike couples therapy, where both partners have equal claims, he tells families that sessions are about helping the parent become more empathic and respect boundaries, and that if he sides with anyone it will be the adult child. Once the parent shows empathy and accepts those terms, the relationship can move to discussing what the parent needs.

• Parents have a moral duty to take the high road, and adult children owe something too

Because children didn't choose to be born, Coleman says parents must lead, take more responsibility than feels fair, and not get pulled into the weeds. He also argues adult children owe parents a period of due diligence: hearing them out and seeing them three-dimensionally, with compassion rather than contempt, though not tolerating ongoing abuse.

• Concept creep makes generations talk past each other

He cites Australian psychologist Nick Haslam's 2015 'concept creep' paper: definitions of abuse, trauma and neglect have expanded. A parent hearing 'you emotionally abused me' often can't relate. His suggested reply: 'It's clear I have blind spots; I'd like to learn what that felt like and whether there's something you'd like me to read or work on.'

• The odds favor reconciliation, slowly

Coleman says most estrangements eventually reconcile, even without his methods, as people mature, become parents themselves or want their kids to know their grandparents. It's a marathon of months or years, and catching the dynamic early leaves a smaller hole to climb out of.

EXAMPLES

• Coleman's own daughter

Divorced in his 20s, he later remarried; his daughter cut contact for several years in her early 20s, feeling displaced by his new family's more stable life. His therapist advised reminding her what he'd done for her and showing up to demand to see her. Things turned only when he stopped explaining, defending and blaming. Reconciling took many conversations, and he says it still comes up occasionally.

• Mel's prom-suit moment

After an hour and a half and hundreds of dollars on a black suit for her son's prom, Mel asked for a ride home and he said it would make him late for practice. She caught herself before saying 'are you kidding me,' recognizing a transactional 'I did this, so you owe me' reflex, and saw that he had also accommodated her schedule.

• Mel and her mom

Newly married and living near her husband's family on the East Coast, Mel sensed her Midwest-based mom felt she was losing her to another family. Every conversation had landmines. Mel credits therapy with avoiding a rupture and feels closer to her mother now than ever.

• Listeners Mel met in real life

One woman hadn't spoken to her sister in five years; a man and his wife hadn't spoken to their daughter, who has mental health issues, in seven years and didn't know where she lived. Mel's uncle died without meeting two grandchildren, who then

came to his memorial.

- **The lighthouse model**

For parents alienated after a divorce, Coleman's image is standing steady on the beach broadcasting light while the child is tossed by waves. They may orient toward you, get pulled back out, and eventually find their way, so the job is to stay loving, available and accountable.

OTHER RELEVANT

- **How to write an amends letter**

Keep it to about two paragraphs. Open with 'I know you wouldn't do this unless you felt it was the healthiest thing for you.' Name their complaints fearlessly, like a searching moral inventory, and how they may have hurt their trust or safety. Make no excuses, such as being a single mother or the other parent's failings, but don't make it self-hating either.

- **If you don't know why you were cut off**

Say you clearly have blind spots and ask whether they'd be willing to write and tell you more, promising to read purely to learn, not to defend yourself.

- **Know when to stop**

Returned letters, police threats or contact through an attorney signal it's time to stop completely, often for a year. He calls it 'lose your parent, find yourself': some adult children need to feel the absence to reconnect differently. He'd say the opposite for minor children: don't give up.

- **Treat a child's partner as the gatekeeper**

Never criticize a son- or daughter-in-law to your child, because it will likely be passed on; if you already have, work hard to make amends to them directly. Feeling replaced is developmentally normal, and complaining makes it worse.

- **Siblings and friends in the middle shouldn't be advocates**

Don't ask a non-estranged child to plead your case; they may be cut off too. Tell them they don't have to prop up your self-esteem and can voice their own complaints. Friends caught between two people should avoid taking sides, which can make the other person feel ganged up on.

If Someone You Love Is Having a Hard Time, Listen to This

Guest: Dr. Lisa Damour
Date: 2023-05-18 · Duration: 1:25:23
URL: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=0QI2BQmnsH8

KEYPOINTS

• Mental health isn't feeling good; it's fitting feelings that are managed well

Clinical psychologist Dr. Lisa Damour, author of The Emotional Lives of Teenagers, says psychologists ask two questions. Do the feelings fit the circumstance, and are they managed well? Being dumped should bring sadness and maybe some bitterness. A teen who hasn't studied for tomorrow's big test should feel anxious, and its absence would be more worrying. In her words, that distress is 'proof that they work perfectly.'

• Uncomfortable has started to feel unmanageable

She worries that too many people now treat discomfort as a sign that everything must stop. Discomfort is part of life and deserves care, but it is different from distress that needs clinical support. She also notes that psychologists treat all emotions, positive and negative, as information. If lunch with someone always leaves you feeling diminished, that's data.

• Two red flags: mood that impairs functioning, and costly coping

Sadness is expected, but depression casts 'a pall over everything.' Anxiety is expected around danger, but not when it becomes paralyzing. The second flag is coping that comes at a price: substances, being hard on the people around you, or turning pain inward through self-criticism or self-harm.

• Costly coping persists because it works

Her training held that people are rational actors: weed, cutting or eight hours of video games bring real relief. Mel called this the first time she'd heard anyone say it plainly, and it explains the defensiveness when you try to take the behavior away. Telling someone 'you need to stop' sets up a showdown. The better move is to stir up an internal conflict and side with the part of them that wants to be healthier.

• Adolescence runs from about 11 to the mid-20s

Puberty is usually underway by 11, which is why psychologists start there rather than at 13. Brains are largely developed by 18–20, but under stress, good reasoning is knocked offline more easily until about 24 or 25. She pushes back on the idea that young adults have undeveloped brains: 'look at that English paper.'

• Girls tend to discuss, boys tend to distract, and both work in moderation

She stresses big caveats: these are averages with heavy overlap, and the research has mostly studied conventional genders. Venting to a friend or shooting hoops are both healthy. Trouble comes at the extremes. Endless analysis of a text thread becomes rumination ('picking at an emotional wound'), and girls are more prone to vicarious distress. Constant distraction denies boys support and practice putting feelings into words.

• Think delay, not loss, after the pandemic

Teenagers have two jobs, becoming more independent and spending time with friends, and lockdown blocked both. Some strong students 'cratered' without the cues of moving between classrooms. She saw more extreme derailments than ever, including eating disorders, heavy weed use and social conflict. Still, she says development is powerful and humans 'bend toward health.' Kids now back in routine mostly look like pre-2020 teens to her.

• Avoidance feeds anxiety

She calls this one of psychology's most important findings, and one of the worst communicated. Skipping a dreaded party brings instant relief, which teaches avoidance. And because you never go, the imagined disaster stays 'sealed in amber.' She makes the case for healthy anxiety and stress. Stress is simply adapting to change, and it is pathological only when chronic or traumatic.

• Weight loss in a teen is a flag

Teens normally gain weight and strength. Learning from eating-disorder colleagues, she says that by the time a teenager is losing weight, 'something's usually up.' Not every vegetarian develops an eating disorder, but nearly everyone who develops one drops a food category. Her test is whether the 'no sugar' kid still eats a really good cupcake. She suspects seeing thousands of ultra-thin images a day changes real behavior, though she admits it can't be proven.

EXAMPLES

• The knock on the door

Playing a teen smoking weed in his room, she models the opening line: 'You and I both know that smoking weed like this is going to get in the way of the kind of life you want to lead.' If the kid isn't in a state to talk, schedule it, with the core message 'what you're doing isn't working.' Mel said she wishes she'd used that framing when Chris's depression came to a head, instead of 'pounding on the door.'

• Externalization: emotional trash

Mel's daughters call Chris to chat but FaceTime her three times in a row to unload, then move on while she lies awake. Damour calls it the defense of externalization. As a freshman, she called her own mother from college in Connecticut saying she had no friends, then hung up to go out. Her mom stayed up all night, ready to 'pack the cooler' and drive across the plains.

• The eight-word rule

A 'brilliant and terrifying' supervisor allowed her eight words or fewer when responding to a client, because longer replies go to the head and bypass the heart. She credits that discipline for how she writes and speaks.

• Read the CDC numbers in context

She notes the devastating CDC report on adolescent mental health released that February was collected in fall 2021, during a third disrupted school year. That context got lost in the coverage, and she expects about another 18 months before a clearer picture.

OTHER RELEVANT

• Just ask about suicide

She says passing thoughts of suicide aren't rare in teens. Give a reason ('you've been in your room for a day and a half'), then ask directly whether they've had thoughts of harming themselves or ending their life. Research, she says, shows asking doesn't plant the idea, and teens who are thinking about it are glad you asked. With a client, side with 'the part of you that wants help.'

• Interrupt rumination with a scheduled pause

Say: 'Talking usually helps, but the more we talk the worse you feel.' Set a time for tomorrow and take a mental vacation until then. The next day, kids often wonder why they were so upset.

• Suggest therapy without confirming their secret fear

Get help when what you're trying at home isn't working. Since teens often secretly worry something is wrong with them, she says: 'For what you're up against, you deserve way more support than you have.' Ask your pediatrician who they like.

• Be a steady presence

Don't match their agitation. Otherwise a '15-year-old-size bad' day becomes '52-year-old-size bad.' Listen and say 'that stinks, I'm sorry,' which is often all they need. Don't jump on the phone or cancel plans.

A Toolkit for Families: Practical Wisdom That Makes You Closer | Mel Robbins Podcast

Guest: Chris, Sawyer, Kendall & Oakley Robbins
Date: 2022-12-22 · Duration: 1:00:17
URL: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=RXjHfBcI-XE

KEYPOINTS

• 'You will never get in trouble for telling the truth', and the parents actually kept that promise

Sawyer says this rule is the main reason all three kids talk so openly with Mel and Chris. Her friends' parents said the same thing and then grounded them anyway. The Robbins parents did what they said. Mel argues that most parents mean the line until the call comes about a blackout or a police-raided party, and then emotion takes over. Following through is the whole point.

• Mel's number one parenting goal was to be the people the kids came to

She wanted her 13- to 16-year-olds to talk through what they were worried about or wanted to try with adults who would listen, not with other teenagers who 'don't know what the hell they're doing.' Mel didn't grow up with this. The message she got as a child was that trust takes a long time to build and two seconds to shatter.

• Hearing is not the same as listening

One of the daughters draws the line clearly. Lots of parents hear 'I want to go to this party' or 'I slept with someone before I was ready,' but they've already decided the answer. Her parents took in how the kids felt, empathized, and loosened the reins enough to let them fail. Another sibling adds that when a parent's mind is made up before the talk starts, kids learn to be sneaky, and resentment follows.

• Connection first, correction dead last

Mel and Chris say they never aimed to be their kids' friends. Mel describes the job as helping kids figure out who they are: thinking through decisions, finding their own values, feeling the weight of consequences, and eventually leaving to build their own lives. Chris notes that this meant listening respectfully even to ideas that were immature, dangerous or irritating.

• Set guardrails around character, not activities

The kids say their parents' firm lines were about morals: be kind, hold the door, say thank you, learn the waiter's name. Nothing dangerous, self-destructive or discriminatory was ever allowed, and drinking and driving was off the table. Other families, they say, set rules about activities, like no drinking on weekends, and those rules mostly taught kids to hide.

• Showing your feelings makes it safe for kids to show theirs

The kids have seen both parents cry at the dinner table over a bad day at work or a hard talk with a friend. Sawyer, 23, says many of her friends have never seen their parents cry, and that a constant brave face tells kids they aren't allowed a bad day. Mel adds a limit: be open about your life, but keep things like the details of your marriage private.

• Kids are truth-tellers and lie detectors

Mel says honest communication works because what parents say has to match what kids actually experience. When she or Chris was upset, they said so up front with 'this is not about you,' so the kids didn't blame themselves for their parents' moods.

• Go to your kids instead of dragging them to you

Mel's main takeaway is to do what your kids love, even if you don't, and to welcome their friends. Kendall wishes they'd done more girls' outings, like painting pottery, the pumpkin patch or shopping. Sawyer says the teenage stretch when friends matter more than family is a phase, and that family comes back, especially once kids leave for college.

• Repair is always possible: tell your kids directly

A listener named Buffet asked how to make peace with past parenting mistakes. Kendall's answer: tell your adult kids you feel you messed up and want to connect. Mel models what that could sound like, for example 'I regret that I wasn't around more,' or 'I regret we were struggling so badly financially that I couldn't afford those things.' She says it's more useful than processing it all with your friends or spouse.

EXAMPLES

• Sawyer and the handle of vodka

The first time Sawyer drank, she finished a whole handle of vodka and woke up covered in vomit on the window bench, sure she was 'dead meat.' On the screened-in porch, her parents told her they would never punish her for something they had also done as kids. Her only 'punishment' was going to a lacrosse tryout anyway. She says that talk opened the door for good.

• Chris takes Oakley to PAX East

Chris doesn't play video games. He still offered, unprompted, to take Oakley to the PAX East gaming convention, where they walked the booths and played together. Oakley says it made him feel there was nothing wrong with what he enjoyed. The family also recalls Oakley trying gymnastics, diving, soccer and lacrosse for half a season each, while his parents simply asked what he wanted to try next.

• A miserable freshman year at Boston College

One of the kids describes going to BC with a boyfriend at Michigan, making only one friend all year and crying daily to be picked up 20 minutes away. Her parents made her stay the year. Sophomore year turned into the best year of her life. Mel's script for this situation: 'I hear you, that is hard. We're paying tuition, so you finish the year. If you're that miserable, put the energy into transfer applications.' Mel's practical push was to knock on someone's door or DM someone to get lunch, and it worked.

• The boyfriend no one liked

When Sawyer's parents first said she should break up with someone, she pulled away. When they switched to inviting him for dinner and framing their worry as 'you're not yourself around him,' the question 'who am I in this?' stayed in her mind until the end. Oakley describes hiding a girlfriend in his room to keep her comfortable, and says his parents' gentle comments stayed with him the same way.

OTHER RELEVANT

- **Keep asking, and accept silence**

  For a listener with a four-year-old, the kids recommend a warm, genuinely curious invitation to share, over and over. If kids don't answer, that isn't a crisis. The asking itself tells them you're there.

- **Ask 'Do you want me to listen or give advice?'**

  Mel says nine times out of ten her kids just wanted her to listen, and then worked their way to a solution on their own. Don't rescue kids or let them bail on discomfort. Mel warns that letting them escape every hard situation raises their anxiety.

- **When a child is excluded, promise to listen, not to act**

  For a 12-year-old crying over her friend group, the kids suggest sharing a similar story from your own school days first. Then make clear you won't call teachers or scold anyone, because kids fear a parent stepping in will make the bullying worse.

- **Stop grounding, and keep their secrets**

  One of the kids says her grounded friends went straight back to parties, doing twice as much. Talk through why it upset you instead. The kids also insist that what a child tells one parent shouldn't reach the other parent, a friend on your walk, or anyone else.

Why Having FUN is the Secret to a Healthier Life | The Mel Robbins Podcast

Guest: Sawyer Robbins
Date: 2022-11-23 · Duration: 0:57:32
URL: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=KuR0gcRGOuE

KEYPOINTS

• Rule one: you don't have to spend the holidays with people who harm you

Mel notes that searching for advice on family holidays mostly turns up tips on toxic relatives and boundaries. Her starting point is that you have permission to decline invitations involving narcissists, people who abused you or anyone who triggers your trauma. Everything else in this Thanksgiving episode is about the families you do want to see.

• Family gatherings follow a predictable slide

Mel describes the pattern: excited emails, packing the car, big hugs, then within hours you've caught up on college, work, dating and weather and everyone's on their phone. By day two you want your friends and your routine back and you're 'ready to kill your sister.' Old roles return too: the golden child, the middle child, feeling eight again at your parents' house. She admits relatives probably find 'Aunt Mel' a loud control freak.

• Fun is a serious ingredient in strong relationships

Mel cites relationship researchers Drs. John and Julie Gottman, whose research found that happy couples know how to have fun together, and argues the same goes for families. She lists what fun does: lowers stress, helps sleep, raises happiness and strengthens relationships. When she asks what your best family memories are, she bets they're the fun ones.

• Most of us are in a 'fun drought'

Mel cites research figures without naming the source: 97% of people wish they had more fun, 60% of adults feel their lives are too grown-up, and 73% miss parts of childhood like birthday parties and family celebrations. Researchers, she says, call this a 'fun drought.'

• Guilt is the first reason we skip fun

After hard years of divorce, job loss, illness or death, it can feel wrong to prioritize fun. Mel argues that having fun when someone can't be there, or has died, honors them, and that guilt shouldn't stop you.

• Fear of judgment is the second, so expect to be teased

You will get eye-rolls when you show up with foam hats, poster board, face paint or a Wiffle ball. That's what families do. Mel's point is that they'll complain anyway, so you choose whether they grumble about politics and sore backs or about the ridiculous hat everyone is now laughing at.

• The biggest reason is that adults don't plan fun

Childhood fun felt spontaneous, but adults planned the parties, play dates, Legos and popcorn. Now you have to plan it for the grown-ups too. Mel cites research that happy people deliberately do things that make them happy, and says fun works the same way. Weave laughter into the logistics, the way Oakley replied to a dry Thanksgiving email chain in all caps: 'PEOPLE WE ARE GONNA DESTROY THIS FEAST!'

• Recruit a 'first follower'

One person in a turkey blazer looks odd, but two make it a party, like the second dancer on an empty dance floor. Mel calls this first follower theory and recruits her 23-year-old daughter Sawyer, the family's 'Chief Fun Officer.' Sawyer's rule: if you plan something, go 100% all in and be the most enthusiastic person there, or no one else will commit.

• Make it turnkey, with no opting out

Sawyer says asking 'what does everyone feel like doing?' kills fun, and the day dissolves into eight Harry Potter movies, a bottle of wine and phones. Plan one activity a day that's already booked or prepped: a hike, a paddle court reserved, wreath greens already cut. Give two or three weeks' notice for costumes so no one turns up in red leggings as Santa. Avoid repeating stale ideas, which get done half-heartedly, and don't force things like pool parties that only work if people want them.

EXAMPLES

• Mel's fun memories

Euchre, backgammon and cribbage with her mom as her smack-talking partner. Wiffle ball with her twin nephews (now 14), which she had to quit because she'd pee herself before her bladder surgery. Her dad's 30-plus-year-old rented pontoon boat on Muskegon Lake, which died mid-lake last summer. Chris's nine cousins building sled jumps about 15 years ago, and an epic lip-sync battle 13 years ago in which every family was a band.

• Sawyer's track record

A bar crawl in Breckenridge in colonial prairie costumes that ended up on the town's Facebook page. An impromptu living-room 'wedding' for a widowed mom who had just gotten engaged, with a paper-towel veil and foil flowers. A Halloween granny costume built from about 15 makeup tutorials, with New Balance sneakers and a mask chain.

• The quarantine 'anything but clothes' dinner

Sawyer planned a month of theme nights, including a family Olympics and a chef-costume bake-off. On 'anything but clothes' night, Sawyer duct-taped king pillows around herself and Mel wore a champagne box and garbage-bag pants. Chris came downstairs in a rubber pot lid tied over his front, plus clogs and socks. He now threatens to wear it to a kid's rehearsal dinner.

• Planning their own Thanksgiving for 14

It's their first time hosting extended family at the southern Vermont house. They land on Capture the Flag, a cocktail contest per family with alcoholic and non-alcoholic versions, drawing names to make someone a crown (Sawyer takes on the supplies), a question bowl ('If money were no object, where would our family travel?') and the family's disco playlist for cleanup. They rule out karaoke, since Kendall would take over.

OTHER RELEVANT

• Break up the usual seating

Sawyer suggests ringing a bell every 15 minutes so everyone picks up their plate and moves seats. That way people talk to Uncle Bill instead of spending two hours with their favorite cousin.

• The phone basket

As host, bring out a basket and say you want everyone present, ask for phones for about three hours, and frame it as a request, not a punishment. Sawyer predicts adults, including Mel with her 'work calls,' will resist most.

• Do all the prep so guests just show up

Cut out the crown shapes and set out paint, markers and gems so guests don't have to lift a finger. Have playlists ready. Give people a fun question, like Mel's friend Maxine's dinner-party prompt about your first apartment, adapted so younger kids can answer too.