

Parental Burnout with Dr. Lisa Coyne

Lisa Coyne: [00:00:01] So one of the things I think that's really important is, if I could say one thing to, if there are parents listening is, be gentle with yourselves and know that you're doing all the things that you can do. You're doing the best you can, and it's enough. It's enough and kind of give yourself permission to just be as you are. No need to go beyond, above and beyond.

Debbie Sorensen: [00:00:27] That was Dr. Lisa Coyne on Psychologists Off the Clock.

Diana Hill: [00:00:40] We are four clinical psychologists here to bring you cutting edge and science-based ideas from psychology to help you flourish in your relationships work and health.

Debbie Sorensen: [00:00:47] I'm Dr. Debbie Sorensen, practicing in Mile high Denver, Colorado.

Diana Hill: [00:00:51] I'm Dr. Diana Hill practicing in seaside, Santa Barbara, California.

Yael Schonbrun: [00:00:55] From coast to coast. I'm Dr. Yael Schonbrun, a Boston-based clinical psychologist and assistant professor at Brown University.

Jill Stoddard: [00:01:01] And from sunny San Diego, I'm Dr. Jill Stoddard author of Be Mighty and The Big Book Of Act Metaphors.

Debbie Sorensen: [00:01:07] We hope you take what you learn here to build a rich and meaningful life.

Diana Hill: [00:01:11] Thank you for listening to Psychologists Off the Clock.

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Diana Hill: [00:01:42] we're also affiliates with Dr. Rick Hanson's online Neurodharma program and his Foundations of Wellbeing programs, you can find out more about them at our website offtheclockpsych.com where you'll get a \$40 discount

Debbie Sorensen: [00:01:56] This is Debbie. Yael and I are here to introduce an episode with Dr. Lisa Coyne on parental burnout. And we just noticed something, this introduction just takes a little bit of time to record, but even in these moments, we tried to sneak away to our computers. We both got pulled by our children, and I think it's.

It speaks to the unrelenting nature of the job of being a parent right now during the pandemic. And it's quite relevant to our conversation today.

Yael Schonbrun: [00:02:24] Absolutely. And before we go any further, I just wanted to mention that your interview Debbie was recorded before the current protest movement and in light of recent events.

It feels really important to name that systematic racism is a risk factor for parental burnout. For parents of color who've been experiencing, higher stress long before COVID-19 and all the challenges that we're encountering now.

Debbie Sorensen: [00:02:46] And are also disproportionately affected as a whole by the pandemic. And I think that's really important in terms of stress and burnout. Let's define burnout. The World Health Organization talks about burnout as an occupational phenomenon with three main components. The first is just exhaustion, right? So feeling utterly tired, you've got nothing left to give. The second is a feeling of cynicism or detachment from the role where normally you might care, you just feel a little bit. You know, checked out from it. Um, and also just feeling that you're not as effective in the role as you normally might be. And I think it, it, it is, it is an occupational phenomenon and I first experienced it in my professional role and became curious about it because I have many clients who have burnout.

Um, and I think it's also quite relevant to the role of parent as well.

Yael Schonbrun: [00:03:41] One of the studies that I think is just fascinating on the topic of burnout is the study that followed army reservist in Israel. And they followed individuals who were at all at the same company. Some were called into active duty.

And some were not called into active duty. And when they compare the two groups, they found that those that were called into active duty had reduced work burnout.

when you fully step away from a role that's demanding, even if you're stepping into another demanding role, like going to war. Or like going to attack, seeing job, you get a break from the role that you're stepping away from. And I think that's so relevant for now because we're full time parenting and we never get a break from parenting because our kids can never go anywhere.

And it really doesn't provide an opportunity to get a break from that role. And therefore, Really heightens the risk for burnout. And I'll make a comment that just yesterday, w I had told you that I've heard word that the final camp fit. I had my youngest going to, um, was canceled. All the others had already been canceled. And I just had this feeling of, you know, there's just no opportunity that I can see in the future to have a real break and to have my kids, you know, go somewhere and be engaged with some other provider. Um, and that, that is really, I think, a tax on parents right now.

I think

Debbie Sorensen: [00:05:00] that's such a great example. When in this conversation with Lisa Coyne, we talk about how right now the stress is so high. It's the perfect storm. And just having those little breaks built in whether it's school or childcare camps, they really help, I think for parenting just to have some time when you're not in that role.

And right now that's not as available. And so it becomes extra important to practice self care, self compassion, and some of the strategies that. That Lisa talks about in this episode. So all you parents out there who are feeling the burnout, hang in there, and we hope you find this helpful. we're happy to welcome our guests today. Dr Lisa Coyne to the podcast. Lisa, we're happy you're here.

Lisa Coyne: [00:05:44] delighted to be here. Thanks for inviting me.

Debbie Sorensen: [00:05:46] Among other accomplishments that you'll hear about soon. Lisa is the president elect, soon to be the president, of the Association of Contextual Behavioral Sciences, which is the organization for ACT and other contextual behavioral therapies, and we really want to make an announcement, for people who are in the field, about the ACBS conference this year, in July, July 16th through 19th it will be completely online this year. Which is exciting. I think it's a chance for people to get great workshops, panels, talks from the comfort of your own home. You don't even need to travel and it's affordable and some will even be recorded and available later, so you could do multiple sessions at the same time.

The problem was always that everything great is at once.

Lisa Coyne: [00:06:33] That's right.

Debbie Sorensen: [00:06:35] Lisa, do you want to say anything about the conference?

Lisa Coyne: [00:06:37] Yeah, I mean, we're really excited about it and one of the things that's been most exciting has been that we've had some feedback from our members, and ACBS is truly an international organization, and some of the feedback has been, hooray, this is the first time I'll be able to spend, I'll actually be able to attend the conference.

, um, one of the things that's really important to me as an incoming president is to really, um, I wish more people were not members of ACBS would come and visit us and maybe this is an opportunity for them also in common. If you're ACBSP curious, some cool stuff is going on and we love collaborating and it's all about the science, but it's about science part. It will be a lot of fun.

Debbie Sorensen: [00:07:25] Yes, there are some sad things about it, but I think it's never been easier to go to a conference. And here's another perk. That two cohosts of your favorite podcasts. We'll be presenting me and Jill, so we will be happy for you to join us if you come

, and you can register if you'd like to join the conference at contextualscience.org . and now I'm going to introduce Lisa. Lisa Coyne is founder and senior clinical consultant of the McLean OCD Institute for children and adolescents and assistant professor in the department of psychiatry at Harvard medical school.

She also founded and directs the new England center for OCD and anxiety, and she's the co author of several books, The Joy of Parenting with Amy Murrell, and that's a great one for parents who might be listening to today's episode, The Joy of Parenting.

She also has a book for clinicians called Acceptance and Commitment Therapy: The Clinician's Guide for Supporting Parents with ACT with. Koa Whittingham, it's a really helpful guide for clinicians like me who work with a lot of adults and who see a lot of parents in their practice and want to help them.

Um, and then her newest book just hot off the presses is called Stuff That's Loud: A Teen's Guide to Unspiraling when OCD Gets Noisy with Ben Sedley. And so, of course, the challenge interviewing Lisa is that she has so many. Talents and areas of expertise. You don't know where to begin. Um, today we're going to be

talking about parenting and. Parent, parental burnout and parenting during this difficult time. Lisa, you're a parent yourself, and as a clinician, you help parents navigate the challenges of parenting and you're developing a resource, um, a website, Nuture in Place, which has resources for parents navigating Covid 19. Can you tell us a little bit about that and what you're working on there?

Lisa Coyne: [00:09:21] the project basically is to help disseminate evidence based practices in the smallest, most portable, effective dis easily disseminable doses that we can, um, to families because we know that families are struggling right now for a variety of reasons.

Um, and so the website contains, um, a number of different things. One is resources for parents. It contains evidence based practices for parents for how do you, what do you do for your children? How do you manage behavior, how do you help them when they're anxious, all of those things. And then there's a piece, and this is the case I've been most heavily involved in about self care because it's really, really important.

And I think that a lot of parents, I know, I feel like this, you know. Since the world has really shifted on his access because of COVID, I think that parents or their families are feeling the burden of trying to fix it and trying to keep their kids safe and trying to figure out how to my parent, how do I homeschool?

How do I take care of everything? How do I work from home if I'm working from home, how do I, if I'm a first responder, if I work in health care, how do I go to work and then come home. And handle the fear of maybe, you know, contaminating the house or, or transmitting the virus to my family. And then there are parents, one in five kids, at least in the us, does not have enough eat.

There are 30 million people over 30 months. And so there's the stress of how do I make ends meet? And I'm feeling like things are so out of my control. So for all of these families, we see you and we really wanted to make a resource for you that would help. And so that website is not quite live yet. It should be probably by the time of this podcast.

So, um, hopefully we can link that

Debbie Sorensen: [00:11:21] Well, yeah, we'll link to it. And it's called nurture in place, so, so look for that, cause it's going to be a wonderful resource for anyone. And if you like what you hear today, you also have some free webinars, including one that you just did with Praxis on parental burnout during COVID-19 so yeah, we can link to a lot of your different workshops and resources. So we're going to shift gears and talk about this topic of parental burnout and how just exhausting all of this is and how difficult. But let's start with just generally talking about burnout and burnout more broadly because parental burnout is one form of burnout.

Can you tell us a little bit about burnout and where we might see it and what, what does that mean?

Lisa Coyne: [00:12:03] it is something that can happen when you feel like you are experiencing chronic. Um, and unremitting stress, that's beyond your capacity to handle it in an area that has meaning to you.

, and Deb you know more about this than me, but I think that most of the research about that, you know, the vast majority of it is about job burnout, right? . It was interesting because researchers that were involved in that research were

curious because they thought, you know, what about, can you have parent burnout?

Can parents get burned out? if you're in a situation and you are experiencing some sort of unremitting stress, right? If you're constantly feeling overwhelmed and you know, if it's an area of great meaning to you, then theoretically you could. And low and behold, they found that yes, parents actually can get burned out and it's slightly different and it's related to different things.

Then job

Debbie Sorensen: [00:13:05] I think that's really important though, that really any area that's meaningful to you. And that can be stressful over time. You can have that experience. Cause I think even though the most original research was done on professional burnout, what parent can't relate to the idea that you sometimes do get burnt out as a parent, especially if you're very involved with kids frequently and you don't get a lot of breaks, which is the case for many people right now.

Lisa Coyne: [00:13:34] well, one of the things that we've talked about too, in our webinar, um, Evelyn Gould and I is that, you know, with work, you get the vacations, you don't necessarily get the vacations when you're a parent. And you don't really get to go home from work. Your parents are raising your children home, right? , there's lots of factors that predict it. But if you have, um, you know, kids who are experiencing any sort of behavioral issues, emotional issues, developmental issues, you know, that adds to the, the burden. And it's also very hard to cause by your parents. These things are difficult to talk about because there's this guilt that shows up, aren't I supposed to be good at this?

And I supposed to, I was supposed to love this job, right? So how can I get burned out from it? And admitting that is something that I think is a challenge. So in one respect, I'm delighted that this research is being done because I feel like. It's going to normalize that experience and normalize that. Yes, it is really hard to be a parent.

And then this, especially now,

Debbie Sorensen: [00:14:51] Tell us a little bit more about that. How do you think coven is contributing to parental burnout?

Lisa Coyne: [00:14:59] personal experience

Debbie Sorensen: [00:15:01] Well, maybe. Sure.

Lisa Coyne: [00:15:03] both

Debbie Sorensen: [00:15:03] I mean, we, it, I'll actually tell the listeners, we are both joking when we first signed on that this is, we're not interested in this out of nowhere, right? I mean, I

Lisa Coyne: [00:15:13] Yeah. We're like,

Debbie Sorensen: [00:15:14] we can relate to the stress and trying to be a parent in the midst of this is, it's not just theoretical. Like we, we live it.

Lisa Coyne: [00:15:23] No, it's hard, and I think there are a lot of factors and then it's going to affect each of us differently. Although again, you're in this together. if we take a big sort of broader perspective, it is, there's no clear course, there's a lot of uncertainty here in what's happening with the pandemic in, we're looked like we're creatures because we like to categorize things and we'd like to plan things out and we like to have structure and you don't like

ambiguity.

Like it's really hard to. You know, to not have answers to when will the pandemic end and what should we be doing now? And because we've all been thrown into this, it's kind of like we just got catapulted onto another planet and we're not really sure how to survive there. It's, it's almost like that. One of the things that's associated with parent burnout is feeling like you need to do it all right, and that there's a manual somewhere that you should find. And if you just do those things, your kids are going to turn out okay, and you're going to be good at this. First of all, that didn't exist before COVID, but we were better at convincing ourselves. I think that maybe there were some rules and guidelines that can help, but with this, it's just, we're really in this new territory and I think, you know, most of us are feeling like we have to rise to the occasion and we have to be able to do all of the things that now we're being asked to do.

And I think the bottom line is that's just not realistic and it's okay to feel overwhelmed and it's okay to get tired. One of the things that shows up or that's associated with parent burnout, that's part of what we think of it. What it is, is exhaustion. Yeah. Feeling like you're just tuckered out all the time and it's really hard to show up and do the things that you need to do.

And have energy for yourself and energy for your kids to be emotionally present for them. And that's another characteristic of parental burnout, is feeling really fed up with the situation right. And also feeling emotionally distant and feeling kind of turned off or numbed out.

And feeling like you can't even remember when you were good at this. You don't recognize yourself as a parent in these moments when you might have in house. So it's a really tough situation, and I think that COVID just cranks up the volume on all of those stressors, you know, especially for families that are already struggling.

So that's really, really, it's really hard. It's important to make a space to just slow down and kind of acknowledge that, you know, we're all pretty good at powering through when we need to, but maybe that's not the thing that's needed here.

Maybe the things needed here is to slow down, take a moment, sort of take stock of where you are.

Debbie Sorensen: [00:18:30] Yeah, I mean it's, I think it's so true what you're saying that the stress is already high and then we're in this situation where the parenting role is sort of unrelenting, right? Like you might normally be able to take a break, send the kids off to school. Have a, even having a vacation together or something, and many of those things aren't available right now. And then there's that general stress of living in this world. It's the perfect storm for

Lisa Coyne: [00:18:58] It is. And then thinking about, you know, there are all of these new things you have to figure out like. How do I talk to my kids about COVID, how much is too much information, how much time should they be hearing about this on screens or should they not be? But how do I do that? And then you have different developmental issues with different aged kids.

Like how do I manage working from home with little tiny kids? And then what do I do with the teen, the surly teenagers who are like wanting to go out and see their

friends and maybe sneaking out. Or who are isolating in their rooms, gaming and doing things like that. And so it's a whole, it calls for a whole lot of creativity, flexibility.

And so, I could conjecture why feeling like you have to do things in a specific, perfect, rigid way wouldn't work and would feel so hard. Just recognizing that and getting flexible and honing in on like what are the really important things that are nonnegotiable, and letting everything else go.

Like everything else go that you can.

Debbie Sorensen: [00:20:09] Some of those, those pressures that you're putting on yourself that may not be entirely necessary. Yeah. What, and we'll talk in the episode here in a few minutes about some strategies like that, that can be helpful. Um, before we move into that, what are there other risk factors or problems associated with parental burnout?

You mentioned having high standards as one.

Lisa Coyne: [00:20:35] one. There's a number of others. Um, feeling like you don't have help is another feeling like your parenting skills, right? Cause it is, I mean, you know, it is hard. And like if, if you. If you're new to this or if you have kids who, you know, have some behavioral issues or things like that, you might not know, how do you, how do you handle that?

I mean, none of us really know how to do that a hundred percent of the time. So feeling like you might not have great skills. one of the things that's a predictor is how you handle your emotions, right? So if you feel like handling stress is really hard. I think that's something that's a big predictor.

if there's conflict, you know, that's another thing. If you feel like there's a lot of inconsistency across caregivers, um, and then there are all of the logistical things that, you know, just make it harder.

But yeah, those are the main things.

Debbie Sorensen: [00:21:32] Okay. Um, and I know you mentioned in, in your webinar that there are some problems associated with parental burnout, like sleep issues, potentially substance abuse, depression, couples conflict.

Lisa Coyne: [00:21:46] yeah, and the hardest of those is just kind of feeling so overwhelmed that you're feeling like opting out, and you might be thinking about. Ending things, and that is really, really hard. And it's so important to note that these, these things, right, that we're talking about that are associated with being burned out, they are not causally related.

What that means is that if you feel burned out, it does not necessarily 100% lead to those things. It means you're at risk, right? And so it's important to know the difference that just because things have occurred together doesn't mean that one thing causes. But I think it's important to listen to yourself and if you're feeling that way to reach out, you can get it from friends or from, from helpers and some other way if

Debbie Sorensen: [00:22:44] that would be a good time to reach out. And I think that's a good point too, that it doesn't always happen that way. Cause sometimes actually burn out. I think both professional and parental burnout are pretty specific to that role.

Lisa Coyne: [00:22:55] Right?

Debbie Sorensen: [00:22:55] May not be, may not be, um, these other things

may not be happening.

It might be that you're doing okay in general, you're just really, Sick of being a

Lisa Coyne: [00:23:04] parent

Debbie Sorensen: [00:23:04] parent for a while.

Lisa Coyne: [00:23:06] yeah, and I think it's also a really normal natural response to a really hard situation. So one of the things I think that's really important is, if I could say one thing to, if there are parents listening is, be gentle with yourselves and know that you're doing all the things that you can do. You're doing the best you can, and it's enough. It's enough and kind of give yourself permission to just be as you are. No need to go beyond, above and beyond.

Debbie Sorensen: [00:23:41] Yeah, and also, I mean, I think that's so validating too, that probably most parents feel this way from time to time and even

Lisa Coyne: [00:23:48] I know I did. I know I still do.

Debbie Sorensen: [00:23:51] Even just feeling this is, it's okay to feel this way sometime, right?

Lisa Coyne: [00:23:55] A hundred percent

Debbie Sorensen: [00:23:56] yeah, yeah.

Lisa Coyne: [00:23:57] telling this to one of my clients the other day, but I was saying that. You know, I remember when I was, this is years ago, Amy Murrell and I wrote The, the Joy of Parenting, you know, being in my little office upstairs on our second floor trying to write, you know, cause I was of course late and past deadline, all of that. And my kids who were probably like five and 10 downstairs where. Playing, and then ultimately they started, I don't know what they were doing, but they're screaming bloody murder at each other, and I'm sitting there and I was just, and I just lost my temper and I was like, "Will you be quiet, I'm trying to write a book on parenting!"

It's just so funny. I thought. Just the irony of that, like here I am trying to tell a lot of parents how to parents. Yeah. So that's true. So be gentle with yourselves. None of us are experts at this.

Debbie Sorensen: [00:24:51] we can actually move into strategies for helping parents. And one of the things that's so important is recognizing that we're not alone. And that shared humanity piece. And so hearing that you, a parenting true expert has moments like that.

Lisa Coyne: [00:25:07] You should ask my kids about that. They would tell a very different story.

Debbie Sorensen: [00:25:12] It's reassuring. It's reassuring to the rest of us. Um, tell us a little bit about that common humanity and why that's important.

Lisa Coyne: [00:25:20] you know, we've all. Lost our temper, we've all made mistakes. And this is at the heart of, um, you know, this, this idea of the things that we find are the hardest to accept about ourselves or the things that I'm most universal, right? All those perceived failings. And this is at the heart of self compassion. It's one of the components of some illness knowing that we're connected.

Not by the faces that we've put on and where I find the stuff that we don't talk about. And so making a space, no matter what evidence based, parent training techniques I'm teaching, I want to meet parents where they are and I want to

make a space where they can say the hard things and then it can be okay. And sometimes. Doing that for them opens up the space where they can begin to do that for their kids and each other. That's really.

Debbie Sorensen: [00:26:20] Maybe that's one of the most important things we can do with this conversation today is to just remind people that they're not alone with this. Even in those moments when it just feels super hard and maybe you lose your temper, or maybe you don't have your proudest moment. Um, but that we've all been there and that this is such a hard situation and you're not alone.

Lisa Coyne: [00:26:42] when you think about like what's, what's parenting all about? What's the goal of it? Like the stakes are so high. Like I remember coming home from the hospital with Josie, who's my first child, she's 20 now, so it's been a long time. And I remember thinking like. Actually, I remember going to my house and being like, wait, they're letting me alone with her.

Like, wait, wait, no, I don't know what I'm doing. Hold on. Wait. And there was this like abject terror of like, Oh God, I'm going to screw this up. And then you have, and you realize like you have this little person,

Debbie Sorensen: [00:27:16] Yeah.

Lisa Coyne: [00:27:16] right, that your heart and you think, Oh my gosh, I have to make sure. That they survive and are thrive, and how do I do that?

And when I'm just so flawed and me and like that's a huge tall order. That's a huge, tall order in our minds. Trick us into thinking that, you know, it's something that's impossible.

Debbie Sorensen: [00:27:41] I have to tell my own story, which was giving them the newborn baby a bath for the first time and just feeling so overwhelmed like there was no way I could possibly do this.

Lisa Coyne: [00:27:54] Do you remember that?

Debbie Sorensen: [00:27:56] I have no idea how to do. Yeah. I mean, that overwhelming feeling, that feeling of, I don't know what I'm doing and it, but it's, it's not just when they're newborn babies,

Lisa Coyne: [00:28:06] it

Debbie Sorensen: [00:28:07] persists.

Oh, no.

Lisa Coyne: [00:28:08] Oh no.

Debbie Sorensen: [00:28:09] Yeah.

Lisa Coyne: [00:28:10] And recognizing that that's behind a lot of the mistakes that we make and all of, you know, and if we parent based on like, Oh God, this could go wrong, you know, it's going to organize our behavior around our kids in all sorts of different ways. Right. And so acknowledging that that you're feeling that maybe the stakes are really high.

That is really scary and hard, makes it easier to carry it. It doesn't make it go away. It makes it easier to carry and maybe makes you more effective because it frees up your attention to focus on things that might be more helpful.

Debbie Sorensen: [00:28:48] Yeah. Well, let's, let's do a little bit more into compassion. Um, you mentioned that earlier, and I'd like to talk more, I think it's pretty central here. Why is it, why is it important for parents and how is it different from how we typically treat ourselves as parents.

Lisa Coyne: [00:29:07] Yeah. Well, so I don't know about you guys who are

listening, but like I know that when I feel like I'm not up to par, which happens a lot even more than you would think right. Um, my mind is very self critical and it's always been that way. It's just always, always, and that way. And it tells a lot of stories about if you don't do X perfectly, Oh, well then you are invisible or not worthy or not lovable or not interesting or whatever it is.

And I think that. You know, those kinds of our minds tend to be critical on purpose, right? They're trying to help us. They've evolved. You know, our languaging brain has evolved to be our threat detector. And so what it does is it tries to hem you in with all of these stories about like what you shouldn't do because it's risky what you did wrong.

So you can fix it and then be acceptable. Right? Cause that's one way of mitigating danger. but that can be a drag. After a while, and it can be really loud in situations of crime. Stress is this self compassion is about slowing down and noticing and witnessing all of these feelings and thoughts that you're having.

And sort of softening around them, making space for them and making space that you just want them and then noticing that you're not alone in feeling these things, that these are the kinds of things. And just being gentle with yourself and one of the things I think that's really helpful. Is when you notice that sort of very critical voice imagining, noticing, first of all, I'm going to say that.

And second of all, seeing if you can engage a kinder, wiser voice, you know, they can see your struggle and that can be gentle.

Debbie Sorensen: [00:31:15] So that's, that's the practice there is, is that what you would do to help parents. Who are self critical, foster self-compassion, that sort of noticing and gentleness.

Lisa Coyne: [00:31:29] Yeah. And I think it's really hard because we're not good at being nice to ourselves. Um, as my esteemed colleague, Laura, some church has, has written about so beautifully and many others who love her book, um, it's, it's really tough, right? Cause like when you think about, what do you mean? Be kind to myself, I don't deserve that.

I. Made all these mistakes today I yelled and I did all these things, right? And so it's a practice and it's not necessarily easy that first steps are slowing down and noticing and meeting yourself where you are and just, you know, a really tiny practice could be sort of just closing your eyes, taking a pause if you can, even for a few seconds and just checking in with yourself.

To just notice like we're here now and what does it mean? You can just give your moments of this into that and see if you can give yourself just some small act, whether it's housing when you're really busy day. Linger over your coffee, whether it's letting the laundry lay there without trying to put it away.

Just this meaning, whether it's spending a few moments, whether it's taking a walk, you know, getting your bodies in here, whatever that small thing is, shifting your posture. Never the same. Like if you're holding yourself attention and tightness, just noticing how am I holding myself. No. And just that slow, quick little pause.

Right? And noticing opens up for you to choose. Do you want to choose to be kind to choose to just shift yourself just until you get to your more comfortable.

And so that's kind of a tiny little practice that is, you can do at any time, wherever you are. And. Just making it something that can come back to you again can

make a difference.

Debbie Sorensen: [00:33:55] What I love about that tiny practices, that it's realistic to be able to do it. Even in this situation where maybe you don't have a break from your kids all day long and you can still take that pause. You could do it with the kids right there with you.

Lisa Coyne: [00:34:12] Exactly. You can totally do that. And yeah, there's lots of little tiny things that you can do and sometimes just doing that is enough to get me through. Um, another one that I'm thinking of is, it's not quite self compassion, but it is sort of really noticing so. If things are really hard and you're feeling overwhelmed and you're starting to see all of your family children as things you have to do in jail, take care of another to do on your very long to do this.

One of the things you can do is take these in positives and really, you know, think back and see if you can think about the time. When's the last time you made a good laugh? With your child, you know you just from sort of sweetness. There are joy you just share. It could be very simple. It's something very small and see if you can bring that forward into the moment that you're in.

Now you can see that little kid inside this big one that's causing trouble. And just pull back just and see what that does too. That's one that I find help us infuse as well and remembering that this is the moment in my life. It's a difficult moment and it too is. And I like this. Uh, some of these women similar themselves, they're all at our disposal.

We just slow down and kind of connect them, right? Our minds tend to focus on the hard things. There's no museum. We don't have guys who choose that we can kind of choose to bring forward something that's really hopeful or something that we might miss. Mom. You feel like is gone?

Debbie Sorensen: [00:36:26] That's a really nice shift from that to do mode that you get into when you're caregiving. Yeah. I love that. Um, maybe one more practice to quickly talk about is that that was in your webinar was about taking downtime together.

Lisa Coyne: [00:36:44] Well? Yeah,

Debbie Sorensen: [00:36:45] It's less, it's a less self-focused one, but I think that's even, that is hard in this day and age when we're just home so much. Um, maybe could you tell our listeners about that

Lisa Coyne: [00:36:57] Well, actually it's so funny cause you're asking about, and I'm thinking about all the failed attempts at like, there's the, what movie do you want to watch? And no one agrees. And in our family, we're all musical. Everybody plays an instrument, but nobody wants to play together right now or that like, or let's make dinner together.

But not that. And like so

Debbie Sorensen: [00:37:21] that interesting that your mind immediately thinks of the failures.

Lisa Coyne: [00:37:25] Exactly. That's exactly

Debbie Sorensen: [00:37:26] Yeah.

Lisa Coyne: [00:37:27] So I think that, you know, sometimes these things are organic and they just happen. And so one thing you can do is capitalize on the ones that are occurring and when they do happen, enjoy. Um. If you know, and

other things that you can do. Just fun things. It doesn't have to be anything serious.

It can be like snuggling on the couch and having a quiet moment and taking a walk can be like, can you help me with the dishes? And things like that. And one of the things that I think a lot about is, you know, there's things that. Not that it's linked so much of coven, but there's a literature on, you know, what are the things that families can do to reduce risk for kids?

Right. And one of the things that's really important is having good communication across family members. Having family mealtimes is actually like a really nice evidence-based thing. Even if it's brief sitting down, sharing a meal at the table. Really quick, instead of everybody like running off to their rooms.

I mean, aren't my kids get older at the stage? So they'd love that to go game and eat in the room. So, but if you're, you know, if you can, one common shared experience a day like around a meal is so, so helpful. And another thing that's really helpful is, you know, when kids feel like they have a role in the family.

That they're important to the work of the family. That the family is something that you share and that you co-create and that you build together. So it can be little things like, can one of you clear the dishes? Can you do this? And you know, if the kids don't love chores, what are the things that I encourage them to do is have what we call, you know, I think I got this from Kelly Wilson many years ago. Thank you. Kelly. Is. You know, a conversation with them. That's about the value and the moment, right? And what that means is talking to your kids about what are the things that are really important here and what's hard for you about this. So it might go something like, you know, I'm really, I'm really enjoying that you guys are all phone together with us.

And I'm also feeling a little disconnected. And then Ty, and I know you're probably okay, but I'm worried and that scares me. And what's important to me is that you don't know necessarily when it's get down, everything's weird. You guys don't get to go to school. There's some sports, there's nothing. And I feel that that's hard too. What if it's important to me that we can do something together and I need a little help running your house since we're all in it together. Could you, do you guys think we could talk together about something small that you could dream that could be more helping them? Um, you know, so just some sort of conversation that that's about what's the thing that's important.

I want us all to be together. I want us to have a good experience or whatever it is for you and your family. It's the value and then what's hard about it and just being really genuine and honest and having that conversation. Treating kids like they're just about to do the next right thing is another thing that can help with that.

You never know, right? Sometimes expecting kids to step up. Even if they have not housed for experiment. Seeing if you can create a window of involvement. Does that make sense?

Debbie Sorensen: [00:41:15] It does. It does, and I like that it supports, supports the parent or the child's emotional growth and also involves the parent just being really genuine. Are there strategies that you have for supporting kids' emotional growth? If they're struggling a lot with what's going on right now, how might you be helpful?

Maybe first we could talk about. Younger kids. And then, um, I also know there's

some special considerations with teenagers.

Lisa Coyne: [00:41:42] one of the things that's really important is it can be sort of a mismatch of what needs to happen in the family and what can happen, right? So like if you have parents who, let's say they're working at home and trying to manage a bunch of things. It might be super helpful if they vary, if the younger kids were more independent, you know, and could manage themselves.

And of course, that's not going to happen developmentally with a lot of kids who are young. Right? And so kind of recognizing that you're having sort of clash of cultures here or demands and that we've got to flex things. So, um, one thing that's, so there's that. The other thing is thinking about like, you know, I was reading something today about, um, and it wasn't entirely convinced on this data, right, that I read about, but it was a story about kids are struggling a lot more.

Do the coven. Maybe they are, and I'm not sure, but what I wonder is how can we as parents protect them and insulate them just a little bit. By the onslaught of news. And so for parents, one thing that I know is not a healthy check behavior, right? Is scrolling, scrolling, scrolling, and like just taking it.

There's so much information that's just so available all the time about all of the bad things that could happen on happening, et cetera. And so limiting kids access to that, and the same way you would if there was a natural disaster right. Is going to be very, very important, especially for younger children.

So limiting their access specifically to that stuff. Thinking carefully about how are we talking about this is important. Um, and then for little ones, I think, you know, making sure you're listening, just noticing, um. And just open to hearing what's going on. And sometimes little kids communicate distress, not by talking, but by behaving differently.

So looking for behavioral changes, disruptions in sleep tantrums, um, sort of lower thresholds for crying, frustration, fear, those kinds of things, right? And then giving them where you can, a structure and a routine, those things are comforting. Right. So sometimes our inclination might be, if we have a child that's upset, just giving them whatever they want to make sure that they feel loved in some way, that might not be such a good idea because kids actually signaled to, they need structure and they need the signal to us sometimes behavior that, you know, if I push, I need to know you're going to push back.

Are you there? Right? And so keeping in place routines like bedtime meal times, things like that, holding them accountable for little things. Like when we take out all our toys, when we put them back, you know, and mommy can help you, but you're gonna, you know, I'm going to expect you to help me too. And think about one thing that's unhelpful, right, is dealing with.

Increased distress or behavioral issues that might show up in the, in this time even more. Everyone's having that stress with punishment, angle scolding, and the freshness. That does not help. What it does do is, you know. Increases the stress for pretty much everybody in your family. So one useful thing to think about is what do you want to grow, right?

Think about what sorts of things do you want to see? What do you want to nurture in your family instead of what do you want to cut down? Um, in my colleague in Australia there, and carne said this beautifully, you know, he said, sometimes we get, when we get really coercive and we start to yell and Hunnish.

You know, all that's about it is like, it's like chopping down the tree. I don't like this. I'm going to chop it down. But that doesn't ever teach anything to grow. And so just a small shift in how you're thinking about what do I want to see more of in my family? That's what we want to nurture, pay attention to and call out.

And you notice that, really let the little kids know your seat.

Debbie Sorensen: [00:46:14] I love that it's positive reinforcement and also it's, it's not trying to shut down their emotions in that kind of harsh, punitive

Lisa Coyne: [00:46:24] Absolutely

Debbie Sorensen: [00:46:24] which is usually not helpful.

Lisa Coyne: [00:46:26] No, it's not an actually I should say something about that too. it doesn't matter what age your kids are, but when kids are coming to you in distress, the very first and most important thing to do is to say. Wow. That seems really hard.

Or I see that you're anxious. Wow. You sound really mad. Very first things to empathize, no matter what else happens next, it's really important that kids feel, felt, and seen, or, um, then the next step might be something different, right? But the very first step is to really kind of empathize and acknowledge, wow, this looks really hard.

I can hear the anger in your voice. Yeah. And then we can take it from there.

What happens next?

Debbie Sorensen: [00:47:10] Now what about teenagers? Cause there's some specific concerns about them

Lisa Coyne: [00:47:14] I have one of those right now.

Debbie Sorensen: [00:47:16] So you know, you know personally quite well.

Lisa Coyne: [00:47:19] It's really funny. Yeah. Um, pick your battles. It's fun. And there's a couple of things that are important and you know, everyone's teams are going to be different and then they're going to have different struggles. Um, however. Keep in mind, what I would say to parents is, keep in mind that this is the age where kids are becoming more independent and autonomous.

They are finding their own way, and some of the things that we perceive as rebellions, right or disrespect, are really simply behaviors that these kids are evolutionarily designed to do at this age when they are trying on, you know.

Different ways of being in the world. They're discovering who they are.

They're discovering how things work, right? And so the other thing is, at this age, they, it's really weird to be cooped up with their parents 24 seven my goodness.

Right? For most of them, I mean, and even if they are. You know, cooped up with you anyway. Like I work with a lot of kids who were home bound in the OCD community.

Here are kids who are experiencing extreme anxiety. Sometimes those kids really want their spaces that are just theirs as well. And so if your kids are spending a ton of time in their rooms, that's not necessarily a danger signal. It could be, but it's probably, in part, they just want their privacy, you know?

And so what I would say to that is treat it with respect, right? Treat it like, um, you know, this is their Haven knock, you know, in the same way that you would with a roommate. I think about it like that. That's helpful. Um, and still hold them accountable for things, but for sure, give them their space. Right.

And kind of be respectful. If I could say anything else like you, they won't

necessarily want to connect every, every minute either. So. Being communicating that you're available and that you're there and that you're just in a close orbit, but that you're being mindful of their boundaries. I think that's really helpful.

Um, so that's another one. Don't take things personally is really, really important piece of it too, because if they are struggling, it's probably not related to something that you did and it's probably not necessarily something yet. You know, you yourself can fix for them. But again, just emphasizing the things that are hard and letting you know if they lose their temper with you, if they're crotchety or whatever.

Holding that a little bit lightly, I think. Um, rather than maybe being demanding and directive and asking for respect, just give them some space to, none of us are perfect and they are. You know, and it's probably important to mention that, like when the kids are in adolescents, they're experiencing massive brain changes, right.

You know, and to, to kind of describe the simply sort of their ability to plan and inhibit their behavior and kind of manage themselves is relatively less. Loud relative to the emotion center of their brain, which is just starting to pop. And you know, they are, it's almost like when they were little kids and they would just, you know, have really big emotions all the time.

They're kind of back there really only they're in great big bodies now. And so they're not always, um, skilled. At regulating. And that's important to know. It's a skill stuff. I said, it's not necessarily something that you as a parent should take personally. So making a space for that as well. Um, and I think those are probably the main things I would suggest get good at. Get good at gaming. Now, Oh, one other thing too, like, so there's the gaming issue, right? So for some kids, they will get addicted and that's a really terrible thing. On the other hand, at this point. Just like the adults are all zooming in, doing our own thing. That's how they're connecting with their friends.

And so it's important to set meaningful limits, right? Like if they're gonna be up and flip their sleep schedule, so they're up all night gaming and sleeping during the day, that's not a very helpful idea right now. It's going to be hard to transition cycle back when it's time to actually start moving out into the world again. But at the same time. This is probably how they're connecting with friends and you know, a lot of teens will describe, like, it serves different functions for different teams. Right? For some, they describe it as a level of where if they feel like maybe they're not so socially successful, or they feel a little on the outs, this is a place where they feel equal to everyone because, you know, it's just the differences are somehow erased in that way.

So talking with them about it. Um, and having conversations about like, what's helpful, what's not helpful, and then keeping meaningful limits, especially around things like bed times, you know, and if it's interfering with school work that needs to get done and stuff like that, that might be something to look that

Debbie Sorensen: [00:52:34] That's helpful. Actually, I, it just occurred to me for those who do have teenagers and want more, we had our dear Louise Hayes on the podcast a while back, and she just talked about she has some normalized all the stuff that

Lisa Coyne: [00:52:47] Oh my God. Yeah.

Debbie Sorensen: [00:52:48] wanting to separate from their parents that is wired in because that's their job and just those emotional ups and downs and how is a parent just being there to support and love them through all this. Is necessary, so you could check that out if you want

Lisa Coyne: [00:53:02] Yeah. I could not recommend more. Yeah, she's great. And I agree with her too, and it's like this, you know. While they are developing too, and it's a developmental shift for kids into adolescents. It's also a developmental shift in parenting where you go from, and it's, this is on purpose, and I think some of us get stuck here, right?

Where the things that you used to do before when your kids were younger are no longer helpful, like being directive, like, you know, kind of. It's more about shifting into this more collaborative, supportive role where you're watching them unfold and if you need to, you're letting them fall down when they need to fall down because natural consequences really are very good teachers for a lot of kids. Um, but that can be hard, especially with those of us are feeling more helicopters. Like we have to curate everything so that they're safe all the time. There's a great story in the Atlantic about that. Um, you know, about anxiety in kids

Debbie Sorensen: [00:54:11] Oh, I saw that. We'll link to that too. I mean, that's a great article. Yeah.

Lisa Coyne: [00:54:14] Yeah. And like, I mean, I work with anxious kids all the time, and one of the things that we teach is, you know, anxiety can actually knock kids off that developmental trajectory.

Right. Because instead of going out and exploring world robustly, they're working on managing fears and that so hard for parents because like of course you feel like you should protect your child. You should, it's not okay for them to be anxious or you're going to do everything that you can to make them not anxious.

But. That just sort of strengthens the walls around them, prevents them from going out into the world and really discovering their own skills. And they have a lot of skills. So just nascent, they're just developing. And so it's more about like nurturing, providing opportunities for them to take mindful risks, right. And moving out into the world. So.

Debbie Sorensen: [00:55:08] The name of the game with all of this, with, with dealing with this crisis and changing how you pair it, it's, it's flexibility. I think that this is a time when we have to do our best and we have to roll with the punches and we have to be adapting. I mean. hard, but that's, that's kind of where it, we've got to do one last little

Lisa Coyne: [00:55:32] But let me say one thing about that. It is really hard. And something to remember is that we were built to do this, but we evolve, right? We were built to be good noticers of our context, and we are good problem solvers, right? So we have all of the capacities that we need. It's just that we need to step back from sort of.

Hanging on to, Oh God, how do I parent? Just the way I was doing pre-COVID. Now that's the part we need to jettison, and then we need to kind of step back into that sort of space where we're noticing and innovating, figuring out what does work. We can hack it and really can, it's just gonna take that kind of. Mindfulness about like, all right, let me let go of my idea of what the perfect day

or the perfect parenting piece is, and let me see what actually work and focus on that.

Debbie Sorensen: [00:56:36] Yes, absolutely. Because you can't just be stuck in, while I wish it wasn't like this, because that gets you nowhere, right?

Lisa Coyne: [00:56:42] And for the record, I do wish it wasn't like this too, so I'm with you. Got it.

Debbie Sorensen: [00:56:47] Oh, yes. I wish so too. And, and yes, we must move forward. Yeah. Well, let's, let's do, let's end with this values and perspective taking exercise that you have, which I think is a wonderful.

Lisa Coyne: [00:57:03] So one way to think about this, you know, I think that it's really hard to. Remember. Um, now when you get stuck in thinking about like all the things that are really hard about this and all the possible dangers, the things that we've lost for some of us who we've lost people, and I do know there are many of us out there that have experienced that.

And for all of the fears that, you know, the uncertainty, the future, it's hard to remember to step back from that. One thing that people might do is to step back and think about, you know, 10 years from now when your kids are 10 years older, and you're 10 years older. Imagine like sitting down at a picnic table somewhere, you know, at the edge of field and summer and having a conversation about the pandemic, and do you remember what it was like.

We were all cooked at together in the house. How do you want your kids to remember that? What would you want them to remember about you? What are the most important things? And so I would say do that little imagination exercise and just. Let kind of show up. Maybe do it right before you go to bed and just imagine, what would you want them to say?

What would you want them to remember if you could give them a gift, something that they could keep grabbing from this time, that was good. What would you want that to be about you? About how you were to give that some thought and then. See, we can carry that idea with you, you know, over the coming days and see what happens. See what happens about how you are, how the values and how your kids are reacting. And just explore. Try that and see what happens.

Debbie Sorensen: [00:59:18] I think that's great. I think when you're feeling burnt out, it can be. Really hard to connect with those values, and so I hope that's, I think that's really powerful. I, I hope that's helpful to others as it is to me. Well, Lisa, thank you so much for joining us today and for sharing your wisdom with parents who are struggling everywhere and, and with people who are wanting to help parents.

Um, I think we're all in this together and your, your wisdom is really valuable. I really appreciate it.

Lisa Coyne: [00:59:53] and so it was a total pleasure. And you know, just thanks for having me on, I hope this was useful.

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