

Alice Kearney Resilience

Alice Kearney: [00:00:00]

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Behave in a resilient way. And then finally you want to reinforce it. You want to make it a habit. , and the more adults around you are saying, wow, , you're so resilient and reinforcing the new skills and new behaviors and all those kinds of things, the new mindset. Then, then you're going to get a resilient person, kid.

Jill Stoddard: That was Alice Kearney on psychologists off the clock.

Diana Hill: We [00:01:00] 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: I'm Dr. Debbie Sorensn practicing in mile high Denver, Colorado, and coauthor of ACT Daily Journal

Diana Hill: I'm Dr. Diana Hill coauthor with Debbie on ACT Daily Journal, and practicing in seaside Santa Barbara, California.

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

Jill Stoddard: And from sunny San Diego, I'm Dr. Jill Stoddard author of Be Mighty and The Big Book of ACT Metaphors.

Debbie Sorensen: We hope you take what you learn here to build a rich and meaningful life.

Diana Hill: Thank you for listening to Psychologists Off the Clock!

I am here with Katy Rothfelder there, who is our dissemination coordinator, and we thought we'd bring her on because we talk a lot about Praxis, how Praxis

sponsors this podcast they've, offer online, continuing education for professionals, everything from DBT to act training to compassion focused therapy and Katy's had some personal experience with practice that I think would be helpful for you to all learn.

Katy Rothfelder: Yeah Diana. And I started out with Steven Hayes act immersion program, and that was really my first chance to get, you know, really in the act. And then since then I've had these kind of on-demand course opportunities., the one that really sticks out to me is Lou Lasprugato's feedback, enhanced act course, which was this. Beautiful mix of instruction for really difficult act concepts. And then in-depth learning with practice. that grew my muscles as a brand new clinician.

Diana Hill: So, so if you are interested in taking a Praxis course, go ahead and go to our website off the clock, psych.com and we have a discount code for you for some of the live courses, check them out. Praxis, continuing education.

Jill Stoddard: Hey everybody. I'm here with Debbie to introduce this episode today with Alice Kearney, who specializes in teaching kids about [00:03:00] resilience and how to be more resilient. And I wanted to do this episode now, I think it's particularly timely because. We know everybody's struggling a little bit more with the pandemic, but kids in teens seem to really be having a hard time.

And Debbie, you even sent me an article from the LA times yesterday about a surgeon General's warning related to the struggle kids are having.

Debbie Sorensen: Yeah, it was really interesting timing because I had been listening to your episode. Throughout the day as I was driving around town. And I saw this article in the news that the surgeon general just released a public advisory about young people and mental health. And I took a quick look at it and it's just basically about how a number of mental health conditions have really been on the rise.

In, in recent years and that people are struggling and also that, , you know, it's very tough, I think right now to find enough mental health [00:04:00] services to help people. And so it's a, it's a really difficult situation, I think right now, because so many are struggling and it's hard to find the right service.

Jill Stoddard: Yeah. I was particularly blown away by the statistic that I want to say. It was the rate of young girls, , attempting suicide had increased like 50%. Does that, does that sound right? Is that your memory of

Debbie Sorensen: something like that?

Jill Stoddard: It was really dramatic.

Debbie Sorensen: statistic.

Jill Stoddard: It was

Debbie Sorensen: been on the rise.

Jill Stoddard: It's been on the rise, anxiety, depression, you know, suicide attempts.

And, , , the surgeon general also did it w it was a cute and funny TikTok. But with Dr. Glaucomflecken, who's a, I think, I don't know how you say it, but, um, TikTok and on Twitter. And he does these very funny, you know, kind of light videos about the healthcare system.

, and he's a ophthalmologist and he actually got the surgeon general to do one with him. And it was a video about burnout and how,[00:05:00] , healthcare providers are really experiencing a lot of burnout. And it made me think of this episode and the article you sent me because we have, you know, kids who are in much greater need of mental health services at the same time we're having.

Mental health providers experiencing probably unprecedented rates of burnout. You know, everyone, I know for the most part, their cases are full. They're not, you know, their wait lists are long. , so as you're saying, it's, it's even harder, like there's a higher need and maybe more limited resources or there's, you know, a lack of ability to meet that need.

And so what I love about this episode is Alice is basically giving us a way that we can help teach our kids. Whether it's parents teaching them at home or whether it's teachers teaching them at school, , you know, these really basic skills that can make such a world of difference.

Debbie Sorensen: I think that's part of the mission of us on this podcast is to help people with some of these [00:06:00] skills to learn some skills, some tools

so that we can all work on them together. Right. And it's not, you know, this podcast isn't meant to be a substitute for mental health treatment.

That's not what we're saying. I think it is the case that if we all work on these skills and teach them to kids and teach them to teenagers and work on them ourselves, that it can help. And especially it can help. I think if someone is maybe going through a stressful time and struggling a little bit, they can get some support and some skills in place, hoping that it will prevent things from getting to the place where they're, you know, really in a real crisis.

And so I think that this episode really fits with that mission of.

Jill Stoddard: Yeah. And whether it's, while someone is on a waiting list, waiting for therapy, or maybe they don't need therapy, but they're still doing these things at home to prevent the need from therapy down the road, or maybe it's even in between therapy sessions. So, you know, when we're taught, most people go to therapy, maybe 45 minutes.

Once a week and then they have all the rest of the time that, you [00:07:00] know, they still need to be managing their struggles in the best way that they can. And I think these skills are, you know, a really appropriate way to be practicing in between sessions.

Debbie Sorensen: Yeah. And I was just reading something about how some of the emotional intelligence skills, right? Like understanding your own emotions and knowing how to manage them effectively really is a lifelong skill that serves us well in so many different ways. Research about this. And I think that is the skill that we're really getting at here, right?

Like, no one, this is not about being happy all the time. That's not going to be the case for anyone. Life can be hard, but what do you do? How do you navigate that?

Jill Stoddard: Absolutely. Or as Alice says, how do you bounce? All right, everybody. Well, enjoy this episode with Alice Kearney.

Hey everybody. It's Jill here and I'm really excited to have our guests today. Alice Kearney, who is going to talk to us about how to build resilience in kids.

Alice has over 25 years of [00:08:00] experience as a licensed therapist, she has worked in clinics, schools and hospitals. About 15 years ago, she opened a

full-time private practice outside of Boston at hope floats healing and wellness center.

She is both a licensed mental health counselor and registered art therapist. She works with people from about five to 75 years old. She has positive strengths-based and often uses art in the creative process to help her clients gain insight. And. Concerned about children's and families rising mental health needs.

Alice created the bounce box of fun educational and therapeutic kit that raises resiliency in children. You can check it out online@bounce-box.com.

Alice. Welcome. thank you so much for being here.

Alice Kearney: Thank you so much for having me. I'm so excited to be here. I'm a huge fan so it's

Jill Stoddard: Oh, good. Good.

I'm really excited to talk about your bounce box, but before we get to that, let's just talk a little bit about. Resiliency in general. I think this is One of those [00:09:00] words that has become kind of like a, almost like a buzzword in pop culture lately. And so I'm curious, like how would you define resilience for our listeners?

Alice Kearney: One of my favorite expressions, which to me sort of offers the essence of resiliency is we all fall down. It's how we bounce the counts. So I feel like that saying really. Talks about how knowing that we all fall down, which is one of the first steps of being resilient. It's sort of knowing that bad things are going to happen.

And then being able to ride that wave and being able to bounce back from it.

That's the definition. I work a lot with kids, so sayings since sort of simple using the word bounce, instead of resiliency can be helpful to, to, to create a mental image.

Jill Stoddard: Absolutely. And even for adults, I mean, , if you listen to psychologists up the block, you know, that the co-hosts all practice a therapy called acceptance and commitment therapy, and it there's a, , heavy usage of

[00:10:00] metaphors and experiential exercises. And, , you know, bouncing is basically.

A metaphor and you have a physical metaphor in your bounce box that we'll talk about. And I think, you know, there's a lot of lingo out there in the mental health world and the more simple we can make it for everyone that the more accessible it becomes. So I love that. And you just said, what I think is interesting that had never occurred to me before is like the first part of resilience is knowing that life is hard.

I might've paraphrased you there. I'm not sure if that's exactly what you said.

But I, I mean, I think that's so important because sometimes you have people who wrongfully think life is supposed to just be happy and easy all the time. , so that maybe they're like knocked down even harder when their expectations don't meet reality.

And I think you're saying part of resilience is knowing from the get go. Life is going to be hard. It's not about whether you get knocked down. It's about what you do, how you bounce after you get knocked down.

Alice Kearney: Yes, absolutely. I think that's so true.[00:11:00]

Jill Stoddard: I love that. I love that. Is there, this is sort of an odd question, but I was thinking about it and couldn't come up with my own answer. So I thought I'll ask the expert and see, is there a word that would be the opposite of resilience? Like if we're not being resilient, what are.

Alice Kearney: so I guess I'm going to do it by thinking. So I'm thinking about being clearheaded, being, thinking what resiliency sorta means, being flexible. , Sort of having a positive mindset. So I guess the opposite is that when you fall down feeling inflexible, feeling stuck, feeling heavy, , those are a negative, those are sort of a, a mindset that doesn't help you to bounce.

Those are words that sort of come to mind what I think of the opposite.

Jill Stoddard: yeah, so there's not like a true antonym for resilience. We have this one word that means a lot of different things. Resilience. There's no real antonym to resilience, but there are these qualities [00:12:00] that would sort of depict a lack of resilience.

Alice Kearney: I guess when I think about it too, I think resiliency or resilience looks so different and everyone, like what resilience means to you versus what it means to me is so different because.

Jill Stoddard: what way do you think, because it's like context or situation dependent or person dependent,

Alice Kearney: Yeah, I think all those things sort of what makes me fall down and struggle to get back up. What just looks so different from possibly what your experiences.

Jill Stoddard: What triggers us is going to be different based on our individual learning history is our cultural background, those kinds of things. So what. Is more impactful for one person may be differently impactful for another, but recognizing that we are impacted and then being able to bounce from that point forward is resilience. yeah., what got you interested in [00:13:00] resilience specifically?

Alice Kearney: Well, so I've worked with kids and families, , and adults for, for almost 25 years. And particularly in kids, the depression and anxiety has gotten. So, , Just the, the rates are alarming. It's just gotten so severe and overwhelming. And I really want to kids to know that they're mentally strong. I wanted them.

I kept trying to think, how do you help kids through this? And in a way, I guess I think of resilience as something that does bridge because you, it is a mindset of, , being able to manage your worries. It sort of can be connected to anxiety, but also to. And feeling down and stuck and overwhelmed. Those are sort of, , characteristics of both what, , and a lot of what I see kids struggling with today.

So I thought focusing on [00:14:00] resiliency and skills around building resiliency would be helpful.

Jill Stoddard: Well, absolutely. I mean, and, and you started this well before COVID, but like never, has there been a time where that's been more true than right now? I mean, the rates of anxiety and depression were already going through the roof, you know, increasing at a steady rate or COVID, and now it's just been. Amplified and kind of going back to that definition, like none of us had any control over a global pandemic and shut downs and distance learning, you know, hard things happen, how we're able to come back from those things

and being mental health providers who can actually teach skills to get people back on their feet is so critically important.

Alice Kearney: it's so it's so important. Yeah. And I think parents struggle. They want to teach their kids mental health skills, but often they don't know how. So I think parents today, they say mental health is ABCs. It's one, two threes. We get it. It's so [00:15:00] important, but I don't know how to teach it.

Jill Stoddard: Yeah,

so true. I wish they did more of this in school. And I don't see kids in my therapy practice. I only ever see adults, but I can't tell you how many adult clients have said to me. Why didn't they teach this to me in school. If someone had taught this to me in elementary school, I wouldn't need to be here right now.

Alice Kearney: Yeah. Yeah, I think it's true. I actually think schools are really, really trying to do, integrate that now at starting at much younger ages and they're working really hard. And unfortunately, with COVID now it's doubled. They're scurrying to get so many more counselors into schools because just getting kids settled down to learn is a huge challenge.

I mean, kids haven't been in school, they've had so many different challenges, so they're, they're really struggling in a lot of ways, , to even begin the academic part. So

Jill Stoddard: yeah.

Yeah, For sure. I've noticed. I mean, and maybe it depends teacher to teacher school system to [00:16:00] school system. We've been very lucky with our. our school. And, , my daughter has a standing therapy appointment every week and we were scrambling to, you know, like I'm working. So to get them home from their aftercare program and get the homework done and get dinner and then drive half an hour to therapy and drive half an hour back.

And there was one night where my daughter didn't get her homework done. And I normally am not a person who like reaches out to teachers and things like that. But in this case, I just wanted her to know it wasn't Scarlet's fault. It was me picking them up late into it. Anyway, long story short, she said, You know, therapy is so important and these kids should not feel pressured and stressed.

So how about from now on, on Tuesdays when she has therapy, she just doesn't have homework that night.

Alice Kearney: Wow.

Jill Stoddard: Right. And I'm like getting choked up right now. Just sharing that with you. And I was choked up at the time and it was like, oh my God, like this teacher, oh, I'm totally getting choked up. Like she really gets it, you know, to have a teacher [00:17:00] that isn't solely focused on academics sees that these kids are struggling and supports the efforts to do what it takes to get them back on track.

It just meant the world to me. And so then there's almost like a whole team that can be involved in kids being resilient and learning how to be resilient.

Alice Kearney: Absolutely. Yeah. And I think if grownups are on the same page around that, to your point, it makes you feel so connected. And, , all, we all have the same values around this

Jill Stoddard: Yes and optimistic. and I know when I shared that with Scarlet, I could see her light up, you know, that like, oh my gosh, like my parents, my, you know, my therapist helping me, my parents are the ones who got me, this therapist. And even my teacher understands that this is important. Like I've got all of these people here to try to help me like bolster, you know what what's going on.

And.

Alice Kearney: And it also, I mean, it makes me choked up too, because it speaks to how far we've come. I mean, there used to be such a stigma and the [00:18:00] fact that your teacher and your parents and everyone says, oh, that's so important. There's, it's just, it's amazing.

Jill Stoddard: I T I totally agree. I

Alice Kearney: We're heading in such a good direction in that way.

And I do think that mental health used to really take a back seat. And now it's such a front seat.

Jill Stoddard: Yeah. Yes, I totally agree. And, and in some ways it probably, you know, took the pandemic and really seeing what, you know, how much trouble people people are in. Unfortunately, a lot of times I think it takes that to get us, to get us going, but, but I think, you're going to be more successful at learning resilience skills. The more people you have behind you, either actively being part of that teaching process, like a therapist or parent-teacher, or at least supporting you in doing that. So one of the things I want to talk about as I think sometimes you hear this word resilient, talked about resilience, talked about as if it's something people have, where they don't have like, oh, you are so resilient.[00:19:00] , whereas you know, what, what you are all about is that you can teach anyone how to be resilient. So you're saying like this isn't equality, these are skills like you can resilience skills to anybody.

Alice Kearney: Yup.

Jill Stoddard: So tell us a little bit about that. How do we teach kids to be more resilient?

Alice Kearney: I think it's almost like how you would teach anyone, anything. I think you do, you educate around the main concepts, then you break it down into smaller skills, , and make it personal to what we were talking about earlier. What exactly do you need to do to recognized your strong mind, , and feel resilient?

Behave in a resilient way. And then finally you want to reinforce it. You want to make it a habit. , and the more adults around you are saying, wow, that's, you're so resilient and reinforcing the new skills and new behaviors and all those kinds of things, the new mindset. Then, then you're going to get a [00:20:00] resilient person, kid.

Jill Stoddard: Right, right. Okay. So we, so, so that's great. That outlines like the process. And so what are some of the skills, like when you are trying to teach kids about resilience? Like, what are some of the specific skills. That you're teaching kids are teaching parents to teach kids.

Alice Kearney: Yeah. , so I think the first one of course is to calm down. Is because kids get flooded. I always like the word flooded for, , you just get overwhelmed and how to float, how to figure out I got this. I'm okay. So that's usually the first step in teaching resiliency, , is being able to sort of regulate

your own temperature and say, well, I gotta, I gotta, you know, take the heat down.

I got a cool-down right now. , so that's really the first step that's superimposed.

And

Jill Stoddard: that's true for adults too, right? Like, you know, in, in like complicated grown-up language, sometimes you hear [00:21:00] someone say like, oh, it's like the amygdala hijack, but really. You know, when that, when that like primitive intense emotion center takes over, it's difficult to be able to think rationally, you know, like to, to engage your executive functioning, your frontal lobe.

And so to be able to like, get that back on track, to soothe the nervous system so that you can get that back on track, , you know, an act we try to. Make it a point not to send the message like, oh, we have to teach you how to relax because anxiety is bad and it's dangerous and you don't want to feel anxiety.

Right. Because if you're anxious about anxiety, then you're anxious. So it's this like weird paradox. And yet to be able to self-soothe so that you're in a place that you can actually enact coping skills, you know, especially for kids I think is, is really important. So what kinds of. Strategies do you like to use, to teach kids to calm down

Alice Kearney: So that is so tricky. [00:22:00] I particularly think for parents to help kids to calm down. I think everyone, to your point, you can't say you need to calm down or chill out. I mean, that

Jill Stoddard: that doesn't work?

Alice Kearney: No, um,

Jill Stoddard: Just relax. Oh, all right. Thanks. Why didn't I think of that.

Alice Kearney: Yeah. And I think also a parent, even just talking to a kid can make them feel more out of control. Like don't tell me what to do, you know, it's so, so it really is the most tender, sensitive, tricky thing I often use. , I make lavender bubbles, and I have a really simple wand. Sometimes I teach kids how to calm down and take some deep breaths that way I have.

Lavender said to the stuffed animals. I often recommend that parents just like put in a th they're on my website or whatever, which, but, you know, you put them in the microwave and their soup, like a stuffy that's super toasty, warm that you just, you seem upset handed leaf, you know, sorta just label it, give a little space and come back and [00:23:00] maybe a few words.

Jill Stoddard: And probably teaching kids the skills when they're coming. So that when they're feeling like they can go get their lavender stuffy on their own, or they're laughing or bubbles wet because they've already learned, this is. what I need to do the next time I'm feeling activated, stressed, worried, whatever the case may be, might be more successful than like trying to intervene when they're at the height of panic.

Alice Kearney: absolutely. Yeah. I always say catch it early, catch it early. If you see just the seeds of anxiety or worry, you know, whatever it is, stress. , to help at that time, because an ounce of prevention's worth, you know, if you could get in there early, it can really make a big difference much more quickly.

Jill Stoddard: My daughter learned. And I, this is probably a very well known thing among kit therapists, but it was new to me, which is finger breathing and she taught it to my son and me. And we've both been using it since then. So for people who don't know, I mean, I'm doing this on video. You can't see. You trace your fingers.

So [00:24:00] you go up your thumb and breathe in and then down your thumb and breathe out and up your pointer, finger and breathe in and down your pointer, finger and breathe out and do that for all your fingers and back again. And it gives you something to focus on. While breathing and I sometimes will be laying in bed and I'll just picture in my mind, going up and down my fingers without even moving my body.

And it's been really helpful. And my son will say, it's great to say hi. I had trouble sleeping last night. So I just did my finger breathing.

Alice Kearney: And some kids call it a rollercoaster breathing, which is really cute because you picture like a little car going up the roller coaster then down. But yeah, that's a

Jill Stoddard: That's very cute. Well, and that's a good point. I think, you know, you can modify these strategies for different developmental stages, you know, like a 15 year old might think roller coaster breathing is dumb unless they love

roller coasters, but a five-year-old might think that's super cool or maybe [00:25:00] they're terrified.

And they don't like that. But you know, that's where that tailoring comes in, depending on who it is that you're seeing.

Alice Kearney: Yes. Yeah. It really is sort of individual, skills. You have to tweak it to make it fit that person. Of course. Yeah.

Jill Stoddard: Yeah.

And I always like to say, like, there's a lot of right ways to do things and that parents should trust that they know their kids pro you know, know their kids probably better than the therapist even, or, or teacher. And if you, you know, try everything out, if something suggested to you, but at the end of the day, you know, you'll you'll know what's a good, good fit.

For them and to trust that.

Alice Kearney: absolutely. Yeah. I think that's a great thing to tell parents.

Jill Stoddard: Yeah.

Alice Kearney: Yeah.

Jill Stoddard: So, okay. So, so first we want awareness. I think you said was kind of the first, the first piece. Then we want to calm down and get to a place where you can even be able to practice other skills. What, what else would be some [00:26:00] resilience building skills?

Alice Kearney: I think to be aware of your thinking, , so that you can recognize. To our point around when you feel overwhelmed, sometimes you have sort of distorted thinking. So, , you might be overly negative. Like this is the worst day ever. I'm so stupid. , that kind of stuff, or, , this is never going to work.

There's just lots of ways that our thinking starts heading in a bad direction. , And so you want to keep that in check so you can sort of have the, , okay. I got this, , attitudes. So that's a part of thinking in mindset. That's sort of the next important step and learning to be resilient.

Jill Stoddard: And we talk a lot on the podcast. I should say our guests talk a lot on the podcast about Carol Dweck's work and growth mindset and, you know, The type of thinking we can teach kids. I know a [00:27:00] lot of times in school they learn the power of yet.

So if they're thinking I am so bad at division, I have no idea.

I'll, you know, I'll never know how to do math, to shift that mindset into, I don't know how to do long division yet, but I'm working on it.

or I'm learning or, you know, the harder I try, the more likely it is that I'll master this. And so that it's more of a. Effort and process and progress rather than whether I know this or don't know this, or whether I'm smart or not smart.

Alice Kearney: Yeah. And that's a great to not when, if a kid's upset and you're trying to work on resilience. I think to comment on the mindset is so much more helpful, , whether it's positive or negative than the current. So not focusing on the math or the grade or any of that to say, you know, to your point, I love the way you're thinking about that.

I love your effort. I love how you're being. So, compassionate towards yourself or kind to yourself. There's so yeah, [00:28:00] that's can be really helpful in learning to be resilient.

Jill Stoddard: Hey listeners. If you've loved learning about acceptance and commitment therapy on the podcast, and you're a clinician who wants to incorporate more act into your clinical work, I have just the training for you. I am offering my breakthrough act techniques and experiential exercises, a clinical roadmap to help clients overcome psychological distress

through PESI. This is an on-demand training that you can access at my website, Jill starter.com. Then click learn from Jill and trainings.

This is an interactive way to really bring your clinical work, especially your work with act to the next level. I hope to see you there.

So you mentioned your lavender bubbles, which I actually happen to have right here in front of me. And what we're really talking about with a lot of these skills are cognitive behavioral therapy skills, and you have [00:29:00] created this cool. Bounced box that for people who are listening and can't see us, there will be pictures of this on our website and we'll link to Alice's site. , but it is the

cutest. It looks like a lunchbox, like an old school metal lunchbox. And there are all sorts of goodies in this box and it's called the bounce box. So, you know, right. We're teaching kids to bounce to be resilient. And it's like this really fun, colorful one stop shop. For not just kids to learn how to be resilient, but for a therapist, if the therapist has the bounce box or parents, I think especially, you know, parents at home, like you were saying, parents want to know how to help their kids, but don't necessarily know how and the bounce box basically hands you, these tools to be able to do.

With your kids. So walk us through like, th this is a whole experience you guys, by the way, I have my bounce box and like opening it, and there are these cards and it's walks you through what to do and how to do [00:30:00] it. And so tell us a little bit about, , tell us about the bounce box. And then I'm also really curious about where this idea came from.

Alice Kearney: , sure. I would love to. So the bounce spot. It's basically, I realized a lot of interventions I use in my practice could be put into a box and help people at home. And to your point, they would be better served to learn together, , to have a shared language, to have a really fun bonding experience when you're playing with the toys and reading the book and coloring together while you're learning about resiliency is so much better.

So for example, there was a little girl I've seen for almost a year and she's a little shut down and quiet. , and sorta towards the end of the year, I came out with a bounce box, gave one to her and it made a much bigger impact.

Their whole family loved it. They had all this sort of [00:31:00] non-threatening fun language to talk about. having a stretchy brain, you know what it, as I said, it means something different to every person, but they all had these, , tools and skills to help her and the other kids. So the other kids ended up having other ways that they want it to be resilient.

But anyways, so, , the bounce box, basically it's a little system. The instructions are very simple, but there are certain steps and the first. It's to read the book and the book is about two frogs. It's cute and rhymin, but it lays out the main concepts of being resilient. Then there's a coloring fun activity book.

And again, these are to be done together. So you do what adult, caregiver, child, family, you do it all together. , and. The activity, book breaks, some concepts of resiliency and just smaller skills. And it leads to conversations about obstacles that might get in the way. [00:32:00] What are your up thoughts? What are your

down thoughts, meaning thoughts that are sort of positive and inspire you and, , help you move forward.

What are your negative thoughts that maybe are not so healthy? Not so helpful. , And then it comes with lavender bubbles. So you learn to calm down, let things sort of float away, let things, let your negative thoughts sort of go, which is always a great skill. , and then the final step it comes with, I'm going to call it a reward system, but, or reinforcing system where there's a ball and the kit and the ball does not bounce, which is, that's not an easy thing to find.

Like if you. Drop this ball onto the ground. It would just sit there. So it's a bit of a metaphor for. Not being resilient, not being bouncy. And then when you, then the parents are given, or caregivers or adults are given a bag of these big, fun, colorful, rubber bands. And when you see your child [00:33:00] using their stretchy brain, turning a negative thought into something more positive learning to, you know, sort of calming down in situations who say, wow, you are so bouncy.

Here's a, , colorful band and they can wrap it around the. So they're earning bands and the ball gets bigger and bigger and bouncier and bouncier. So as your ball learns to bounce, as your child learns to bounce, if that makes sense. So, and kids love it.

Jill Stoddard: They do love it. I have to say this is so incredibly clever. I love it. My son loved it and it, it is a reward system because he was so motivated to want to add. Rubber bands. And he's a really curious engineered type brainy. Oh, you know, he, he just put a Popsicle in juice and put it in the fridge to see what would happen after a few hours, you know, then he'll put it in the freezer to see what will like, he just always wants to see what will happen.

So he really wanted to see how this non bouncing ball was gonna [00:34:00] turn into a bouncing ball, but he had to put the rubber bands on first to see. You know, so he went through, I'm looking through the book now. So the first book is called educate and that's kind of the psycho-education and the second one is called collaborate.

And that's the activities you were talking about. , you know, in addition to the change in your thinking, there's one that circle all the things that are flexible. So they're learning about flexibility, which I love. , there's other suggestions for

how to feel better, like singing a song, going outside, playing with your pet, asking for a hug.

So in the beginning of the book, , on the very first page where it says, what does it look like when you feel up happy and full of energy? Draw this below. And my son drew a picture of a circle inside the forehead. So I should say so there's like kind of like a, a figure drawing of a person, but It's blank.

So you have to fill things in. Cause what would you be thinking about what would your face look like? And he drew a happy face with a picture of like a circle [00:35:00] in the forehead and then labeling. Poop

Alice Kearney: Oh, my gosh. That's his happy thoughts?

Jill Stoddard: aha. And then like the next page is like about down thoughts? and what would your body be doing? And I think this might be a picture of somebody or maybe pooping. So that was the question I specifically wrote down that. And what do you do when you have Kids. who are at that exact age, where every single thing on their brain. Is potty humor. But one of the things I remember reading in your, you know, you have a lot of good, simple and short, but great instructions to the caregiver. That's collaborating to do this with the kid and you know, it, it basically, it was saying don't be stingy with rewards. If they're even interacting with this material, then go ahead and give the bands away freely.

So I let him have bands even for pee and poop and. a page with [00:36:00] a bunch of thought, bubbles that you're supposed to write down your thoughts and he didn't write words, but he drew faces with all different expressions, you know, even like the, the, the eyebrows that turned in to show an angry face,

Alice Kearney: yeah. Kids. When you say that now they are into emojis,

Jill Stoddard: over there into emojis.

So, right. It's like all emoticons and, you know, I had this thought like, oh, this is actually teaching me to be flexible too, because. I became very aware of my own rigid thinking around how you do this in a way that's right or wrong.

Alice Kearney: Oh, that's interesting.

Jill Stoddard: But having those instructions that were like, just kind of like, you know, don't be stingy with the band, those aren't your words.

Those are my words, but it helped me to be. A little bit more flexible. And he was so happy when he could add bands and test it out. And it was almost like every time he added a band, he'd bounce it to see How many bands do you have to add for it to like really become a bouncy ball.

Alice Kearney: Yeah, it's a bit of a science experiment for

Jill Stoddard: It is which it will.

[00:37:00] And it's great. I mean, kids are naturally curious and they like to know how things work and, you know.

Magic markers that come in the box for the activity book. And there are lots of them and all different colors. The rubber bands are in all different colors. They asked me if they can use the bubbles. , . Of course, I'm afraid that they're going to dump the whole thing out, which is what usually happens with bubbles. But so far that has not happened. They seem to take the box. There's a little more like reverence that they have toward the box. Then like the bubbles we get at the dollar store, you know,

Alice Kearney: And when, usually when I send people the box, I put it in a bag and it says grown-ups are the boss of this box because I do like to keep it special, a grownup, you know, it's something to do with a grown-up as special time. It's. Subcontracting out, like, okay, we're going on a road trip here. Take this box and do it in the backseat.

Jill Stoddard: Right. Right. And I think because, it's like aesthetically pleasing to look at it's colorful. So, you know, I think it [00:38:00] makes kids that it doesn't feel like homework. It doesn't feel like it's even like therapy, homework, you know, it feels like it's something that. Fun, but it's almost like secretly has this ulterior motive to it.

You know, like the kids don't know that they're, that they're becoming resilient by engaging with the bugs.

Alice Kearney: you. Cause I really worked hard. I did so many versions of it where it was just so dry and boring at first. And so instructional and I was like,

geez, I got to make this fun. So then I thought, oh, I'll do many markers. They'll be, you know, and trying to find the best bubble wine.

That kind of stuff. So I'm glad that it was, I really wanted it to be appealing to kids, , and helpful to adults and, and bond and have fun and do it together. So it was a nice connecting. And I also think that takes so often when you're, even if you're in therapy and you're given homework, it just has such a heavy vibe to it.

And I wanted this. I feel like you learn so much more when [00:39:00] you're relaxed and you're light and you're having fun.

Jill Stoddard: Well, just the word homework is where you have that association and this feels more like play, you know, that you're learning, but it's play. Now, you, in your bio, it talks about you also being an art therapist.

So did you actually do the art for this, the pictures of the frogs, or did, did you have somebody else do that?

Alice Kearney: I had someone else do it actually. , cause these days it's all computer art and that's not my strength. So I started off trying and I thought, you know what? I think I'm just going to let someone else do this piece of it. Yeah. But it has the art component with the markers because I do think. When you're coloring and you're interacting with things using art, it has more meaning it'd be, sort of becomes yours., so it does have that art component to it.

Jill Stoddard: , you know, the other thing I want to say about the collaborative piece is that even though it's designed to be done with an adult or caregiver, , you know, kind of [00:40:00] along these lines of, of homework, I know for me, I'll just, it. Having to do homework with my kids, you know, their school homework. If I have to help them, it's painful for all of us. It's something I think we both dread, this has such a different feel to it where I think you even correct me if this is wrong, but I think he even say in the instructions, like to just do a little bit at a time, like you don't sit down and just plow through this box in one night.

Right. Am I remembering that

Alice Kearney: Yes, that's absolutely right when they're engaged and focused do it. And if they, all of a sudden are looking out the window or picking their nose, just let it go. Just say, yeah, that's enough. Yep.

Jill Stoddard: Well, and so I love that and it's not, you know, this isn't a thing that I'm like, oh, we have to open it. The kids want to go. into the bounce box. You know, sometimes they ask you to play a game that you've played a million times and you're like, oh my God, I can't take another minute of candy land.

Like, it's supposed to be fun, but like, maybe it's fun for them. It's not so fun for you. , but I, I never have that feeling with the bounce box. Like there just the way [00:41:00] that it is put together, I feel like. There's nothing about it. That is a burden or that you dread, or that feels like hallmark. You know, it's Just a really nice way to, you know, engage with something together. that's that is, you know, clearly teaching them something cool and that they seem to be into without this sense of like, I have to do this, or, you know what I mean? Which is, I think that's a very hard balance to strike and you've done that well.

Alice Kearney: Thank you. Yeah, that's wonderful feedback. So I'm glad that it feels that way because I really wanted it to feel that way. I didn't want it to, and I D I really tried to keep it sort of short and simple and you could put it away. And then like, like were saying about resiliency, you could almost revisit it later and talk about.

You could take the ball and the bands out and redo a sort of reinforcing system for the next sort of obstacle that might come up in their development. But

Jill Stoddard: Well in one of the things I love about [00:42:00] metaphors with adults too, is that it gives you this really easy, instant, common language. So if I were to say to my son today, you know, if we haven't looked at this bounce box in a few weeks, and I said to him to, if he was having a hard time today, something happened at school.

And I said like, you know, what do you think you would need to do to bounce? Or what's one, what's one thing you could practice to get a rubber band to put on your. And that'll be like his instant signal of like, oh, I could blow bubbles or, oh, I could do finger breathing are all I could think, you know, try to think more positively about the situation and it doesn't take a lot of talking to get back into that space.

Alice Kearney: that's awesome. And it's sort of nonthreatening language. It sort of focuses on the positive, like you're super bouncy. What do you need to do to bounce? I know you're a bouncy guy.

Jill Stoddard: ,

Mine is quite literally a bouncy guide. So that works very well.

So [00:43:00] here's a bit of a challenging question. I, I think that fits because we're talking about doing this in collaboration with adult caregivers and you know, one of the things I was thinking about. When, like in more like adult professional circles, you know, in, in businesses, corporations, organizations, you'll often hear people saying, you know, teaching individuals how to be resilient is insufficient.

So for example, right now, with COVID and healthcare. You know, maybe the hospitals are like here, go do this free meditation or this yoga class we'll pay for it. And the, the criticism is okay, that's nice. Like, that's all fine and good. And we all know meditation and yoga. Yoga is good for people, but.

When what's causing burnout in these individuals is organizational and systemic issues. And those things aren't addressed, then you know, all the yoga in the world, isn't going to be the answer. so translating this to, you know, kids and resilience in what we've been talking about, I'm wondering, how often do you find that a lot of the challenges that are [00:44:00] going on with the individual kids or clients.

Are in large part due to like family systems or home environment issues. And if that's the case, like, is there a way to circle, but like what if you have parents who are part of the problem and aren't willing to do the bounce box together?

Alice Kearney: Yeah, yeah, yeah. That's , well, the reason I did it collaboratively and tried to. Take myself out of, it was exactly for that reason so that a whole family would have language, because I do think that that is a really hard thing. And schools are using them too to have all the language and they'll, they'll use them in the classroom.

So there'll be the bubbles. They're there to help kids calm down. There's like a little calm down station and kids are earning bands. , and it's sort of often. Does connect with the language that schools are already trying to use to incorporate more mental health skills into the curriculum, but it is hard.

I mean, I do think that that's [00:45:00] why I sort of did it this way because I sort of feel isolated as a therapist in terms of, I work with schools, I work with families, but I can't make bigger changes, but this is a small way. , To get people

together and in a non-threatening fun approach, just start to change some of the language and, , mindset around resiliency.

So, but it is, but that's, that's a very true point

Jill Stoddard: Yeah. Yeah. Well,

Alice Kearney: systems.

Jill Stoddard: And I think, you know, the, the idea is like we can't expect kids to just do this on their own. And the ideal is that they have caregivers at home that are willing to do this with them together. And if they don't, then hopefully they have access to a therapist, a school counselor, somebody that they could work on these skills with.

And, you know, gosh, the more we can get this stuff into school. I mean, I think that's it right there that, that, you know, free [00:46:00] public schools, if we can be focusing on social and emotional development for, for kids early on, you

Alice Kearney: Yeah, a school system just in my town just bought 12 and they, I mean, I think more and more school in Pittsburgh, there's there, it's all over where they're, they're using them with individuals groups and in classrooms. Which is great, but even your story about your daughter, I mean, to hear, I really think more and more everyone's valuing mental health and everyone realizes we've got to put time and energy into this if we want our kids to be okay.

Jill Stoddard: Yes. And especially people who care about kids like teachers, they want those kids to be okay. And I don't know whether they're thinking about this, but I certainly think of it as their jobs will be a lot easier. You know, their job, you know, they're now teachers are no longer just educators.

You know, they have so much. Pressure on them to be taking care of a lot of these more emotional and behavioral issues. And it's [00:47:00] just a plot, you know, it's a lot therapists are trained to do this and were all burning out. So, you know, for teachers to be, to be having to deal with this too. , my, my daughter, same teacher who took her homework away, so she could go to therapy, also did a several week, I think, or several day unit. , I mean she had like a 60 slide PowerPoint. Presentation that she was doing little chunks of each day or each week. That was all about, , positive thinking. It was cognitive restructuring, but not called that because it was for eight-year-olds nine-year-olds, you know?, and I looked through it and it's fantastic. It's cute. And it's there it's, you know

top notch, cognitive behavioral therapy skills that she's, I don't think it's the curriculum in our town, but she has chosen to implement this with our students, which I think is so special or.

Alice Kearney: it's amazing. And to, and to your point to even mean kindergarten, I think every kindergarten has a morning meeting to check in to how, you know, connection. How are you [00:48:00] feeling? , that whole thing to start the day. So, and I do think to your point, none of this can be done alone. We have to support each other.

We have to find ways to work together to make things better, because it is, it is a bigger system problem, I think for

Jill Stoddard: right. You're so right. And even though things are getting better and moving in the right direction, there still is quite a bit of stigma. And you know, one of the things we talk about a lot on the podcast is common humanity. This idea that. We're all suffering in some way at different points.

And the more we talk openly about this, the more we see like, oh my gosh, you too. Like, I'm not alone. We're all in this together. We're all connected. And I think the more teachers and parents and therapists, you know, even me being open about the fact that my kid is in therapy, you know, maybe people out there are saying, oh, me too.

And that. We'll reduce the stigma more and more, the more we normalize this And and I think you're right, the more we can kind of be together [00:49:00] as a team to help support one

Alice Kearney: And I do think that's was a silver lining of the pandemic because it was, it was it's happening to all of us and everyone might experience it differently, but we're all in it together. So, and it was such a strange experience as a therapist when you have. Clients saying I can't teach my kids and do my work or I'm so out of whack, my sleep might, you know, and of course I'm sitting there going, yeah, I hear you.

Me too. Me too.

Jill Stoddard: Yeah,

Alice Kearney: So yeah, I think we're all having that experience. We've got to come together and we're all, and you say this on the podcast all the time. We're just more alike than we are different.

Jill Stoddard: Yes. A hundred percent so true. Tell me, I just realized one important thing I didn't ask you is what ages is the bounce box appropriately?

Alice Kearney: Well, so the book is cute and rhyming. , so it's, it's for three to 10,

Jill Stoddard: Okay. Yeah, that sounds right. [00:50:00] Elementary school-aged

Alice Kearney: yeah. definitely. But the only thing is there's some 10 ten-year-olds that you might want to say, read me the book, or, you know, let's do it with your little sister and read it to her, you know? Cause the book could feel babyish.

So you might have a 10 year old who thinks they're a teenager or something like that. And vice versa, you might have a really young three-year-old. So you, so you might want to gauge it, but it's three to 10.

Jill Stoddard: Well, maybe that's your next project is like the bounce box for tweens and teens. You know, something that's like that ages the ages up a little bit into that, you know, 10 to 15 or whatever age

Alice Kearney: Yeah, and I do think kids love to learn about mental health. They like to talk about it. They want to feel mentally healthy. So I do think about that. , a lot of people have approached me and said, we need a balanced box for tweens and teens, because I think they'd eat it up.

They, they would like that.

Jill Stoddard: So what is next for you? Is that on, is, is that, is that part of the plan or what what's next for you?

Alice Kearney: So [00:51:00] I'm in the process of trying to get the box on Amazon. , and I just want to get the word. This is such a gift to be able to talk to you because I want to get the word out. It is a great product. Any kid, it doesn't,

you don't need to have any mental health issues. , anyone would benefit from this. And I do again, an ounce of prevention is worth a pound of cure.

I really wanted to make it a box for young kids. So to your point, you learn these skills at a really young age. So you're set up for being a teen or an adult. , but

Jill Stoddard: is such a great point. If this bounce box could put me out of business, I would be totally onboard with that. Right. And really, like, not only do your kids not have to have mental health problems to have it, like get it now while they don't and maybe it will prevent them going down that road in the future. Yeah.

Alice Kearney: And that's, I realized I don't want to be in the job of putting out fires. I'd like to be in the job of fire prevention. So that was another reason why I sort of came up with a kit.

Jill Stoddard: Yeah.

Alice Kearney: [00:52:00] Yeah. So I do have ideas for lots of different other boxes, but in the meantime, I'm trying to get on Amazon and just spread the word because I have it in some toy stores.

I have it around, but you don't walk in and say, oh, a bounce box. I need that.

Jill Stoddard: Right, right.

Alice Kearney: to you in a way that it's sort of a little out, pardon the pun out of the box. So, um, so it just trying to spread the word

Jill Stoddard: Yeah, well, it's very cool. I'm glad that we can help you spread the word from psychologist. Stop the clock. Tell me, , if people want to find you , find out more about you and about the bounce box or order the bounce box, where what's the best place for them to find.

Alice Kearney: Alice Kearney.com and my name is sort of weird. It's like Kearney it's K E a R N E Y. So Alice Kearney and Kearney.com and then bounce, hyphen box.com. Also where you can find out more about the bounce box.

Jill Stoddard: Perfect. And we will link [00:53:00] to all of those places and our show notes. , Thank you, Alice so much for being here. This was such a cool conversation. And now that I have the whole bounce box out, I'm sure when my kids come home today, they're, they're going to be right back on drawing pictures of poops so they can earn more rubber.

Alice Kearney: love that. I love that poop is in poop emojis.

Jill Stoddard: mean, Hey, even as an adult, I still laugh at

Alice Kearney: yeah,

Jill Stoddard: so.

Alice Kearney: yeah. Yup.

Jill Stoddard: All right, well, thank you so much for being here and good luck with everything guys. Check out our show notes, bounce box.com. Alice Kearney.com. They make great holiday gifts.

Thanks for being here.

Alice Kearney: All right. Thank you, Jill.

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