Beyond Mental Health Labels: Integrating Physical, Mental, Emotional And Spiritual Well-Being Transcript

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Introduction and mental health journey

Welcome back to ADHD, Autism and Chronic Disease Parenting Summit. I'm here with another fantastic practitioner. Christina Biondo, who is a wonderful naturopathic physician and, founder of the Natural Terrain Clinic.

I'm super excited to chat with you today about mental health. Super important topic. On everybody's mind these days, I think a little bit more. So thank you for being with us.

Thanks for having me. It's great to be here. So let's just start. I know you you had a little bit of a journey with your, your mental health and, and so let's let's talk about that first and your story about regaining some of from what you feel like is your mental health and getting to a better place.

Yeah. So my struggles really started in, in high school with an eating disorder. But I'll just make a sidebar there that the year prior to that I took antibiotics for several months to address acne.

And so we know now that there's a connection between the gut microbiome and the brain. But we didn't know that back in the 1980s. So, so it's important to mention that because that's that's an important piece of the health health puzzle.

And then subsequent to that, and then I further, my health mental health further declined, went to anxiety and depression. And then I put got put on medication and and then I spiraled into a manic episode, a psychotic episode.

And then I was given the diagnosis of bipolar disorder type one. So it's really been, a journey for me to move from that Western view that you're you're you've you've got to take a pill for every ill and, to this place in that, that medicine where we look at restoring health to the individual.

Well, I you know, I appreciate you mentioning that because. Yeah, I don't think people talk about enough what they've what they've been through. And I think, well, I know that that, you know, we're, we're having more and more of a mental health epidemic and a crisis, you know, especially around kids and, and teens at the moment.

I mean, the rates of depression are skyrocketing. I've seen seven, you know, 10%, seven, 10% anxiety, you know, even more when you take the whole umbrella of mental health diagnosis.

But yet people are not talking about enough. Certainly without question, people are talking about more now, which is a good thing. But but there's a long way to go and we shouldn't be seeing these, you know, severe rates of, of mental health along with everything else.

I mean, along with chronic disease just in general.

Attachment, loneliness, and parent-child connection

But, you know, the first step is just talking about it and identifying that it's happening. And anybody who I feel like has been through it can be very helpful for the those that are you know, going going through their own don't struggle.

So I just want to say thank you for for even bringing that up and sharing that. So now maybe we can move in a little bit more into, you know, so what, what you are thinking now more in terms of mental health, where, where, where is your thoughts around the aspects of health that are important and especially when it comes to mental health and

what should people be thinking about?

So the thing that we really want to keep in mind is that we're multifactorial beings. Right. There's we're complex and there's lots of moving parts. So if we're thinking about the like our children and teenagers, a really important thing is for parents to be connected to their children.

And there's three needs that children have as they're growing up, which is versus attachment, attunement and authenticity. And what can happen is we can sacrifice our our authentic expression of our emotions and who we are to maintain the attachment.

And this attachment can get severed, if you will, if they're in the incidence of trauma. So many of us have little, little traumas that are happening.

And so the most important thing often is for children and teenagers in particular, to feel like they can talk to you, the parent. We don't want peers raising peers.

And the problem I think that we have is that with social media now, we have a lot of people looking to that and looking to the peer level to gain the influence as to who they are stepping forward in the world versus being guided by their parents.

So there's been this disruption in the attachment connection with parents. And it's interesting, like my son is turning 18 and as he as he's gone through the years, I've had to rephrase every year, you know, people would say, oh, the terrible twos or, you know, the the problem fours or whatever it was.

And so every year I've rephrased it to, you know, the terrific twos and the Fabulous Fours and even the teenage years. Right. People will say, oh, the teenage years, and we roll our eyes as adults.

And why are we doing that? Right? And I was bracing myself the other day. I'm like, oh, I've got to brace myself for the teenage years. They're coming, they're coming.

And then I was like, he's going to be 18. Like, you're through it. Really? Yeah. And it's been amazing and it's been amazing. So how are you connecting with your child and not just from the parent?

I'm the authority telling you what to do perspective, but truly connecting heart to heart, soul to soul with your children. Because what's got what's happening nowadays is an epidemic in loneliness.

So we have a loneliness problem that is leading to these symptoms that we're calling or these manifesting as these labels of depression and anxiety. So I really think we have to get back to some basics here and, and really get to the fundamentals of what's really important.

And that is the connection with your child. So they feel safe to come to you with whatever turbulence or turmoil they're struggling with internally, so that they're not seeking for external, solutions to that through the device.

Right. Yeah. So I went on a big tangent there. Sorry. No, but I if. I couldn't be more like, that's so, so wise, you know, and I don't think people really, really think about that, especially as you're getting to the later years.

You know, it's like we're we have all this social media, we have all this, you know, the internet stuff that you can do. So people feel like maybe they're more connected, but we're less connected than ever, certainly not in person.

And yes, you know, you can get a little bit of validation from posting something and getting a like, but that, that that runs dry real fast and it's not the same thing is, you know, building something and getting validation for, for doing it or planting a tree and watching it grow, or just being at home with your parents and having a conversation.

You know, we're we're definitely missing that. And I agree with you that it really is one of the biggest aspects. And in the mental health crisis. I mean, there's so many pieces.

And so, you know, I've been speaking for about 20 years, and every year I get on this stage and I say mental health conditions are on the rise, right.

Nutrition, exercise, and community as treatment

And so 20 years is saying that I really would love to get on the stage and say, hey, guess what? You know what mental health conditions are on the decline, right?

So what? Where have we gone wrong here? And how come in 20 years we're not improving in this area and it's just got deeper and wider. So yes, nutrition of course. Right.

Physical foundations of health got to be in place in your nutrition, sleep movement. All of those basic things need to be in place and many of them aren't either.

So there's so much opportunity here to create solutions for people and to help people. It's just that people need to know that these resources are out.

There are people like you and I, and and these summits are so important for people to, to get information and to take not only, you know, we're talking about it, but you got to take action.

Like, what are you actually going to do to help your child. Right. What are so from, you know, you're speaking and as a practitioner you work with a lot of patients.

You know, over the years, mental health conditions, whatever, whatever it may be. What are some of the things that you start to talk to families about?

You mentioned it a little bit, you know, diet, exercise, sleep. But maybe we can dive into that a little bit more and just kind of connect that to mental health because I think people laziness to some degree, hopefully have an idea that that these things are connected.

But I think it is always good to talk about, you know, just how important the gut brain connection is. This how, you know, exercise is so important when it comes to mental health? I mean, I've seen studies.

I'm sure you have two where they talk about like the antidepressants and exercise. And it's like that exercise outperforms antidepressants on almost every study.

You know, if you're just doing doing a little bit more. And so it's like, well, duh. Like we should be obviously making sure that everyone, you know, gets out and exercises a little bit more.

And that doesn't mean you should never taken antidepressants. People need it. But you shouldn't be prescribed an antidepressant without being prescribed, you know, exercise too.

I think I made a post about this, like a few months ago. I was like, you know, everybody, if you're getting an antidepressant, should also get a prescription for exercise, right?

It's like, sure, you can get the prescription if you need it. But the research shows that that's better, right? So here's the thing though. This is this is a this is the challenge.

Is that so I've been I've had a lot of depression in my life. I've had three suicide attempts. Right. Six psychotic events. I've had I spent a year of my life in the psychiatric hospital, not consecutively, but all the little add up, all the states.

So of course we all know. We should know that exercise is just as, outperforms, accessories. And in the cases of mild to moderate depression, the catch 22 here is that that is the least when you're depressed.

Right. This is like I need to exercise is like asking a blind person to see if we, you know, we're physically disabled in that area. So this is where it comes back to what I just mentioned earlier, which is this idea of connection and community.

You need someone to be encouraging you. We are social beings. We need each other, and we need each other to be helping and caring for each other. So I can tell you, because I lived alone for from, you know, age 20 to 40, I struggled so much and it was really difficult for me.

Sometimes the only thing I accomplish in a day, and sometimes this took me 16 hours, was moving from the bed, getting dressed, getting the shoes on, going out right.

However, I never once, not once, came back feeling worse than when I went out, and over time this would build on itself. I can tell you actually, after one, attempt I had in 2009, tennis actually was the solution to my depression.

I, with a friend asked me to play. I went, I wasn't going to go, of course, because I didn't want to engage with the world, but my husband forced me. So I went thankful for him to doing that and thankful to my friend for asking and continuing to ask.

She she never stopped asking. So you need people in your life that are never going to stop asking you. No matter how many times you say no, you need to show up.

So look what that got me. That got me outside, that got me fresh air. That got me pounding out my problems with the ball. And the racket got me connection with my friend.

It stimulated my appetite. So it it's so powerful. But the piece that people are missing is you need. The research shows actually, that exercise is best done in community, outside in nature.

That is the best way. So I know it's hard and I also know that it's so powerful. So yeah, and I was just going to say, I think sometimes that even the word exercise is what is it.

You know, the first like lock there because it's like, okay, we're not necessarily even talking about exercise. Like you just said. It's like tennis. I mean, yes, it's exercise, but you're it's fun.

It's like, you know, you want them to do something that they're going to enjoy it. I don't think that if you have a, you know, depressed teenager that the best thing is like, oh, go for a jog for a, you know, five hours, maybe that's if they like that.

But it's like, oh, can you get them to play squash or can you get them to play, you know, tennis, baseball or, or you know, whatever it is that they want to do with people that, that they love, that that's going can be the best thing.

And just like you said, that's something that's going to actually have a chance to be successful because it's something you kept going to you did it. You did it in the social community.

And you know, just to tell somebody, oh, well, eat a little better. Oh, go for a walk. Well okay fine. They might do it one day. But, but but exactly like you said, it's if you're depressed, you're anxious.

Screens, social media, and rising teen anxiety

Then the last thing you want to do is like, is do that. So it's easier said than done, but I, I think from a, you know, when we're talking to parents, especially if this is for talking to parents about their kids, I think it's just important to understand these things, because knowing that exercise is so powerful is important, and then knowing how to incorporate that into their lives is is the second piece.

Knowing that, you know, the exercise is not going to stop you from a suicidal attempt in the, you know, in the middle of that attempt. But it's so powerful in terms of helping with your mental health.

So, okay, but that's really important. Let's figure out how to get our kids to do something. And that to me is the big piece. And that's why it's so important they talk about this because I think parents just sometimes forget that they get frustrated.

You know, especially if you're, you're dealing with something over many years. But just how powerful it is that your friend may play tennis, you know how it works where you are today, you know, and that's that.

That's such a powerful thing to hear. So I think that's helpful for parents. Yeah. And I think, you know, the other factors that you've touched on are super important.

It's got to be fun and you got to like it. But you got to be willing. You also have to be willing to try new things. Right? This willingness to explore, there's so many options nowadays too.

Right. So and we're not talking about you got to go out there and you know be the best. Like that's not what we're talking about. They take the competitiveness out of it. Right.

Just just do it because it's fun. And your body's meant to move, right? It's meant to move. So very powerful piece. I mean, Michael Pollan said that we've given up two hours a day to screens.

And what have we given up? We've given up movement, exercise, and we've given up cooking as a family. And so those are two really important things to get back to some basics.

Get get off of the phones. I had a 17 year old girl in my office the other day depressed, anxious eating disorder, and I asked her what her screen time was and nine hours a day.

That's a problem. Yeah, I said to her, okay, we need to get to office. We need to get you off of looking at everybody else's life and get you into your own life.

So that's a great like that's a great phrase. Just just in general it's like it's such a again a powerful message. It's like that. That is what we're seeing.

And there are so many kids that are going through that. And you know if we can if we can get to parents and families before they get to that stuff like that.

That's why I think the goal has to be and, you know, going back to when you said at the beginning about, well, you know, it's going up and it's going up and mental health crisis continues.

The way that it would change is if we can get to people early and everyone realizes that we're doing this, that we're we're a part of the problem, but we can also be a part of the solution.

And the fact that so many people are on screens all day that we're not a part of nature, that we're not eating healthy, that we're doing all of these things.

You know, if everybody is more mindful of it, we go in the other direction, then we will see it go down. I think there's no doubt. I think we're about as bad as it's going to be, because I hope, I hope it's not going to get worse. I think there's not much more.

We're not that much worse for it to go. But 1 in 3 girls are going 1 in 3. So that's I mean, I guess the worst it could be is one and one. So let's say.

Exactly I hope we don't get there. And I hope that that we're getting to a point. And currently this is like 1 in 2. Right. So I hope we are getting to a point where it's going to be enough is enough.

And and eventually that some changes are going to come. But it's not it's going to take a while and it's not going to happen on the big level right away.

So that means it has to happen at the family level. And like you said, it starts with community. You know, starts with with those around you. Yeah. Community and connection.

And the other big piece I'll mention here as well that I think is is really important. So like the overview for me is that there's four aspects to you as a person physical, mental, emotional, and spiritual.

Our Western system focus on the focus is on the physical level. So for that we want to understand that there's these three big systems in your body your neurotransmitters, your hormones, and then your organs of detoxification, which includes the gut brain connection.

And it's my job as a health detective to figure out, well, which of those macro systems do I need to support in you. Now, that's not the only system, though, right?

We want to understand that your thoughts and your emotions are a really big piece of this as well, because your thoughts create neuropeptide, and those neuropeptides affect the hormones that get produced, and then those hormones that get produce affect how you feel.

Root-cause medicine and the mind-body connection

So that's called psycho neuro immunology. Just a big fancy word for what I just said. Your thoughts affect your physiology. So for myself, I dialed in that physical level when I started regaining my mental health.

However, no one talked to me about the voice in my head, which was this inner critic that was beating me up every step of the way, every step of the way.

Now this stems back for myself, goes back to the in utero experience, which is that I'm adopted. So any mother that has to make that decision to to give up a child is a stressed individual.

So those levels of hormones that she was experiencing affect the developing, effected the developing child, in this case me. So I came into the world somewhat wired with a really sensitive, nervous system.

Now learning to navigate that nervous system over the last 57 years I've been on the planet has really been the key to my regaining my mental health from some of those serious labels that you apparently never get cured from.

Right? But if you think about bipolar disorder, really it's two poles of your nervous system. You're swinging right. You go from high as high and low to the lowest low.

But no one's talking about the nervous system in the context of bipolar disorder in this psychiatric world, it's all neurotransmitter based. So root cause medicine, root cause medicine is what we practice.

You have to sometimes go as far back to that in utero experience. In my case, or even in the case of a child who's come out via C-section, that's a whole other.

Another conversation, right? You've met talk about which started off talking about the microbiome. That's when it gets seeded in a child is when they come down the vaginal canal.

But if they come up by C-section, they've missed that step. So they're not set the set themselves up yet for that success from that gut health perspective, right.

Doesn't mean you can't change it. It's super important. Super, super important. So anyway, so I just wanted to mention this piece about the thoughts, because a lot of teenagers, they're not loving themselves.

Right? They're walking through the world thinking they're wrong. Something's not perfect about them. And that is is really another area that's incredibly important to to be navigating.

How do you actually feel about yourself, not only from a self-esteem, self-worth, love perspective, but also how compassionate are you to yourself and to others?

Right. So these are these are the other, you know, the mental, emotional, spiritual pieces of the health puzzle that are just as important as a physical level.

It's all important. That's why I talk about ten steps in my book beyond the label. Right. There's these all have to be addressed. So yeah, now, I mean, it's a beautiful way to end.

I think it's it's such a poignant message. It's so important. You know, people realize that there's so many whatever, whatever mnemonic you want to use, whatever.

You know, people use a tree. I use the seeds of health, you know, stress, environmental toxins, exercise, diet and sleep. You have your ten, you know, pillars.

And I and I think that we all basically echo the same words which are there. There's just so many pieces, but they're all important. And we need to work on each of them to get to a healthier place.

And nothing is nothing's on it's own. Right. It's like mental health is not outside of your body. Your brain is part of your body. Everything's connected.

And, you know, I just love that you're you're bringing that message and helping so many people, especially right now. You know, like you said, it is it is rough in terms of mental health and it is getting worse.

And I hope that, you know, if we can clone you like, 50 times and get out there and maybe we maybe we can turn things around if we can get that message out enough. So I'm sharing your wisdom.

Maybe you can tell people where to find you. Name your book again. And. Actually, I just I'll just share with you this little story really quick. So basically, just because for parents, it's just so important because I know that when your child is struggling, you feel, you know, you just feel like you're not doing enough sometimes, especially if they're not talking to you and they won't come out of the room and that kind of thing.

And so this story was that there was this teenage boy and he was struggling, and his mom was at her wit's end, and he would not go to any appointments or anything.

So she just showed up every day with a sandwich for him. And sometimes he ate the sandwich. Sometimes he didn't eat the sandwich. Anyways, this went on for months.

Eventually he turned the corner and when he did, she asked him, you know what?

Hope for families and closing resources

What helps. Like, I really, you know, in case we end up in this spot again, I want to know, like, what can I do more better? You know, how can I help you?

And he just said, basically, you know what, mom? That sandwich showed me that you loved me. You showed up every day. She thought she wasn't doing enough for her son.

So I just want to leave that message with people that it's just so important. You just never know. What that smile can do with that friendly, you know, Pat on the back can do what showing up with a sandwich can do.

She felt desperate. This this mother. And yet the sandwich represented the symbol. Became a symbol for her love. So beautiful. Yeah, well, thank you for for sharing that.

And, And can you just, share? Oh, yes. Yes. You. If they want to work with you. Yeah, just my website is, Dr.. And

then Christina, and then beyond all which is hard to spell.

So it'll, you'll have it there in the show notes this my website and then the books are on Amazon and, Barnes and Noble and in Canada chapters. But yes, if you hit my website up, then there's a of course, that I offer and, you know, the usual suspects, I hate to say Instagram and Facebook, but the reality is, don't go don't be there for too long. No.

Love your body more than you're looking at that stuff. Yeah. For sure. Well, thanks again for for sharing your wisdom and I really appreciate it. And thanks everyone for tuning in. Thank you.