Introduction and guest background

there is more hope for you than I'm sure you are usually led to believe. And I would not do this work if families didn't heal. And I would never tell a parent that it's going to happen overnight.

I don't think they'd believe me. But it certainly is not the way that it works because it's complex. This transformation that you and I have been talking about now for the last 40 minutes or so, it's complex, but it's so worth the time and energy that it takes.

So just sending so much compassion to those parents who are currently navigating it and holding hope for you because I know that it's really difficult to hold it on your own in those really hard moments.

This is Doctor Talks, real talk from real doctors on the issues that matter to you most. Welcome back, everybody. I am really excited to welcome Eileen Devine to the podcast today.

Eileen is a licensed clinical social worker and founder of Brain First Parenting. She's in Portland, Oregon with her husband and two teenage children, and one of whom lives with a brain based difference.

She's had over 20 years of clinical experience and for the last dozen or so of those years, has really focused solely on supporting parents who have children with neurobehavioral conditions, including families impacted by neuroimmune conditions.

In addition to her clinical work with parents, she facilitates dozens of workshops, trainings, of parents, teachers, mental health professionals, trainer for the Center for Adoption Support and Education, and lots more.

And I really am thrilled to have Eileen join me today because I think all that Eileen has to say is so important for our families with kids with Pans Pandas.

So thanks for joining me. Oh, thanks for having me. I'm thrilled to be here. So tell me a little bit about how you got to where you are today. Yeah, it's a long story that I will make very short.

So as you mentioned, I have two teenagers, Connell, who's 17, and he's what society would consider very neurotypical. And then I have my daughter, Maya, who is 16. They're only 15 months apart.

And Maya came into our family through adoption. At her birth, we adopted her. and very quickly I recognized that her development was not typical. I had this almost side-by-side comparison, so the alarm bells went off very quickly for me.

She received shortly after that around age two a diagnosis of fetal alcohol spectrum disorder. So her brain was permanently changed from birth mom's alcohol use.

And that was helpful to an extent, but it still didn't tell me what do I need to do differently to parent her successfully. We were doing, I thought, a really wonderful job with my son.

things seemed to be going well and so we felt confident that those things were good and right and you know what people recommend but they weren't working for her and it was incredibly frustrating.

We didn't know what to do differently. So to make that long story short I finally found the answers that I didn't even know I was missing. And it was about how to parent her in alignment with how her brain works differently.

And that she navigates the world in a very different way that I would never have imagined being a neurotypical

individual myself or someone who identifies that way.

And so once I learned that, I thought, okay, this is where she needs support. I didn't even know. And that's when I changed the focus of my clinical practice because I was incredibly frustrated that this information wasn't more available for parents.

I felt like… I found it, but it was kind of luck and I'd work really, really hard to find it. So I wanted to make that not so hard for other parents.

There's so much unnecessary suffering that happens in these families.

Discovering brain-based parenting

So I just work with parents, which by the end of our time together, the listeners will understand, why that is. I don't work with the kids, I don't work with the family unit, I work with the parents supporting them in this very unique, often challenging parenting journey and helping them understand their child's brain so they can parent them in alignment with their brain, their nervous system as well.

So I began this work with the FASD community honestly and shortly after that parents who had kids with neuroimmune conditions were finding me from the blog post I was writing and that kind of thing and saying, you're talking about my kids.

You're talking about our family. Exactly. I had no idea what they were talking about. It was a completely new world to me. And I am so grateful to have been brought into this community.

I work with, I would say anywhere from a third to a half of my practice now are parents of kids with neuroimmune conditions. So that was seven or eight years ago that I first started learning about this very unique illness and what it's like for the parents or parenting kids with this illness.

So that is, hopefully it wasn't too long. No, no, and it's so fascinating because, you know, there are so many conditions that are more similar than different.

And learning about how a child learns, how a child thinks, how they see the world really helps. parents, practitioners, teachers, therapists, to better be able to help them.

And it is such, I think it's so important even for our neurotypical kids. Yes, I would agree. Oh, it changed the way I parent both my kids. Learning about what the nervous system does for us, what our brains do for us, and what it means to be a person living their life.

And when things get hard, they need other people to understand that internal experience. Yeah and making a parent focused also because so many of our parents are so frustrated, so just overwhelmed because nobody's listening and nobody's providing them with the support they need.

I always say the best instrument in my office is a tissue box. You know I can use my stethoscope and my otoscope but it's the tissue box because They're so often not heard, not listened to.

Not just the kids, but the parents. Oh, absolutely. And then told, well, you just need to. You just need to have better boundaries. You just need to have harsher consequences.

You just need to. And so that starts the spiral shame that they have a really hard time getting out of because they don't have any alternative narrative to turn to, right?

But also inherent in that experience, not for every parent, but for so many that I work with, is true trauma. And nobody ever imagines that that would happen within their parenting experience, but it does.

And so that requires specific attention and healing and treatment, right? That parents often, well, they have so much on their plate, they are not their focus, right?

They want their child to be well. But they have to be well in order for their child to be well. As I was listening to other things you've done, you know, I was thinking about that old adage, you know, put your oxygen mask on first.

Because it is so important for our parents to understand that they do have PTSD, trauma, you know, real issues. that are okay, that are understandable and to take care of themselves too.

Yes, absolutely. I will say, and I joke about this with parents that I've worked with for a while now, parents do not come to me to heal themselves. They come to me because things are so hard in their home and they understand that I can help them understand why their child is having such challenging behaviors and how to help calm down those behaviors over time, right?

Intensity and frequency. And that's why they come. Understandably, that is like the presenting concern that's making their life so miserable and hard every single day.

But inevitably, in that work, we get to a point where it's like, oh, this is actually about me. Yeah, exactly. Exactly. And so the focus, it's not that we completely shift our focus 100%, but we hold that the same weight, if not more at times, The piece about their own healing and what it means.

Oh, now that I understand what my child needs, it's different because their brain works so differently. Their system works so differently. How do I ensure that I have the endurance that's needed to be able to deliver on that?

Right. So, yeah. The two sides of the coin. Yeah, absolutely, absolutely. So what does it mean to parent a child or a teenager whose brain works differently than expected?

And how does that way of parenting differ? Yes, yeah. So we all make assumptions about what the brain can do. And, you know, before I started parenting my daughter, whose brain, of course, works very, very differently than expected, I had no appreciation even what for my brain does for me every day.

I just didn't give it any thought because it's working very well for me. Why would I? Right. So most of us have that luxury, that privilege of making assumptions about what brains do for us.

And then we assume that about our kids.

Why behavior-focused discipline fails

But if the brain has been impacted in function, in structure for the thousands of reasons, one of the thousands of reasons that can happen, it's going to work differently.

And that means those seemingly easy brain tasks or cognitive skills aren't so easy for that individual. And it's not about willingness then, it's about skill.

And so if we can shift our lens and see, oh, they can't complete this seemingly easy task or they can't meet this chronologically aged expectation because they don't have the essential cognitive skills to do that.

Yeah. Oh, that makes so much more sense. And when I'm forcing that, when I'm saying, no, you, you must, because you're of this age, you should be able to do this, or this is easy.

You should be able to do this. And we push and we push and we push, then they experienced defensive behaviors. Those are the behavioral symptoms that really, I mean, parents have no trouble identifying those, right?

They're the ones that are disruptive. If we can shift our focus from that defensive behavior that feels like it's ruling our home and our life and consuming all of our energy, and ask ourselves, what if the brain has to do with this?

What am I asking them to do? Do they have the skills to do that based on their brain? And I know that it works differently. And then we say, oh, well, if I can assume, let's just assume that this has something to do with their brain and they need more support, more accommodations.

specific to those lagging skills, that's when things start to get better because they're not then put in this situation where they are set up to fail every single day, all day, right?

So that's what I think about when I'm shifting the lens, right? Getting out of this behavioral lens that our society is so entrenched in. The behaviors are willful.

And our school systems. Oh, yes. We can have a whole nother episode. Oh, can't we though? Yeah. Getting out of that lens that we most, that's the only lens most of us have ever known and shifting it to what's happening within their brain, within their nervous system.

And how do I adjust my expectations to be more in alignment with that? Right. That's the simple, not so simple equation. Yeah, yeah. And I can see how it is very similar but also very different for our families with children that were labeled as neurotypical, that now all of a sudden have horrible intrusive thoughts or can't complete a picture or whatever is happening for them when the post-infectious syndrome starts.

So there's the one group that neurodevelopmentally and from the beginning, that were very early on, the parents may be seeing differences that they can't understand.

But then there's those parents, like the ones that I'm seeing, that on February 12th, the kid was learning this way, doing this, I was pairing this way, we were going along just fine.

And February 15th, all of a sudden, I don't know what to do. I have such a different child. That's right. That's right. Yes. Sometimes, I mean, I always say comparative suffering, it doesn't do any good, right?

And with that, I think about my daughter having her permanent brain-based difference from the day she was born. and that she still has on and off days.

It waxes and wanes slightly where I need to be on my toes and be able to, oh, is this an off day? How do I need to adjust, right? So there still is that element to it, but it's way more consistent than the kids of the parents that I see with pans and pandas.

And so that can feel like whiplash to them. They have on and off days, but they are severely on and off days. And so they wake up and they can tell just by the way their child wakes up, like, ooh, This is going to be a hard day and getting into that mindset, like, okay, this is an off day.

Like, what more are they going to need from me? How do I lead with curiosity about what this is and empathy, right? So that's the piece about the child.

But the other piece that you're speaking to, again, thinking about the parent experience is the grief. and the loss and the judgment people not believing like something must have happened your kids just a bad kid now like they were fine before right and really just that upheaval emotionally is a really really big deal you know I always say that the kids who have fit into that category of neurotypical at one point, or even after the onset of their illness have days where they appear neurotypical like their peers, they're at highest risk for being punished for their differences, right?

And so the parents experience of that and feeling like the world is against you. And you're truly not understanding, like it's a lot. And even grandparents and well-meaning aunts and uncles.

It's not just society, it's even within the family or the other parent. Maybe the parent that's outside of the home more. And I can feel as you're talking that that mom, including me, but that mom that at the beginning of the day their shoulders are already tight their their whole body is tense because they don't know how their child's gonna

wake up and then their child wakes up And that tension doesn't necessarily go away, but that tension in them may make that good day a little bit less of a good day, too.

Yes, absolutely. Yeah. Well, and then, I mean, when we talk about the fragility of the nervous system of these kids, I often say neurobiologically because they're wired differently.

That's how I encourage parents to think about their kids having these fragile nervous systems. And so what does that mean? They get thrown into fight or flight much more easily, dysregulation much more easily, need copious amounts, intense co-regulation.

But what is true for so many of the parents that I start working with, the beginning of our work, is they have fragile nervous systems too. Yeah. because exactly what you just described like understandably their nervous system is this onslaught of stress all the time and so then they feel like oh i know it's an off day i want to show up for my child i want to be more empathetic i want to be the support that i now know they need why can't i do it Right.

Well, because your body is protecting you and telling you, hey, fight or flight, you got to take care of yourself. So you're really working against your own neurobiology to show up in this way, right?

So it's so complex and it's so layered and parents feel that. But my experience has been is when they have someone who can help them kind of dissect those layers of complexity, they're like, oh, That's why it's so hard.

If this makes sense, it's validating in that way, right? And this is what I can do about it. There is something I can do to make it better. Yeah, absolutely.

So why do traditional disciplines and behavior modification techniques fail so miserably in these children? I mean, they really do. They really do. They really do.

Well, let's begin with what the premise they begin with. It's that kids need to be motivated to behave well, that they could do it, they're choosing not to.

It's assuming that all that's needed is for an adult to wield their power in whatever way. and that that will make them behave, that that is the true underlying cause, that the behavior is within their control and is not a reflection of anything else except their opinion for that day.

Co-regulation and nervous system support

Do I wanna do it or not, right? If we look at what is required for kids to be quote unquote compliant, so get the sticker, get the green dot, right? Behave differently because they have this terrible consequence that will happen if they don't.

those require cognitive skills. Like I need to remember that mom said to me, maybe even just an hour ago, honestly, but certainly days ago, if I do this, then this is what's going to happen.

So in the moment, I need to be able to remember that. I need to be able to inhibit my impulses. I need to be able to connect the dots and forward think like A plus B equals this terrible C.

Probably shouldn't do that then. Those are all cognitive skills that many of these kids struggle with on a good day. Yeah. So no wonder they're getting in their own way, right?

If they could do better, they would. And so spending all of our time and energy trying to set up these increasingly complex systems to get them just motivated enough to behave is a complete waste of these parents' energy.

And they have so little precious energy to give. That's why I'm saying I'm not asking you to work harder. I'm just asking you to take all of that energy and shift it somewhere different.

There is usually this internal struggle that happens because we've been taught that's what behavior is. It's willful, it's defiant, it's on purpose. And so to pull ourselves away, from that and consider a different possibility and put our energy there.

It feels like a big leap of faith for some of these parents. But most parents that I end up working with have truly tried everything. They're not coming to me on day one of things being challenging.

Sometimes it's years and years and years. So I say, well, it sounds like you've tried everything. You truly have. So why don't we just give this a shot?

Yeah. Yeah. And see what happens. And after a while, what they find is there's relief of not having to do that. It's so much wasted energy, right? It's like, ah, this feels so much better.

Because this other path that is away from consequences, reward-based threats, bribes, what is down this alternative path is greater connection with your child, increased empathy, right?

There's just all of this. It opens up possibilities that this other path doesn't have available, right? So I know I went off your question a little bit longer.

No, no, no, no, no. That's perfect. But what does it mean for a parent to support a child or a teen In the way that you're talking about. I mean, what, so, so for example, I messed up with a patient this week.

It was a little girl with very difficult impulse control and we share a bathroom with the other office and she opened the door and you know, I used a behavioral mod technique.

to not have her open the door and of course she opened the door again and again and again and she's a lovely little girl you know and and after about three times i was like you know i it's me not you i get it but but what does it mean to do it differently yeah yeah so it's starting from this foundational understanding that brain and behaviors are always connected so if we're considering a behavior like wow do they keep doing this, right?

That we consider what's happening with their brain or not, right alongside that. And so you just mean that for that little girl, like, oh, impulse control, that's what's happening with her brain, right?

And so we move from trying to control her and get compliance to trying to set the expectation somewhere that's more in alignment with how her brain works.

If she literally has the impulse control of a two-year-old, which is basically zero, What would we do, right? What would we do? Would we put up a visual that says, like a stop sign, right?

That says, oh, that's right, I can't go in here, right? Do we lock the door? Do we sit in front of it? How do we help her basically keep herself from getting into that loop because of her lagging skills?

So taking that more generally for all parents, It's starting from the understanding that any behavior has something to do with their brain and how it works differently.

And then the steep learning curve at times for parents is understanding, well, what does that mean for my child? How do they lag behind in certain skills that maybe another child with their same diagnosis doesn't struggle with as much?

Those details are important, right? Once you understand that, like, oh, is it attention and working memory? Is it executive functioning? Is it dismaturity, like a gap socially, emotionally?

between their chronological age and where they are. Then those frustrating behaviors start to make so much more sense. It's like, ah, man, dang it, that got in their way again.

Just like when you said you hit yourself upside the head. It's like, oh, dang it, her impulse control got in her way again. It's not about her character.

It's about slagging skill. That we, who have control of the environment, the adults, need to be proactive about and be thinking about, right? Right. She's not a bad kid.

She's not. Right. And it's also very hard when the messages are coming in from so many other people, your kid's bad or you, child, are bad. to reframe that, but it's so important to their getting better.

Yes, yes, it is. I think it's the essential ingredient to them getting better because so much of their health and stability relies on their trusted adults, their parents, their primary caregivers, understanding that they are good.

and leading with empathy in that relationship, even in those hardest moments, which is so much easier said than done, that steadies their nervous system so that those behavioral symptoms can decrease in intensity and in frequency over time, right?

And one of the things I've heard you say before, too, is being present, feeling your feet on the ground. And I think so much of the time we don't do that as a society.

Forget about the exact stuff we're talking about. And that is so important. Can you talk about that a little bit more? Yeah, and the foundational understanding behind that is that in order to support our child's very fragile nervous system, again, that's easily thrown into fight or flight or collapse mode, easily dysregulated, we have to be regulated ourselves.

Now, it's impossible for us to be regulated 100% of the time, so that is not the goal. The goal is to understand when we are being entering into dysregulation and having, I call them, things in our back pocket that we can do to get regulated again, like feeling grounded in our body, in our space, right?

Now, the reason why that's so important, it truly is our greatest parenting tool, our ability to co-regulate with our child. We can't do that if we're dysregulated, then all bets are off, right?

But in the midst of a challenging moment, typically what parents try to do is talk more, talk louder, reason, logic, right? You're gonna sit down, that was not okay, we're gonna talk about this.

That conversation, everything they're asking their child to do, relies on their child being regulated, having a steady nervous system, and also having access to cognitive skills.

Why did I say that to mom? What was I thinking? Can I put myself in my mom's shoes?

Parent healing, school challenges, and future worries

No, no, no, no. Those skills might be hard for that child to access on a good day. It is not going to happen in the heat of the moment. So in that moment, what you have to offer your child is your regulated presence, which is oftentimes no talking, right?

It's being in close proximity to them. It's getting maybe lower in body posture. the main ingredient there is being very in touch with what is happening within you.

So what if parents are listening to this and thinking like, that feels impossible to me because my child's rage episodes are terrifying, right? And because of that trauma response, my body is already dysregulated, right?

It's like, yeah, I get it. Right. And also that's where the work is. I want those parents to understand that it is possible to get to the place that I'm describing, but that's why you need your own support to be able to do that.

Right. Yep. Absolutely. It reminds me of another example this week. I had two parents come in and the little boy

was just raging and trying to elope and, you know, not comfortable in his own skin at all.

And I watched the mom trying to help him and she was so dysregulated herself She was almost a puddle on the floor and was sitting down and trying to get at his level, but not in a way that he was able to receive it.

And the dad stepped in and gently and lovingly just asked the mom to go sit on the other side of the room. And he stood up and his presence and his calmness, the child immediately just let it go.

Yes, I believe it. I believe it. And it wasn't, you know, I'm not saying she's the bad parent, he's the great parent, and it was just a different way of looking at that child with a lens that wasn't so hurt and so shameful and so defeated.

that was able to just stand up and be present and grounded. I mean, literally his feet were on the floor and she was curled up in a ball in the chair.

Yes. Yeah. Right. And so it sounds like she was deep in her dysregulation. And again, no shame and blame. Like that is just what you said, like completely understandable based on what you described.

And if another parent can tag in, with their regulated presence, right? It's single parents. This is incredibly difficult for them for the obvious reasons.

But if there are two parents in the household who are both actually parenting, and I say that in all seriousness, and they're on the same page with this, That is such a gift because that co-regulation that you described, it is contagious one way or another.

We can be a buffer influence like that dad was able to be in that moment, or we can be a triggering influence. And that's never our intent, but it happened.

It's going to happen. So again, the goal is to recognize when that pattern, that cycle is in process and try to take a step back, do what we need to do so that we can enter back into that relationship with a more regulated presence.

Yeah, absolutely. And even if you are a single parent, I mean, there are also ways just to, before you intervene or try to be with your child, just taking that cleansing breath, that extra few seconds of a breath that may help you to be more present in that moment in a slightly more regulated way.

Oh, absolutely. Yeah, the moments a day do matter. And I'm sure your experience is the same as mine, where self care is not a topic I talk about. It's more I talk about it as resilience building and nervous system healing, because that's really what we're talking about.

And then we get into what is actually research based in terms of healing nervous systems, and it's breathwork, it's movement, it's all these moments a day that can add up and that really do matter.

But you know, you mentioned the mom who wakes up and is already tense, like bracing herself for what the day brings. I have a lot of parents who describe that feeling.

And one of the things that we do is the moment your eyes open, get into the habit of checking in with your body. and relaxing, taking one minute to relax your whole body so that you can go thoughtfully into the next moment with your child rather than just alarm goes off, getting up, charging into the day and hoping that it's gonna be a good one, right?

So those moments of awareness and intentionality really do matter in terms of helping with our endurance and our resilience through the day. But also I think they're good models for our kids.

Because if they see us doing it, even though it might not soak in in the moment or even, you know, really ever. You know, there is a bodily experience that reverberates with them, I feel.

Oh, yeah. No, we know. I mean, it's not just a feeling we know. And so what you and I are talking about is just for folks listening, is not your child maybe even consciously seeing and going, oh, that looks good.

Mom's being a good role model. I should do that. It is they embody our regulated presence. And it's a biological imperative for them to be connected to us.

And so, yes, it really, really does matter. And it strengthens their nervous system. Like a lot of what I do with parents is helping them understand the lagging skills and then how to build those skills because our kids are capable of growing in skills it just may be a different timeline than we expected right and so one of them is emotional regulation skills and parents like how do i build that that is such a problem it's like use your regulated presence to co-regulate like that strengthens their nervous system right Yeah, you know, I often talk about my own family and, you know, my husband will call it my work voice or my son will call it my autism voice when I'm not regulated.

And they can tell right away that I'm a little pressured or, you know, and just by saying, you know, work voice, you know, that I'm like, oh, right. And sometimes it's also when you do have two parents or when you have another person that can gently help you to see that you may not be regulated as well can also be helpful.

Yes. Oh, so helpful. Yeah, especially for folks to have that conversation early. Like, this is how I want to be supported. This is our keyword, right?

So there's no hard feelings about that. My 17-year-old neurotypical child, when I'm really kind of pursuing my daughter with something that is totally brain-based, he'll say, Mom, come on, it's a brain thing.

Like, let's go. I'm like, oh my gosh, my own child is… But I love that he has that perspective and he can see it so clearly when I am dysregulated in my key.

Exactly. And having that conversation with your spouse or with somebody else in your family or anybody, not at a time of crisis. And finding those words that everybody feels comfortable with is so important.

You don't have to call it what it is. Finding a code word can be really helpful. Yes, absolutely. Yeah. So you've talked a lot about the parent experience.

And I know you said to me earlier that you really do focus on the parent. Why is that essential? And tell me a little bit more about that. Yeah. You know, the perspective that I have, of course, folks listening are here, it's very biased in getting away from that behavioral lens and moving into, I mean, I say it's biased, but it's research-based, that brain and behaviors are connected.

And so what that means when you have a child with a neurobehavioral condition is that is their biology. I know that's really hard for some parents to accept in here.

Doesn't mean that it can't get better. Doesn't mean that there isn't growth that can happen. But there is a piece of who they are that really needs to be seen clearly.

and then allowing them to be who they are. That comes from the world understanding they have this difference that is not their fault. It's part of their physical makeup.

What do we do with people who have a difference in their physicality? We provide them with accommodations. We as a society have no problem doing that for someone who is, for example, wheelchair bound.

Correct. It's really tricky when it's difference of the brain, when the brain is the part of the body that's been changed in some way. And behaviors are usually the only symptom.

So why do I work with parents? Because they are the ones in charge of that environment. They hold the power And if they can shift their lens and see their child, they have a difference that needs my support and accommodations,

not my punishment.

That makes those frustrating behavior. It's like, oh, this makes so much more sense. It softens us. Relationships improve, behavioral symptoms calm down, right?

So that is working with them and supporting them in that process. I believe is the most effective way for the whole family to heal, not just the child who's impacted, but the siblings, everybody in the home, right?

Yeah. Yeah. And it's, you know, I often talk to families about the the connection of the neurologic system, the brain with the immune system. They come from the same cells in the embryo.

And what we're talking about in Pan's Pandas is a dysregulated immune system, an immune system that's not tolerant. And we're trying to build tolerance in that immune system.

We're trying to calm down the fire. But I try to help parents see We're doing the same thing with the brain and by the neurologic system, but some of that has to be in just the ways you're talking about.

That's the way we calm it down. It's not by forcing something on them. It's about seeing it and refocusing ourselves to be able to bring the tolerance to their brains and therefore their behavior.

That's right. That's right. And I would say the most common pattern that I see with parents is most parents get on board pretty quickly with the theory behind it that you and I are talking about the implementation day to day making that leap is like where I come in and help a lot of parents.

But once they start to see it in terms of like, oh, wow, this is how different my child's experience of navigating this world is compared to what I thought or what other people think.

This is where I need to adjust. This is where I need to accommodate. This is where I need to think about them differently. That there is liberation in that.

It's like, I get it. Things start to get better. There's also this like, oh my goodness. Like, why didn't I know this earlier? Or what does this mean for them growing up?

Or what does this mean for my experience now as their parent, right? And so I just mentioned that because it's kind of a both-and experience that happens with all of that.

Yeah. And then I've also heard you talking about future tripping. I love that phrase. Describe that a little bit more. Yeah, well, we're just dipping into it there with the last comment.

Say you have a 10-year-old who has some incredibly challenging behaviors.

Resources and closing encouragement

They're no longer able to tolerate even the school environment, their school refusal, and that parent understandably gets into this spiraling of, oh my gosh, if this is happening at this age, what does this mean for middle school?

and will they ever make it to high school and oh my gosh they have to go to college and how are they going to manage the real world are they ever going to be independent and like you know fly the nest and what i say to parents is that spiral is so understandable and also it is one of the quickest ways to dysregulate your nervous system um you don't want to have your head in the sand in terms of what Your child might need in the future that you didn't anticipate before But it's this balance of this is the moment that I can impact.

This is what I can do for them here and now and Let's focus our energy here and now so again so much easier said than done But if you can rein it in and kind of reel yourself back Understand when you're starting to have that

spiraling happen have something in your back pocket to ground you again in this moment Right?

You will be again, it's just that just consume so much energy, right? So conserving your energy for what you can actually impact. Yeah, yeah, so important and so much, you know, it's also important in the kids with PANS-PANDAS, we talk about the PTSD of it, you know, once the kids are better, you know, once they are improved, their immune systems, their neurologic systems are getting back to where they were before.

And then something happens. Well, their girlfriend breaks up with them. They get a bad grade on a test or whatever. I can see the parent going right back to, you know, oh my God, it's starting again.

I mean, I have so many parents calling me saying, I need the antibiotic because they're this, this, and this is happening. I'm like, wait a minute, what else is going on?

Oh, well, their girlfriend just broke up with them, but that doesn't have anything. Well, yes, it does. There is life. And let's just be present in this moment and not, you know, but that's how you also realize as a parent, you still need more help.

Your child may be healed. Your child may be leaving the nest, but you haven't recovered from the trauma from many years ago. That's right. I would agree with that.

I know you work so much with parents, but what about school systems? I mean, do you have programs, recommendations? for parents in talking to schools?

I wish I did. I work with a lot of parents who then bring me into the school discussion and I do a lot of trainings for schools. I know that that is a really tricky place for parents And I just was having a group, I run groups for parents too, and we were talking about the schools and the difficulties this parent was experiencing.

And I said, well, let's assume that they're missing information, just like we were at one point. how can we translate what you know about your child now and how their brain works to the school setting, right?

Really changing it to that environment so they can talk with them about accommodations there. But yeah, super super tricky. And I have some schools that are immediately on board and willing to think this way about it and other schools that have a very very hard time shifting their lens.

And then I say to parents, well, have we come to the point where we believe that school is not going to be able to do it. They're not going to be able to shift their lens.

And what does that mean for your child? It means they're unsafe in that environment. And so then that's a really hard decision point for that parent. Right.

But that is the truth. That is the truth. They're not safe then in that environment. So. Right. Right, very good points, very good points. So Eileen, how do people find you?

And also, I forgot to ask you earlier, can you care for families anywhere or is there a catchment area, et cetera? Yeah, no, I offer parent coaching. all over the world, actually.

I have parents all over the world who I work with. And my website is just my name, EileenDivine.com. I also have a podcast for parents where we talk about this shift from a behavioral lens to a brain first parenting lens, and it's called Brain First Parenting with Eileen Devine.

So my website, my podcast, those are probably the two best places to learn more about this approach and the work that I do with parents. Yeah, and I have about 500 people I can think of right now who are going to be either going to that website or at least joining your podcast also.

Are there any other resources you recommend to parents who may be looking Um, you know, I, we've talked a lot

about the brain and I also talk about the nervous system, but one resource that is very nervous system focused is Robin Goble's work and her book is parenting kids with big baffling behaviors.

So she comes from the, she comes from the world of helping parents who have kids with complex trauma, but everything she talks about with the nervous system translates And she's very open in her work.

She actually has a three-part podcast series on neuroimmune illnesses because her husband suffers from a neuroimmune illness. So she translates a lot of that work to what it means for this population of kids as well.

So that would be another resource. And that's an excellent point, too. I mean, we're talking about children with neurodevelopmental, neurobehavioral, neuropsychiatric, neuroimmune issues.

But it translates also to adults. you know, our parents that may be going through dementia, you know. Oh, totally. Yes, yes, yeah. I have, my mom has dementia and it reminds me as she progresses through that so much about what I learned in my parenting of Maya applies to my changing relationship with her.

But the other piece I would say is it is not uncommon for me to work with parents who then are like, oh, my brother. Now I can see it so clearly. Like that's why he struggled so much growing up, right?

Or my cousin or my spouse. Like it makes so much more sense to me now. So yes, it's about the human experience. It's not just, not at all just about kids.

Yeah. Yeah. The cycle of life. Yeah. Absolutely. Any last words you want to leave our parents with any words of wisdom or anything? You know, I think what I would say, especially with this population of parents, is there is more hope for you than I'm sure you are usually led to believe.

And I would not do this work if families didn't heal. And I would never tell a parent that it's going to happen overnight. I don't think they'd believe me, but it certainly is not the way that it works because it's complex.

This transformation that you and I have been talking about now for the last 40 minutes or so, it's complex, but it's so worth the time and energy that it takes.

So just sending so much compassion to those parents who are currently navigating it and holding hope for you because I know that it's really difficult to hold it on your own in those really hard moments.

Such good advice, and there is hope. It is a marathon, but there is definitely hope. And Eileen, I thank you so much for what you do. We're probably sisters from another mother somewhere, and I could tell 20 more stories, and you'd be like, yep, yep, no that way, and all that.

So I really appreciate you being here and doing what you're doing to help so many families. So likewise, and I appreciate you having me. Thank you. Thank you for tuning in to Doctor Talks.

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