

#26 Staying Mentally When Your Child Isn't...

MJ Murray Vachon LCSW: [00:00:00] Welcome to Inner Challenge. I'm MJ Murray Vachon, a Licensed Clinical Social Worker with more than 44,000 hours of therapy sessions and 30 years of teaching mental wellness. Join me as I have an unscripted conversation with guests just like you, as we strive to take the mystery out of mental wellness.

MJ Murray Vachon LCSW: Welcome to The Inner Challenge Podcast. Today we're going to talk about how does a parent take care of their own mental wellness when they have a child suffering from depression, anxiety, bipolar, or some other form of mental illness. I've invited a mother who's been on this journey with one of her children for 10 years. In my clinical practice, as well as in my own family and with my own friends, I have walked this road and I think it's a really incredibly challenging road to walk. I appreciate so much you being willing to come on today and talk about this with us. I want to begin by asking you to introduce yourself.

Guest: I am the parent of two [00:01:00] boys. One is 28 and one is 25. My 28-year-old has been very successful in hitting all the markers that you would want someone to hit as they're growing up and my 25-year-old has struggled horribly with mental illness. My husband and I considered ourselves to be pretty good parents. We weren't exceptional. We were just trying to raise well-rounded adults. I have a degree in psychology and I run a business.

MJ Murray Vachon LCSW: We're going to talk a little bit more about the challenges of having someone in your family that you love so dearly suffer from a mental illness. But before we go there I'm interested in how you define mental wellness at this point in your life.

Guest: That's a really good question. For me, mental wellness is doing the best I can with what's happening at that certain moment. So, the bar raises and lowers depending on what's happening, right? Sometimes the best I can do is just try not to let my mind go too far into the future. And [00:02:00] sometimes it's I'm solid, I'm good. I can stay positive about things.

MJ Murray Vachon LCSW: One thing I really love about that definition is you can hear in your voice that our mental wellness is not something that's static, right? That it's always interacting with whatever is the challenge in front

of us or on the good days, the peacefulness in front of us. Yeah. And that one of the challenges I think, in a situation when you have a child who's suffering Yes, is to figure out how do I manage my mind, so I don't become my own worst enemy. In a journey that you didn't sign up for, your child didn't sign up for. How do you know when you are doing well mentally? What's it feel like for you?

Guest: For me it feels like I can contribute to the solution, whatever that might be, or I feel positive about what the outcome or I feel positive about the steps I'm taking toward a more positive outcome. The other [00:03:00] thing that I've noticed is as moms we're trying all the time to protect our kids from a potential outcome that maybe they can't see. Like when they were little and they would want to cross the road by themselves and we'd run up and grab their hand and be like, we have to wait for traffic. You're always thinking five, 10 steps ahead. When this happens, you can't do that anymore. You have to try to stay in the present moment, because your mind can go to really horrible places. If you aren't careful about what your thoughts are, which is not easy to do you can end up in the land of devastation faster than you can even imagine.

MJ Murray Vachon LCSW: When you have a child who suffers from a mental illness and at the same time, is trying to figure how to live in the day-to-day life whether it's high school, college, post-college one of the biggest challenges, I think is the uncertainty. Yeah. It really is one of the skills that I think parents who are on this road have [00:04:00] to figure out. How do I not let the uncertainty overwhelm me so I then end up becoming depressed or I end up becoming so anxious that the peaceful and the calmness that I want to have I have no way to even have access to it. Are there are things that you've learned to do to bring your mind back to the present? This is where we're at today. It says nothing about where we'll be in six months or six years.

Guest: I think one of the biggest things that I do is I'll reach out for help if I need it. And I'll talk to somebody who I really trust. I remember I was having a conversation with my brother recently about something that had happened and he said to me, "Sometimes our imagination is worse than what's really happening." I try to keep that in mind when things happen. , but it is hard in the moment to stay positive or stay grounded and stay where you're at mentally to make sure that you're not creating, you're not adding fuel to that [00:05:00] fire. You don't want to do anything to increase it or make it worse.

MJ Murray Vachon LCSW: One of the things that you said that you do is that you reached out to another person for support. Yes. That sounds easy. We do that all the time. Hey, my dog's out. Help me go find it. But I think when a child

is suffering from mental illness, the pool of social support that therapists like to call is usually pretty small, and I'd be interested in your experience with that.

Guest: That's such a great question. It's something I've really struggled with. When people find out that your child has mental illness, it's like you have what was that in the Bible that people used to have where they'd get sent, leprosy. Suddenly you're alone. And you feel that, and you feel isolated. I think as parents, we to be brutally honest, be mad at our child for having a mental illness. Why can't they just get over it? Why can't you get through it? Why? Why is this happening? But if you change your perspective just a little bit, if [00:06:00] you say, what if I replaced the word mental illness with cancer, if my child had cancer, would I be mad at them for having cancer? Would I be mad at them for not being able to cope today and go to school? What I used to say to myself was, if my child had cancer, my front porch would have 200 Casseroles rolls on it, because this is such a great, kind, loving community. That everybody would want to support us, right? But because he has mental illness, it was like they all vanished. Even the people that love us and support us, didn't know how to help. So, they were scarce. It was few and far between. So, you have to learn how to be your own support system. And it's hard. I have a friend who's from a huge family. Her dad was one of 10 kids. She has I don't know, several hundred cousins that live in her community. Her son is mentally ill, and she feels so alone, and I'm like, that's such a great example of how people, they don't know how to help [00:07:00] and so they don't do anything.

MJ Murray Vachon LCSW: As a therapist, that is a dynamic that I see again and again. I've worked with numbers of people who have had children or spouses with cancer themselves with cancer, and one of the things they've said to me is, we have so much food, we're donating it to the Homeless Center, to St. Margaret's House. I have never had in 36 years a parent even tell me that someone gave them a casserole. Yeah. When their child was in the lowest of lows with a mental illness. I think you're right. Part of it is we're still educating ourself that this is not a character issue. Most people see mental illness as a character issue. If this person tried harder, if they didn't feel so sorry for themselves, if they just read a book on positive psychology, then they wouldn't be so difficult, right? But we really know that's not true In 2023. I really value [00:08:00] that You said this from somebody who's walking the walk, but I'm hoping on this podcast, as people hear this, they begin to treat, families who are going through this the same way as cancer. The other thing you said that was really valuable is anger. I don't think I've ever worked with anyone, the child, the adult child, the family member who didn't have anger. We really give people permission to be mad at cancer . Yeah. In some ways that's empowering, but the difference is people are mad at the cancer. What we are talking about often is mad at the individual. Because unlike cancer, mental illness is invisible. We can

have, these are the cancer cells and this is the tumor, and that gives us something really concrete. Yeah. But mental illness is invisible. And sometimes we all have the symptoms of mental illness. We all can have a few days where we don't feel good or we can ruminate about something. But mental illness is all of those things [00:09:00] extended and it gets in the way of just normal day-to-day functioning. Anger is really something that everyone has to figure out how to tame. I'm wondering what's helped you tame the anger that you had really probably towards your child.

Guest: One thing is changing the perspective of how you look at it. And making sure that you're being aware of the fact that this isn't something that's under their control. The other thing I think that's super important is that you have a really constant free flowing dialogue with your partner, because I have to say that when I was low, he would, just, have a chat with me and be like let's regroup, let's take a little breather here and it was mutual. I would do the same for him when he got low. I'd be like, let's, let's take a couple hours, go get a cup of coffee, get out of the house, change our scenery. But yeah, you're angry. You're angry with them for the way they're behaving. And especially when they aren't properly [00:10:00] diagnosed and you don't know what else is coming. It's scary.

MJ Murray Vachon LCSW: It's really scary. I want to come back to the, not properly diagnosed in a second, but also you're talking about social support and one of the things that I see in my office that I'm really happy to hear wasn't your path is that often the mother carries the majority of this. Often in my experience, the father doesn't have as much information, may even not think it's true and may minimize it. One of the things that I've really learned is how important it is for the parents to be educated. So, both of them see that they have a really important role in supporting this child through this illness. Were you and your husband always pretty much believers on the same page, or did one of you pull the other one to that place?

Guest: I would say early on he, when I would bring it up, he got this look like a deer [00:11:00] in the headlights because I don't think he knew what to do to fix it. That's what men do. They fix things. So, he would really struggle with that. But then as the disease started to progress and other things started to happen, he was quickly on board because he's, cares tremendously for his children. I think that most people do but the deer in the headlight look can sometimes last longer than, it needs to. I was told one time early on by a psychiatrist, that the person who suffers the most when a child is mentally ill is the mother. Because I think we as mothers, we cure that burden. We blame ourselves. We think we've done something wrong. We should have done things differently. We should have,

changed schools or saw things early on. So, we pick up the responsibility for their mental illness. You have to take a step back and I had somebody else say to me at a different time, you know what part of your child's mental illness is your fault? That was a real wake up call for me because I didn't realize, I was not conscious of the fact that I was totally blaming myself and carrying all of that.

MJ Murray Vachon LCSW: [00:12:00] And the field of psychology for many years blamed mothers. Okay. It wasn't that you took that all on your own, and I think probably from the beginning of time, women have often been blamed for children in a way that was not fair. One of the things that I think is been a real progress in the last 30 or 40 years in mental health is that we understand that the mind and the body really work together. I think most people don't understand. We don't know the cause of mental illness.

Guest: Right.

MJ Murray Vachon LCSW: We know the symptoms; we can group them together. This is not like cancer where, oh, you have this type of cancer and it's this tumor and that's what's causing it. But we don't know the cause and so there is a certain amount of uncertainty that anyone who suffers or anyone with a loved one that suffers, has to learn to live with in order to navigate this road in a healthy way.

Guest: The other aspect that nobody talks about is I was embarrassed. I was embarrassed that he was mentally ill. [00:13:00] It wasn't like I was walking out saying to my neighbors, "Hey, my child's mentally ill. Can you guys help us?" I was trying to keep a lid on this. Yes. I was desperately trying to keep a lid on it. Then finally one day I was like, is that helping or hurting? I think it's hurting. I think it's making things worse. I was like, that's it. I can't worry about what people think anymore because they're going to think what they think, whether I say anything or not. Then I started thinking maybe it would be beneficial if I started talking about this so that I normalized it so that other people knew that, we were the couple that, and not just saying this like literally, About four or five different friends came to us at different points in their lives when their kids were little and said, if we died, can we leave our child to you? Because we come here and we think you're such great parents. You two are just so about the kids and you're doing such a great job with your kids. When this happened I thought, oh, they're going to rescind their offers. They're going to find out we're not great parents. Then I started thinking, the truth of the matter is that this could happen to anybody. Nobody wants [00:14:00] to think that, but it could. Genetically,

you just don't know what you're going to get, what that mix is going to be and how that person is going to respond to the environment they live in.

MJ Murray Vachon LCSW: I had a really inspiring conversation with a young couple this past summer whose seven-year-old was very depressed. I saw a form of humility in the father that I seldom see. I laid it out to them that it's great that you're really trying to find some relief for him at such a young age. Often this goes undiagnosed or minimized I think is probably a fair way because we're hopeful like maybe it's this, maybe it's that. As I laid it out, I said, it will take time, it will be expensive, you'll have to learn things that you're probably not that interested in learning. And the father said what? And I said you're going to have to learn a really high level of emotional intelligence. When we talk about a growth mindset. Nothing like having a child who is depressed [00:15:00] asks parents to lean into a growth mindset. His response to me was so refreshing, he said. "I don't know anything about emotional intelligence. I'm not even interested in it, but if I have to for my child, I guess I could do it." I think that's where a lot of people start, but they don't have the guts to say it out loud. Yeah. I think that if we could give ourselves permission, to not know, because I know people do this readily if their child has spina bifida or if their child has down syndrome and there's support communities and people learn and they get support. It's the same thing if a child's depressed or anxious. It does require parents to not just have a growth mindset, but I think is even more important is it requires us to change our hearts from anger and judgment to compassion.

Guest: Absolutely. And once you get there, it's like you've been set free. All of the weight of the [00:16:00] anger and the anxiety and the fear and the embarrassment that, once you get to the place of compassion, and that's why that change of thought from mental illness to cancer. If I said to someone in my childhood cancer, they would immediately be compassionate toward me. So, we have to give that to the mentally ill, to the person who's struggling and suffering and trying so hard to just get through the day. My husband used to say to me, there's a storm going on in his brain. , and I loved that. It freed us up from being mad at him for what was happening. If we could see it as there was a storm going on in his brain, then we could be more compassionate. That's the most important thing to get to.

MJ Murray Vachon LCSW: It isn't about you.

Guest: Exactly.

MJ Murray Vachon LCSW: Even to the point where it isn't about you to fix it, it's about you to accompany him in the process. Of doing the best to manage it and sometimes people get lucky and they do fix it. It's not always that people, suffer from depression at 18 [00:17:00] and have it forever. I think of anger in a simplistic form. I am mad because I'm not getting my way. No parent holds their two-year-old and says, "Oh, I hope they grow up to have a mental illness." so there's always tons of grief, tons of loss, but that usually in the beginning comes in the form of anger. Sure. How did you move from anger to compassion?

Guest: I want to be really clear here. This wasn't a smooth, easy journey. This was a very difficult path, and there were nights and times where we asked him to leave the house because he was being volatile. We felt like we had to, but it was so painful and so hard. And you have to realize that if you're angry it's being directed at someone. It's either being directed at yourself, you're mentally ill child, your spouse, your dog, somebody's getting the brunt of that anger, right? And a lot of times as parents, we turn in on ourselves and you wake up in the middle of the night. [00:18:00] Mad at yourself, you're where are they? Are they okay? Is someone helping them? Are they safe? Are they warm? Have they eaten? This is the path that you take to get to compassion. But it's not just compassion for them mentally ill you have to be compassionate and kind to yourself too, because we take on so much responsibility for them. It's a long road and it's a hard road and it's a lonely road. I've spoken to other parents about this journey because for some reason people just seem to be attracted to me, who have mentally ill I kids. I'm brutally honest now. I tell 'em we made a lot of mistakes. It wasn't easy. And the best part was, is that our child has been able to put all of that aside and he's not angry with us, that we weren't able to cope better at the time. So, we're being more compassionate with each other.

MJ Murray Vachon LCSW: That's really beautiful. That's what I find and that when I talked about, we move into a growth mindset, through really rocky ways. Raising a child who isn't suffering [00:19:00] from a mental illness is rocky.

Guest: Yeah.

MJ Murray Vachon LCSW: And parents and children will have periods where they escalate with each other and get mad. Your husband's metaphor of when there's a storm in the brain. You can expect that. And then it becomes this very difficult dance to figure out how do we draw the line? Because sometimes the most compassionate thing to do is to say, you can't be here right now. There's no cookbook for this. There's no recipe for this. And there will be

mistakes made. And then at times there'll be boundaries set that really are clarifying and life giving, right? Even though they're messy as hell, right?

Guest: It's really easy for other people from their perspective to say, here's what you should do and that might work with a mentally well child, but that's only going to make things worse for a mentally ill child. That's not going to be what solves the problem, or that helps to get you to a place where the problem is at least tolerable. That's hard too because sometimes when you're venting or you need support. Somebody will start to say here's what you need to do. They're doing it out love, but at the [00:20:00] time it could feel judgmental and heavy.

MJ Murray Vachon LCSW: In their desire to help people offer solutions and we have a whole body of research on developmental knowledge for kids who don't have mental illnesses. But we don't have any of that. No. And so my biggest indicator typically when I'm working with a family is the mother. I say to the mother again and again, what's your Gut? What's your Gut? .

Guest: That's a really good point. And I'm going to tell you why, because I started saying something was wrong when he was like four or five years old. I said it to my siblings who have always been very supportive and loving. I said, something's wrong. One of them came back to me and said, you've worried too much about him. And I said, okay. So, I took that in, thought about it, and then 10 years later when everything kind of explode I thought I wasn't wrong. I was picking up on something. I didn't know what it was, but like the things that worked with my [00:21:00] older son, timeout, consequences didn't work with him. It was like it hadn't happened. I couldn't figure out why. I have a degree in psychology. I have certification in how to teach parenting. Why can't I figure this out? What's happening here? I couldn't put my finger on it. Now I want to say this, I had a mentally ill father and I felt triggered by his mental illness when my son had it because it was similar to what I had experienced as a child from a different perspective. I was sandwiched in between these two mentally ill people, and I didn't know how to navigate it. And there certainly isn't a roadmap or anything out there. There's no book that says, here's what you should do, here's what you should try to avoid. I think we probably went through four or five psychiatrists before we finally found one who was able to help them. There's no one solution every, everybody's different.

MJ Murray Vachon LCSW: Every psychiatrist will offer different solutions. We're not at the point of treatment where [00:22:00] it's like cancer, where you could go to two or three different people for a regular type of cancer and probably get the same kind of treatment. We're it's not that it's vastly different, but there is a lot of difference of what psychiatrists are comfortable with.

Guest: Yeah.

MJ Murray Vachon LCSW: Everything you're saying is so incredibly helpful. I want to punctuate that your experience of thinking this child is different is pretty universal of what mothers say in my office.

Guest: Really?

MJ Murray Vachon LCSW: I knew this child was different. Yeah. Often they knew that child was different because they had other children. Secondly, it exactly what you said. When I put this child in timeout, there was not just a tantrum there was things being thrown, punches being landed, and it was scary. I often think of it as what your husband said, that there aren't brakes on that brain in the same way that other kids, right? Often mothers will say they, they [00:23:00] could go two hours. Where my children, when they were four and they'd lose it, they might go 15 or 20 minutes and they'd fall asleep with exhaustion. I really want to punctuate that if you're a mother trust your gut. Because early intervention doesn't necessarily mean that you won't have a child who won't have a mental illness. I think what it does is it gives parents the tools.

Guest: You want to get those tools before it escalates. Yeah. You want to have him before you're the deer in the headlight. And you don't know you're frozen. You don't know what to do. Yeah. You're standing there going, I don't know what's happening. We were just talking about something pretty innocent and now he's escalated and he's throwing things. And he's big. And we never spanked our kids. We believed right from the beginning that corporal punishment wasn't for us. We just are not that, we're just more gentle people. It wasn't a good fit. I didn't believe in it. So, when he would escalate and get a little bit physically violent, it terrified me. It scared me. But I have to say that each of the psychiatrists that we went to [00:24:00] gave him a different diagnosis. Yes. So, we were told he was a lot of different things. Initially bipolar and then borderline and depressed. I can't remember all of them. But the interesting thing was he was researching, he was watching, he was paying attention and doing all these researches, and he kept saying I'm borderline. Finally, We went to see a specialist in New York because we thought he was bipolar. So, I went there and I took his class and I learned all about his method and how he works with his bipolar patients. And he said to me, he's not bipolar. I'm a specialized bipolar. He's not bipolar. He was the first one who said, something else is going on here.

MJ Murray Vachon LCSW: Again, these are emerging illnesses, right? Because the child brain begins to turn into the adult brain at 12, right? And it

doesn't fully mature till 25, which is one of the reasons. , we see mental illness getting worse in children around 18 to [00:25:00] 20, right? Because their brain is changing and the illness then becomes more active, for lack of a better word. I think it's really common. I know it's really common. Palmer out of Harvard talks about this. He's a psychiatrist. As an adult, he could have a number of diagnoses because in psychiatry, it's the symptoms that we've put together and those symptoms develop and change. I really want to, commend you because so much of this is being in a boat rowing up upstream with 40-pound weights on. And you are doing it on your own.

Guest: Yeah.

MJ Murray Vachon LCSW: And you're learning. And if we could do anything differently, that's what I wish we did differently. I know we have a great conversation going on right now about mental health and I think that's important. It's really what encouraged me to do the podcast, but I'm hoping it moves into more of a conversation of supporting and of sharing knowledge.

Guest: I think [00:26:00] it's really important that we get there because we have to stop shaming each other. Yeah. Having a child that's mentally ill. Cause you wouldn't shame someone whose child had cancer, right? You wouldn't say, this is your fault, you did something wrong. Something happened, something went horribly wrong during your parenting and you created this situation. That's a myth, a lie. And we have got, as a society, we have to put that aside because it's like I said before, is this hurting or helping?

MJ Murray Vachon LCSW: Other thing is when we're always shaming, we are blocking this person from really building a life that allows them to thrive. I think it's a real misnomer that mentally ill people can't be productive, functioning, happy people. They have to learn to live with their illness. They have to create a life that allows the rest, the nutrition, the exercise, the social support necessary.

Guest: I have to say that this is one of the areas where I'm very proud of him [00:27:00] because he has risen to that occasion. He'll get up in the morning and he takes a cold shower. I have to tell you that sounds absolutely awful to me. He knows that it resets his parasympathetic nervous system and that he'll have less anxiety throughout the day if he does it. And that really helps. He does things. He goes for walks; he tries to stay in the sun if it's out. He works out. He's an incredibly talented artist. His art and his work, he's able to do that at a home. So, when he goes through a depressive period, which I know he still does and he's,

maybe not as productive as he usually is, he can kind of manage that because he can work from home.

MJ Murray Vachon LCSW: One of the things that works against someone with the mental illness is that we have a culture now where sleep and exercise and eating well becomes a chore. It's not structured into the culture anymore in a way that it might have been a hundred years ago. Where there wasn't as much choice. Everybody went to bed at a certain time and there were no phones to [00:28:00] keep people up. One thing I like to say to parents is it's a big learning curve for a kid who doesn't have a mental illness to do self-care in their twenties. I really am so inspired with the young people who I work with who have very serious depression or have bipolar, that sometimes I say to them after, treatment, you're actually much more mentally well than my typical 26-year-old. Yeah, because you're a bit like a diabetic. If someone is diabetic, they learn to eat in a way that manages their disease, they're still diabetic, but they don't need a lot of crap because their body can't tolerate it. Some of my clients who have mental illnesses, they're healthier than my clients who don't because they've learned self-care.

Guest: And that's the trick. It's learning how to manipulate your physical body so that it doesn't upset your mental body. He's learned that, saying hurtful mean things to people. , if you throw a glass on the floor and it breaks, [00:29:00] it's all still there, but now it's different. Yeah. So that's the same thing with mean and hurtful words. You want to be careful because you don't want to damage each relationship to the point where it's not mendable or can't go back to a place where it's comfortable for everybody.

MJ Murray Vachon LCSW: Just like mental wellness is really us learning to control our mental state. For people of mental illness, that's also what they're trying to do. everybody's doing the same thing, right? Often people's brains have a breaking system that is a bit different. It's so interesting to me that most of my clients who suffer with mental illness are the kindest, softest most compassionate human beings, and they have these periods where the depression gets flipped into anger. Mean things are said and they'll say, it's just I couldn't stop my mouth. I couldn't stop my brain. Yeah. And this is the same thing with addiction where people can't stop themselves from drinking and they ruin relationships, but they go [00:30:00] back and repair them. People are much more willing to accept apologies than I think we often think. That's healing on both sides. It just, like you said, that you and your husband could say to your son, we're sorry we didn't do this perfectly.

Guest: Right. We never stop trying hoping or believing. And I think that's the biggest thing is staying mentally well. You have to stay in that mindset like, we're going to figure this out. I'm just not going to give up. I'm just not. Yeah. I'm never going to give up on my child.

MJ Murray Vachon LCSW: I often say the greatest thing a parent can do is be a beacon of hope. Because part of mental illness is that light for a period of time will get dimmed. There's really nobody that I've ever seen that can open up that dimmer switch as much as parents or a spouse to say, "No, I'm here with you. You are not alone."

Guest: I want to broach this subject because I think it's super important. The last thing we wanted for him to do was ever be in a mental hospital.. We were terrified that he would end up in a, it was a constant conversation that we don't want him in a [00:31:00] mental hospital. We don't. And then one day, sure enough, it happened where we had no choice. We had to, for his own safety, put him in a mental hospital. It was one of the best things we ever did. And there's this whole misconception out there about what happens. It's like you hit the reset button, everybody gets a chance to take a deep breath. Because this is a difficult situation to navigate. He got a chance to have his meds evaluated and be with other people that, were similar to him and have that support. And yes, he was angry. Yeah, he was very angry. We were terrified. We still went every chance we got to see him every day. He said, I'm afraid you and dad won't come because it's so far away. And my husband turned around, it's going to make me cry a little bit. And he said, I will be there every day.

MJ Murray Vachon LCSW: Wow. What a fortunate young man. Yeah. And again, this is part of the learning curve. Yeah. That no one has a child and imagines, the greatest act of love is to have [00:32:00] him go to a mental hospital. But everybody has a child and knows that probably at some time they'll be in ER getting stitches. Because we do what the child needs in that moment, whether they're six or 16 or 26. All of this, takes courage that none of us have. But all of us can step into, the definition of courage is just moving beyond your fear. Is there anything you haven't said ?

Guest: If you know somebody who's dealing with a child that's mentally ill reach out to 'em they need so much love and support, and they need so much care, and they need somebody to tell them that it's not their fault. That's the first thing I say to anybody who has a child that's mentally ill. This isn't your fault. I know you're probably blaming yourself secretly, or maybe you're saying it out loud, but this is not your fault. Just try to be there for 'em and not judge.

MJ Murray Vachon LCSW: That's a perfect place to end. Thank you so much for being on this.

MJ Murray Vachon LCSW: In today's world where people are struggling with mental illness in record numbers, many parents will face this unexpected path. Today's guest has given us invaluable insights for [00:33:00] traveling this difficult yet growth filled rocky road. Here are my inner challenge insights. Insight number one:

MJ Murray Vachon LCSW: Trust your gut. If your child's reactions to normal day-to-day events, limits and consequences, are consistently extreme and unstable, find a professional to help guide you. Don't be detoured by waiting lists and family and friends that comfort you by encouraging you to not worry so much. Early intervention matters.

MJ Murray Vachon LCSW: Insight number two:

MJ Murray Vachon LCSW: The first intervention in helping children with mental illness has nothing to do with the child. It is a prescription for the parents. Take on the challenge of developing your own mental wellness. You will need high dosages of EQ, emotional intelligence, and self-care to not only support your child and the rest of your family, but to prevent you from becoming chronically anxious [00:34:00] and depressed over your child's condition. For children with chronic illnesses, this road of support does not end for parents when their child reaches 18, 25 or 40. So your mental wellness matters.

MJ Murray Vachon LCSW: Insight number three:

MJ Murray Vachon LCSW: Parents must do their own inner work so we can change our perspective. Anger transforms into compassion, shame into knowledge, grief into acceptance and fear into a resolve: I can do this! Let's be honest, most of us cannot do this work on our own. So, find a therapist and a spiritual path that guide you to learn how to be more loving, patient, and compassionate, you know, a whole person. It is my deepest wish that parents can look back and say to their child, thank you for helping me become a better person.[00:35:00]

MJ Murray Vachon LCSW: Insight number four:

MJ Murray Vachon LCSW: Increase your knowledge and support by checking out NAMI, National Alliance on Mental Illness. NAMI, in my

opinion, is the most underutilized resource of our time. For \$40, you are offered education and support programming that is unparalleled.

MJ Murray Vachon LCSW: Insight number five:

MJ Murray Vachon LCSW: If you want more information on the mental wellness tools that were discussed on this episode, listen to episode number one, What is mental wellness? Episode six and seven are my emotions. Potty trained number eight on self-care, and number 13 and number 14, parenting an adult child in distress. If you're interested in being a guest on the Inner Challenge Podcast, please send me an email@mjmurrayvachon.com.

MJ Murray Vachon LCSW: Thanks for [00:36:00] listening, and as you move through your week, if you know someone parenting a child who is suffering with a mental illness, Send them a casserole. This is your inner challenge.