Ep. 58 Mental Wellness & Stay at Home Parenting!

M.J. Murray Vachon LCSW: [00:00:00] Welcome to the podcast. Today we're delving into the world of stay- at- home parenting. A topic that has seen remarkable shifts over the decades. In 1967, nearly half of American households had a stay-at-home parent, predominantly mothers. However, fast forward to recent years and this number dwindled to just 18%, with 7% being fathers marking a substantial sociological evolution from the norms of the 1960s. Recent data from Motherly indicate a notable uptick with the percentage of households boosting a stay-at-home parent, rising from 15% in 2022 to 25% in 2023. What's driving this resurgence? It's a complex interplay of desires for more family time, challenges in accessing affordable childcare, and the persistent lack of workplace flexibility. Today I've invited a woman to share with us her experience of modern day stay at home parenting. I'm excited to learn about her journey and discuss the joys and [00:01:00] challenges, but also the complexity of raising children in today's world. I want to begin by thanking you for being on the podcast.

Guest: Thank you for having me. I'm happy to come and share a little bit of my story with you.

M.J. Murray Vachon LCSW: I'm really excited because I think this is a really important topic to be able to sit and have a conversation I think will be really interesting to a lot of our listeners. But before we jump into that topic, I always ask my guests to begin by sharing with everyone, how do you define mental wellness?

Guest: I look at it as your ability to handle and mitigate, stress in your life. I think it's impossible to live a stress-free life. Trying to cope and roll with the punches as they come in and keep, your head above water as you're trying to figure out, the next step of life and everything that comes with it.

M.J. Murray Vachon LCSW: I want to punctuate your wisdom because it is really impossible to not have stress. Stress does good things for us, too much obviously does bad, [00:02:00] but there's probably nothing like becoming a parent that helps redefine stress for us. Sometimes it gives us a perspective so we're not as stressed about something that previously we would've been stressed about, but it also brings into our life a whole new set of stresses. For our listeners, tell us a little bit about your child and how you ended up deciding to be a stay-at-Home Parent.

Guest: There was definitely many factors that went into the decision to not return to the workplace after I had my baby. The first was I had extreme pain during my pregnancy. The last three months I could barely walk. That was very taxing on my mental health because, they always say you got to be stress free during your pregnancy and being in chronic pain while pregnant was very difficult. I didn't know what that was going to look like after I had the baby, if that pain was going to go away. So, dealing with the rehab of [00:03:00] that and I also did have a c-section, so dealing with the rehab from that I had extreme lower back pain after my delivery. Also, my child has a special health need, so we were trying to navigate what that might look like at the time. The job that I previously worked at just wasn't a great fit. My husband and I looked at the finances of it. We figured we could do it. Putting, an infant in daycare at three months was a very stressful decision. So, we made the decision that I was going to stay home for a little bit longer and take it, month by month from there.

M.J. Murray Vachon LCSW: Prior to being pregnant, did you ever imagine having such a challenging pregnancy?

Guest: No, that was really frustrating. You think it's going to be this wonderful, magical thing, like your feet might swell. You might have some indigestion. You don't think about some of these other things that might go along with it that other people don't talk about. Because I felt like I didn't get to hear the negatives of it [00:04:00] sometimes because it ends in a beautiful child.

M.J. Murray Vachon LCSW: Thinking from a mental wellness perspective, you have chronic pain, which we know is really hard for one's mental health. Did you find any strategies to cope with that chronic pain?

Guest: Actually, my mom found this app and the app is called Happy Color and it's literally a color by numbers app. When I was feeling, a little bit overwhelmed, I would go into that app and I would color, it's a mindless task. It was something that could distract my brain a little bit away from what I might be feeling at the time. I don't really sit still well. Having something, that my hands could be doing something my eyes are looking at that was super helpful to me. I use that almost my entire pregnancy.

M.J. Murray Vachon LCSW: Wow, so Happy Color. We're sending a shout out because that's part of the foundation of parenthood, right? Is that you don't have what you need [00:05:00] until you know you need it. And that's from the time they're born or in utero in your case. Through the support of your mom found this distraction. Sometimes I think distraction gets a bad rap, but it's a tool and when people apply it appropriately, it can really help them relieve their

attention to their pain. It doesn't take away the pain, it just helped your mind focus on coloring versus the pain.

M.J. Murray Vachon LCSW: I winna ask the most obvious question, having gone through a challenging pregnancy, and there's a lot more challenging pregnancies than were led to believe, do you think that eight weeks to 12 weeks is enough for women to recover, make the transition to parenthood before they go back to work?

Guest: No. I've been home now for my daughter is 20 months. And I don't know how women who go back to work, even I think a [00:06:00] year is amazing. And getting to see my daughter develop an age has been incredible. But also, I was fortunate enough that I didn't have a lot of postpartum depression. I cried probably a lot the first week. We also had some challenging with breastfeeding, so that was really taxing on my mental health. I was fortunate enough, I didn't have any kind of, severe depression or psychosis, which I know a lot of women deal with. Had I had to go back to work at six weeks, which was what my employer offered at the time I don't know that would've been the case. Even now, contemplating going back to work thinking of, I would, would get her up in the morning for maybe an hour and then, maybe get three or four hours after work before she goes to bed. Thinking that I only get, five or six hours a day with my child is something very stressful to me. No, I do not think eight to 12 weeks is sufficient time.

M.J. Murray Vachon LCSW: Your job that you were [00:07:00] in at the time only gave you six weeks,

Guest: I was, it was six weeks paid leave. And then with FMLA, I could have taken an additional six weeks unpaid.

M.J. Murray Vachon LCSW: I guess I want to state the obvious because I'm now at the age and stage where lots of my kids and their friends are having children, and it's really interesting to me that some of the benefits are better. Now we have paternity leave in some companies, but they're really not that much better than when I had my children 30 some years ago. When people think about the mental wellness of our children, we start out raising them with enormous stressors. Yet one of the problems is there's so much stress on families. There's no time for families to really become their own political advocate and to, come up with policies, like in many European countries, a [00:08:00] year of parental leave, and to really be able to let mothers heal completely and to let children really make that transition into the world in a really stable environment. It's very difficult, isn't it?

Guest: Yeah. We were fortunate enough, my husband, his company gave him 12 paid weeks leave. I worked for a hospital system and got six weeks paid, and he worked for, a more progressive company and got 12 weeks paid paternity leave. He didn't have to take his all at once, our plan had been that he was going to take off an initial six weeks and then take off the second six weeks whenever I returned to work. I ended up not returning to work so he took off the end of November through January. He was home with us for Thanksgiving, Christmas, new Year's, which was incredible to have him home during such a fun time. Can't imagine trying to, do what we do on a daily basis and then also [00:09:00] trying to advocate for family leave.

M.J. Murray Vachon LCSW: Yeah. what has been people's reaction that your husband had more paternity leave than you?

Guest: It's comical and I know women who get even less time. I have a friend who, she got four weeks paid leave and her husband got a full 12. I'm fortunate that the women who work in the companies that, my husband worked for get the full 12 weeks. But it's not funny, that, the woman who grew baby for nine months, delivered it, recovering. In my cases I was exclusively pumping, so I was, the food provider for baby. And I got half the time that my husband did.

M.J. Murray Vachon LCSW: So, this is interesting. I researched this dilemma because my son and daughter-in-Law are in the same situation where he has significantly more paternity leave than she does. I was thinking, how has this happened? But when I researched it, it is often larger companies, more progressive companies, and their reason for doing [00:10:00] it is that those companies are competing really hard to keep women. The men are the beneficiaries of the company's desire to keep women with them and so everybody gets these big benefits. It was a mind bender for me at first until I researched it. The companies really weren't saying that parental leave is important. They're really looking at how can we keep these women working for us since women are performing so exceptionally well in the workplace.

Guest: It's difficult to expect women to come back to the office after such a short time, especially if they've had a tough pregnancy. I think having a longer benefit time is going to encourage women to come back to the office instead of, doing what I did and saying, okay, if you're only going to gimme this short amount of time, then I'm going to take my own time and we're going to figure this out.

M.J. Murray Vachon LCSW: One of the interesting statistics that I read in preparing for this podcast is that 45% of young mothers are in therapy, and the majority of the [00:11:00] diagnosis is anxiety or depression. Having worked quite a bit with women who go back to work often at eight weeks, probably more commonly at 12, their body hasn't recovered and then there's all the sleep deprivation and that really makes people prone to anxiety and depression.

M.J. Murray Vachon LCSW: We hear a lot about postpartum depression, and I think we talk about it as if it's a natural consequence of pregnancy. I think it's actually a natural consequence of how we help women make the transition to motherhood by not giving them enough support, by not giving them enough time to heal and by not understanding that one of the things that is really going to cause low mood is not enough sleep. And all mothers and many fathers in the first year will not get enough sleep. Again, this is a topic that I can't believe in 2024. We've made almost no progress since my era, except that my [00:12:00] era had a lot more jobs that were part-time. So, I think we've actually gone backwards, to be honest. So, what's it like to be home?

Guest: It's good and it's tough sometimes. I can't imagine not doing it. January was tough. We had one illness after another and my daughter was not in the mood to play. It's also cold and she loves to go outside so there were a lot of times we couldn't go play outside. So, keeping her stuck in the house literally, because we didn't, go even to the grocery store, I take her to Gymboree classes. We didn't go to those. January was very taxing for both of us. But getting to, spend a whole day with her, make all her meals, get to teach her things and watch, almost every day she learns something new. It's irreplaceable. I can't put a price on getting that time with her.

M.J. Murray Vachon LCSW: What's hard about it?

Guest: Right now. She has the attention span of about seven seconds. As soon as I settle her into [00:13:00] doing, one thing, she wants to do something else. I am very much, we do what you want to do, I'll go with the flow. I, it's constantly moving. We have toys in every single room in the house, so we move from room to play with the toys in this room, the toys in that room. She loves music so I always have, some baby tunes playing in the background. My family always jokes that I need a break and I need to get out of the house more because I know this words to every single song, every single nursery rhyme every version of it on Spotify. That kind of gets in your head sometimes and you just have to bring yourself out of it. Remember that you're an adult, you're a human you're not a child. Sometimes I need to call my mom or my sister and just have

an adult conversation. That's probably the hard part is just remembering that there's life outside this house.

M.J. Murray Vachon LCSW: Have you met other men or women who are staying home with their children?

Guest: A few. My best friend is a stay-at-home mom now. Her [00:14:00] husband works remotely out of the house, so he's home a lot too. I do know a few people who have gone back to work pretty quickly, so probably a happy medium of both.

M.J. Murray Vachon LCSW: Do you get together with the ones that you know or do they live out of town?

Guest: They live out of town. That's been something I've wanted to do more of, but I feel there is some uncomfort of meeting someone new. And then either them coming to our house or me going to their house. That hasn't been something we've quite explored yet. I have a lot of anxiety around that.

M.J. Murray Vachon LCSW: That's one of the shifts. If you go back to the sixties, if half the moms were home, if you have a block of 20 houses, if 10 of the moms are home, then you've got 10 sets of kids that are home right on your block. That's just imaginary from the stats. That was pretty common. It lent itself to moms being around, hanging out together. But now I hear a lot of what you just shared, that experience feels anxiety [00:15:00] provoking what we would ideally love is supportive. Can you explain for our listeners what about it feels anxiety provoking for you?

Guest: In our house, I have everything that I need. We have her toys that she likes and I know the environment is safe. We have our routine. I know we're going to do this at this time and do this, and this is how I do it. I have a lot of trouble giving that up, especially even if we have family come. My mom can attest. I have difficulty letting go and allowing her to take over. I'm always hovering on the outside to make sure things are done the way that I like them done because it's how I know my daughter likes them done. But I do think that is something that might be holding her back a little bit because we've had issues if the routine gets disrupted, then she has trouble continuing on. For me [00:16:00] personally, it's more of not knowing another environment and not

knowing how another family might, work or function. Like I said, my best friend's, a stay-at-home mom and I, we would be at each other's houses every day probably. And she's been my best friend for 15 years now maybe in 15 years I'll have a bunch of mom friends that we'll, I'll be with at all the time. But my friends here in the city that I currently live in, aren't just at the same place. I have another, one of my friends is currently pregnant when she does have a baby, I'm sure there'll be a lot of play dates and a lot of joining others, but I don't have a lot of friends that I currently know that are at the same place. Making new moms' friends is really hard. We go to Gymboree, so that's really my only exposure to other moms, and a lot of them are nannies too, so I don't even know how to approach that conversation. It's just one of those things that its anxiety inducing. So, I just avoided it.

M.J. Murray Vachon LCSW: It's not just that you're [00:17:00] avoiding it because I hear this every week in my office. The structure isn't there. We aren't always aware that structures help connections. In the past, most churches had new mom groups. People would have babies and they'd take their baby once or twice a week. One of the consequences of the pandemic is all of that stuff stopped. I've tried to find them in South Bend and they may be out there and they may be reemerging, but when I was really looking for a client maybe 11 or 12 months ago, the Moms Day Out programs, the programs at churches where young moms could come once or twice a week. It would be a room set up for new moms and the kids were all there figuring it out and the moms were figuring out. They weren't in anybody's house. It was a neutral place. That's really helpful for moms. But when the structure isn't there and in Gymboree most of them are nannies, that's another layer to it .

Guest: With [00:18:00] Gymboree, it's not the intention to make mom friends. At Gymboree they have a lot of like high stakes equipment. You really have to be focused on your kids, so it's hard to meet new people. Also, a lot of things have moved virtually too. When I was breastfeeding, I was on some virtual Facebook groups, but it might've been beneficial to have in person groups.

M.J. Murray Vachon LCSW: Yeah, so again, it's the structural support system that slowly dissipated. When I had my first child, the hospital put me in a group with five other moms. You know how people did birthing classes. They had these groups and we met three or four times, and then we met, another time so everybody could share their birth story and everyone did it. It was free. We didn't pay for it. We would never have organized it. We wouldn't have had time to organize it. Again, I was looking for birthing classes for somebody at the hospitals here. They're all online.

Guest: We did do a birthing class. It was eight hours one day and it was not [00:19:00] free. There were other couples there. We introduced ourselves at the beginning and how many weeks we were in the pregnancy and that was it in terms of talking to other people in the room. That was definitely not an environment that was conducive to meeting other people.

M.J. Murray Vachon LCSW: That's really interesting because when I went through both of ours, there was a really clear attempt to connect us as people going through this similar experience at the same time. Women really benefit from being able to talk to each other about what their births were like, how hard it is to breastfeed, the truth of mothering. Now, a lot of that is done online, but people don't know each other. Maybe they know each other, but it's a different kind of socialization and babies aren't included.

M.J. Murray Vachon LCSW: How do you manage being, on your own so much?

Guest: It's challenging. But we have a fun time. The most difficult part right now is her attachment to me. If I'm out of eyesight, it's meltdown city. We've gotten [00:20:00] to the point, she comes with me to the bathroom. If I have to go refill my coffee in the kitchen, she will come with me. If I have to clean something up, she just tags along. Which has made for some difficult experiences with her dad. sometimes, she's sitting and playing happily with her dad. And then I'll try to sneak away to go to the bathroom clean some stuff up, clean up after dinner and she'll be completely focused and then she'll snap up and realize I'm not there and start crying. That's the hardest part right now is how do we deal with this extreme emotional attachment to me because we spend so much time together. We live really far away from both of our families. When my parents or my husband's parents come to town, they'll come for like an extended period and when they come, she does have this attachment to me, but it's a little bit lessened. Right now, she went to the grocery store with her dad and my husband's dad. So, she's off doing something. [00:21:00] That's something that we're working on, is trying to encourage her to step out of her comfort zone a little bit. But it's really hard at this age.. She just wants mom, and mom is her comfort and dad is her play toy. Finding the balance between those two things right now for both of us as parents.

M.J. Murray Vachon LCSW: That doesn't give you much time to yourself, does it?

Guest: No.

M.J. Murray Vachon LCSW: What's that like?

Guest: I utilize every moment of the nap. We have a Peloton bike, so I'll try to do a workout or something during her nap and then work on cleaning up. The one thing I tell myself is I don't allow myself to feel bad about exercising. If there's laundry that needs done or dishes that need done I don't let that stuff bother me, if I choose to use that time to, to work out or exercise. That's where I give myself the most grace. Sometimes if she's napping, sometimes I need to nap or I need to lay on the couch and kind of zone out for a while and watch a show or look at social media on my phone just so I can, get some of that time for [00:22:00] myself back. Like I, I've said before, I may be going back to work soon, so this might be my only time that I get to be a stay-at-home mom, and I've tried to lean into that as much as possible.

M.J. Murray Vachon LCSW: You said a number of really important things. One is when we look at mental wellness, I use the acronym from Dan Siegel, which is Faces Flexible, Adaptive, Coherent and then we're Energized and Stable. It sounds like you do a really good job of being coherent in the moment. For example, she's sick. This is really hard. I don't get my time to myself, but there's a part of you that knows this will pass. I think, a gift that parenting gives us because we don't really have that ability to be as flexible and adaptive until we actually have this major reason to be and that is a child. The other thing that you said is that you really do prioritize, which for you, exercise over dishes and wash. And that's so [00:23:00] healthy. It's so easy to think, I can't do this thing for me, whether it's exercise, painting, reading or whatever somebody really gets fueled up by until the wash is done, until the dishes are done. I'm curious, how did you make that choice to say, doing this one thing for me is going to stay at the top of my list.

Guest: I have a very limited window of when exercising will happen. I cannot exercise in the nighttime and I really can't exercise super early in the morning. There a lot of days, I'll put on my, bike shorts earlier in the day as motivation to make sure that I do the bike when she does take a nap. My daughter's bedtime's about 7:30. That's too late for me to want to exercise, but it's not too late for me to do dishes or stick a load of laundry in or fold. Just knowing that my exercise is time [00:24:00] sensitive.

M.J. Murray Vachon LCSW: I just think that's really wise. One of the hardest things that the parents I work with struggle with of owning what it is they need to stay sane. Putting it at the top of the list. I'd say kudos for you. The marching

band of your favorite schools going by supporting you, because if you don't do it, nobody else will. I love the trick of I'm going to put on my bike shorts early in the day because everybody knows the hardest part of exercising is just getting dressed. I really would encourage listeners, no matter what your age is to every day do something for yourself because we know for mental wellness that really makes a big difference.

M.J. Murray Vachon LCSW: I think 15 months to 24 months is the most labor-intensive time they're very attached. You also have to watch them for a lot of safety. The stage that your child is in, it really is important that you refuel yourself.

M.J. Murray Vachon LCSW: One of the hardest parts of parenting a young child is the schedule never stays [00:25:00] the same for very long. Just when you figure out how to make everything work with two naps, the one nap goes away. I can remember when one of my children's, morning nap went away. I said to one of my friends, I did that no scream.

M.J. Murray Vachon LCSW: No,

Guest: Yeah.

M.J. Murray Vachon LCSW: she can't stop it. She can't stop it. My older one was in preschool and that was my sanity time. But she did stop it. And that's one of the real big challenges that I think we often don't directly say that there is no schedule when you're raising children, not just under five, but all the way through that stays for all that long. If we're going to stay and be mentally healthy, we do have to be very flexible adaptive, such as, I'm going to put my bike shorts on at nine in the morning, even though I'm not going to ride till two and coherent. And that is I have to meet some of my needs every day. I think there's a lot of messages to parents that is selfish. We're not talking about I need eight hours a day to [00:26:00] myself, but how long do you ride your bike?

Guest: 30 minutes.

M.J. Murray Vachon LCSW: 30 minutes. And it makes a world of difference. That's awesome. That's great.

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Guest: There's just always cleaning and tidying that could be done. But because exercise is healthy for you and good for your body and not just your mental

health, that's how I negotiate with myself. Okay, this is a healthy thing, so you cannot tell yourself that you feel guilty. And I say to my husband too when he gets home from work and he wants to get on the bike, we will not make the other feel guilty for wanting to exercise. It's been hard to get to that.

M.J. Murray Vachon LCSW: It's a no guilt zone and it's really prioritizing your health over the laundry. Health over dishes. Somehow laundry and dishes eventually get done. If people don't put the flag down for their own health, nobody else will put it down. Let me move to another topic. This really wasn't something you had imagined at 20 that you'd be home, is that a fair statement?

Guest: No, I always thought I was someone super career driven and I [00:27:00] remember telling myself when I was, just getting started in the workforce ugh, I cannot imagine being a stay-at-home mom. I grew up in. Not super traditional household with my parents' jobs. My mom had a lot of flexibility about when she needed to be in the office or out of the office. When I then started a nine to five, I didn't realize how taxing that would be on a family. Because I always had at least one parent who didn't have to mold to that kind of workforce structure.

M.J. Murray Vachon LCSW: You bring up this other point that research really validates. The workplace doesn't have flexibility. One of the things that I have said to many couples for many decades at this point is you can have two careers in a family, but one has to be flexible. Now there's a million people who don't have two careers without flexibility. But the quality of life, and again, I'm a therapist. I'm looking for mental health in a family. I'm not [00:28:00] saying it can't happen, it happens all the time, but the cost to the children of not having that flexibility that you had growing up is often something we don't talk about of having parents that just feel pushed to the edge all the time. And unless they have a grandparent nearby or an aunt nearby, or a nanny to lift the lid off the boiling pot it really, from my clinical experience, puts families in a stressful situation. it doesn't surprise me that our kids have so much anxiety? A piece of it is from the minute they're born; they no longer have an environment that really supports their needs. Yet we have, for the first time in the history of the world, women are more educated than men and women are outperforming men in the workplace. Just like you said, I never imagined being home. I do imagine going back, but one of the things I want [00:29:00] us to think about is as a society , we're not imagining the flexibility that families need. We're not imagining how helpful that is to raising our children and to keeping all of us really mentally well.

M.J. Murray Vachon LCSW: I think it's really interesting that you had that experience as a kid, but you didn't have it now. Because I was the generation of women who went into work. One of the things that was modeled for us was workplace flexibility. Lots of part-time jobs. I worked in Chicago Kraft Quaker Oats had lots of flexing for women. They had daycares on site. That's all gone for the most part. Some of them have that. But I appreciate the fact that, for you, you grew up with flexibility. The lack of flexibility made it pretty easy to make the decision to stay at home.

Guest: Now flexibility for companies is parents using their own sick time when their kids get sick. Their definition of flexibility is you [00:30:00] we're flexible because you may not be sick but you can use your sick time if your child is sick.

M.J. Murray Vachon LCSW: It was mind bending to me that the statistics in 2022 to 23, 60% working moms missed six days due to their child's illness, 30% missed 11. That is not counting the days that their children were sick, that they were able to get someone to come in and care for their child. And we don't have any policy that really helps parents with that.

M.J. Murray Vachon LCSW: Again, when my kids were little, we had s sick bay. My husband worked at a hospital. He could take them to sick bay and they actually liked that. I think what we're saying is more of the same. I want to punctuate, when we ask young parents to handle this stress all on their own, part of what they at least say in my office is, what am I doing wrong? Everybody else looks like they're doing this so effortlessly. Why is this so hard for me? Part of what you talked about is there's a lot of isolation with [00:31:00] parents until they get to the school age and then they meet other parents. Part of it is that the isolation doesn't let you know, everybody's feeling overwhelmed. But also, part of the overwhelmed isn't anyone's fault that we don't structure in how parents can really, deal with this.

M.J. Murray Vachon LCSW: It ends up being very isolating of each family is dealing with this. What Americans don't know if that's not how it is in Europe. Europe has very generous parental leaves one year, two year, and they still have economies that buzz along. My concern is, what we stated in the early part is that there's really no time for families to advocate and try to make changes.

M.J. Murray Vachon LCSW: In ending, is there anything you'd want to focus on or talk about?

Guest: I think what you just said about the isolation. My best friend her daughter, she's four months younger than my daughter. We've done a lot of this together.

Just checking in with her, my daughter hates to be wiped down after she eats, absolutely hates [00:32:00] it. I always thought, is there a better way to do this? I remember, texting my friend what do you do after, your daughter eats? We wipe her down and she hates it. So just talking to somebody about your experiences and finding out that they have similar experiences gives me such like a warm, fuzzy feeling.

My favorite thing to say is you don't know what you don't know. Just reaching out to other new moms. I had a lot of friends when I was pregnant and had the newborn, I was like, is this normal? Did you do this? Did you do that? Any mom's going to give you advice. That's the one thing I've learned is moms are not afraid to share their advice with you and that could, lead to friendship or, future conversations and not feeling so isolated .

M.J. Murray Vachon LCSW: There's a million ways to raise children. It is one of those things, we have so much information that does lead people to the belief that there's a right way to do it

M.J. Murray Vachon LCSW: instead of finding what works for you. I really want to thank you for joining us today. I think you really shed some light, not just on stay-at-home parenting, but parenting in

M.J. Murray Vachon LCSW: 2024.

Guest: Of course!

M.J. Murray Vachon LCSW: Here are my Inner [00:33:00] Challenge Insights.

M.J. Murray Vachon LCSW: I'm not sure if my guest intended it, but she really brought attention to the huge gap between what society expects when it comes to pregnancy, bouncing back after childbirth and getting back to work, versus what actually happens. It's like, there's this idea that everything will just magically work out, but the reality is far from it. When it doesn't, each family is left to figure it out on their own. Let me tell you, there are a lot of good parents out there blaming themselves, instead of realizing that they are basically pioneers in this modern age, lacking the kind of tight knit support networks that have been the norm throughout history.

M.J. Murray Vachon LCSW: Insight number two.

M.J. Murray Vachon LCSW: Hey, are you working at a church, community center, park department, yoga studio or coffee shop? Think about providing a time and a space for young parents together. Nothing fancy. Today's guest mirrors the social isolation that is rampant in our culture. It's not that [00:34:00] she is alone. She's calling her friends, her family, but her and her baby needs face-to-face time with others. Our young families need our help in meeting each other.

M.J. Murray Vachon LCSW: Insight number three.

M.J. Murray Vachon LCSW: This little girl is lucky to have a mom who uses the mental wellness tool of self-awareness as she raises her daughter. I could almost feel this mom's wheel spin when she talked about her daughter's struggle when she doesn't have her mom within eyesight. I saw this with many of my clients who had babies during the pandemic. I loved what this mom said. We are encouraging her to step out of her comfort zone. Isn't that our kids' biggest message to us.

M.J. Murray Vachon LCSW: Insight number four.

M.J. Murray Vachon LCSW: We have normalized families being in a constant state of overwhelm. I just want to go on record by saying this is not normal.

M.J. Murray Vachon LCSW: Insight number five.

M.J. Murray Vachon LCSW: For those of us who are parents, I have [00:35:00] always believed the greatest work of our life, is to raise a child or children that are loving, curious, productive, and whom will contribute to our society. I am friends with today's guest and I have seen hours of this darling and I mean, darling little girl. I have delighted in her huge vocabulary. Her ability to make cookies and take turns, stirring. Her physical prowess. But mostly I delight watching her mom thrive as she finds herself unexpectedly at home with this little human who I am sure will be the greatest work of her life.

M.J. Murray Vachon LCSW: So, as you move to your week, If, you know, a young family. Pitch in. Bring a meal. Offer to babysit or just go talk to the parents so they have some adult contact. This is your Inner [00:36:00] Challenge.