

# Ep. 64 Mental Wellness & Parenting An Anxious Child!!

**MJ Murray Vachon LCSW:** [00:00:00] Welcome to the podcast. Anxiety poses one of the greatest challenges to mental wellness, especially in parenting. Unlike previous generations who often held onto the belief that everything will be okay, today's families grapple with anxiety on various fronts, be it concerned about their children's future, the daily choices such as school, extracurricular activities, or even their social circles. In this episode, I'm excited to speak with a mother of two about anxiety and parenting. I strongly believe that a key skill in fostering mental wellness in our children is not shielding them from anxiety, but rather equipping ourselves and them with the tools of naming taming and aiming these difficult and sometimes overwhelming emotions. This way we can extract the valuable insights, anxiety offers without letting it spiral into negative or unfounded, thoughts and beliefs. Welcome to the podcast and thank you so much for joining us to talk about what is a really important topic.

**Guest:** Thanks for [00:01:00] having me.

**MJ Murray Vachon LCSW:** Tell us a little bit about yourself. How many kids you have, how old they are.

**Guest:** I have two kids. They're 18 months apart. My son is 10. My daughter is eight. They're very opposite people. My daughter somehow dodged the entire anxiety gene altogether. I've really never seen anything like it. My son got the most of it.

**MJ Murray Vachon LCSW:** So, you're parenting from a really different lens for each of them.

**Guest:** Every minute.

**MJ Murray Vachon LCSW:** I begin by asking everybody how they define mental wellness, so just off the top of your head, how do you define it?

**Guest:** I wish I knew that, but I think it's probably just a feeling of being okay. Everything is okay. Everything's fine.

**MJ Murray Vachon LCSW:** When you think about your kids and the whole topic of mental wellness? How do you define it for them?

**Guest:** We talk a lot about this in my family. We actually listened to the CD by Brene Brown about the map of emotions? He really liked the nuance of every different [00:02:00] emotion. They know that I have a therapist and they call it my worrying doctor. They know that lots of people have those professionals in their lives . We've met medical professionals to help with my son's anxiety. We're trying hard not to have a stigma at all about judging ourselves or any others.

**MJ Murray Vachon LCSW:** Wow. I want to punctuate 14 things you just said in two minutes. One is I am so excited about your generation of parents. Because you've come into parenting, understanding that mental wellness and a very important part of it, emotional intelligence, is a very important thing to develop in your children. And you've normalized it. For me, that was not normal in the eighties when I started. And it began to be talked about in the nineties. Now we see it very integrated into how parents think about parenting. Part of what [00:03:00] you said in your opening is you have two children who their emotional life is very different from each other. Did I hear you correctly?

**Guest:** Yes.

**MJ Murray Vachon LCSW:** Part of what you've done, Brene Brown's book, which I think is genius, Atlas of the Heart, for people who haven't read it, I would encourage you to read it. It is a beautiful book, that names, emotions, and helps people become fluent. In this emotional part of self. How do you actually implement that with your children? , Give us some practical examples.

**Guest:** With my son he always has gravitated to things that can be that nuanced. One of his first favorite things when you learned how to read was the hose nozzle cause there's the settings. It's the same water, but it is different in these Ooh nice ways. What made him really love this book because you can feel all these different ways and some of them feel similar, but they're not. Anger and excitement have things about them that are [00:04:00] similar, but they're totally not. Just having access to the language to pair with the different things that they're feeling and dealing with is such a gift from that book.

**MJ Murray Vachon LCSW:** I want to go back to the hose metaphor. One of the things that I think is really helpful in regulating our own emotions, teaching our children, how to regulate theirs. Is what your son was doing with the hose. He was curious. He looked at the hose and he played around and he realized if I

did this, the hose would do that. One of the things that is a huge shift for parents to make from previous generations is that previously parents were taught to judge their children when it came to their emotional reaction . We would never judge a kid for being curious about a hose. But in the past, we judged children and told them to not feel. It sounds to me like you have made this transition of, I am trying to not judge my children's feelings. I'm [00:05:00] actually trying to be curious with them about their feelings.

**Guest:** That's a really neat analogy.

**MJ Murray Vachon LCSW:** Yeah we will thank your son. Because he's the one that created.

**Guest:** I think that this is also important to that analogy is that he'll watch behavior you're doing with a hose. If you're watering plants, they'll recommend a certain setting versus if you're trying to clean something off the sidewalk. Expertise over the management of the different options. I think there's a similarity there to what he's able to do with his emotion management too. Like I'm feeling this way and I'm not going to let that get out of control.

**MJ Murray Vachon LCSW:** You said two things. One is he's watching you. A really important thing for all of us to understand, is it, isn't what we say about emotions that teaches children. It's actually what we do with our own emotions that teach children. That doesn't mean that we have to regulate our emotions perfectly. We can't. It just can't always happen. But it [00:06:00] means that, we name what we're feeling. We try to tame it. I encourage parents to try to tame at 80 to 85% of the time. Which then gives us that 15 to 20% of the time when we lose it. I don't want people to lose it and be harmful. I mean lose it and be out of the range of balanced. You might yell at them. You might be come on; we've got to go. or I can't believe you did that where you're not regulated and that gives us the chance to repair. We model that for them. My son was five and he said, mom, are you overreacting? What he taught me in that moment was often the, one of the ways I would repair is I would say. I'm sorry that I was so intense. I was overreacting to that situation.

**Guest:** That's so cool.

**MJ Murray Vachon LCSW:** He began to mirror my feelings and that's because I had mirrored his. Part of what I heard you say is that your son was

watching what you were doing with the hose and then he [00:07:00] would give you instructions, I was so curious about this hose, mom, I know a lot.

**Guest:** And he did, he was always right?

**MJ Murray Vachon LCSW:** One of the points I want to make is that our children's emotions are very overwhelming for us. When they're not convenient. When they're unhappy. Christmas emotions tend to not be overwhelming if they're happy and grateful. There's a portion of parenting where it's very overwhelming because our children's emotions are not tamed cause their children. We don't expect children to have tamed emotions.

**Guest:** But it would be handy.

**MJ Murray Vachon LCSW:** One of the things I've come to learn, not just as a therapist, but as a person, when we accept reality we lose very little energy wanting reality, to be different. A lot of the tension in life is us thinking it should be this way when it's actually that way. That tension usually comes off in frustration, irritation, anger. If we can accept that kids are not regulated till they're 25 hate to say that. [00:08:00] Adolescence starts at 12 ends at 25. We don't get adult brains until 25.

**Guest:** Wow.

**MJ Murray Vachon LCSW:** As parents, if we accept, this very inconvenient truth that our children emotionally will not be regulated for a long time.

**Guest:** The other funny part about that is that kids our mistaking reality at a much higher rate than even we are. So much of their day is Oh, I thought maybe this could be real. That is so daunting for them. The things that come along with that, like so much crying, disappointment and fury.

**MJ Murray Vachon LCSW:** We hear the word triggering all the time in our culture. I think it's helpful to understand that the relationship between parent and child can be triggering. Can you come in an example of when one of your kids triggered you, that we could talk about.

**Guest:** Yeah. Last week we had one of those Synchronous learning days where you have to log on the computer. Nobody likes this idea. If [00:09:00] you're listening and you made this idea, nobody likes your ideas. I have two kids and

one computer. My daughter's teacher is so awesome and she makes it very fun. They're basically laughing for the entire time. So, Cecilia was adamant that she was doing this e-learning day. I was trying everything to log her in. I'm texting her teacher. And I lost it. I was just so angry at the situation. Cecilia is crying. Cause she unable to do this thing, and I have no control over getting her into the technology. The teacher is sad that I'm sad. It just was like all of these different things. And I couldn't even yell at who I wanted to be mad at about this idea. cause, I didn't even know who that was. So, I had a huge temper tantrum in front of the kids and they are like, oh, and then we got to talk about everyone has a temper tantrum. I'm so embarrassed and I'm so sorry. And please forgive me and I'll try not to. Be set up [00:10:00] for so much failure the next time this comes around. But yes, her crying about something I couldn't do when I was trying so hard to do the thing was maybe one of the most triggering things. I don't lose it that much. But when I do

**MJ Murray Vachon LCSW:** I want to dissect that and I want to put some science behind it. Science helps us understand that emotions are contagious. Anyone who was a junior high girl knows. And they're contagious because in our forehead, we have these things called mirror neurons.

**Guest:** I love mirror neurons.

**MJ Murray Vachon LCSW:** And her mirror neurons were setting off your mirror neurons. I often use this analogy that when we're emotional, we're speaking French. Your daughter is very fluent in French. She's all emotionally lit up because she wants to be in this class. She wants to belong. That's what kids love. The problem is the task you're doing is very logical and it needs you to speak [00:11:00] German. But her mirror neurons were setting off your mirror neurons, which made it difficult for you to think logically and get into the class because there's just too much going on. Does that resonate with you?

**Guest:** Yeah.

**MJ Murray Vachon LCSW:** One of the things in parenting children and when we think about how do we develop emotional intelligence? It's to understand that if they're speaking French, It's not useful, if we speak German back to them. And it's really difficult for us to do anything that requires German logical skill.

**MJ Murray Vachon LCSW:** Now I know that there's people out there that can do that. And I'd love to have you on the podcast to talk about it. But what I recommend is that you shift to French. Leave the German project getting online, for a second, and you calm her down. We often hear you have to put your own

oxygen mask on. That's true. But you really have to connect emotionally [00:12:00] with your child before you redirect them. What we want to do is redirect them by saying in German. I'm trying to get on the computer. You're crying is not helping. But children are children. So, she's eight. Her prefrontal cortex for logic doesn't even come online till 10. So, when she's emotional, it's best if you just scoop her up and say, honey, stay on my lap. Pat her back and say, what can I do? To just comfort you. This is really frustrating. I know. And all you're doing is mirroring her emotions and you're not fixing them. The German is fixing them. Once I get online, I can fix them. But if you let go of your project and that's really hard for adults to let go of doing and shift to being, I'm just going to be with her and calm her down. Once she's calm, I can shift back to my topic. So, you're not asking yourself to focus [00:13:00] because you can't focus. Because it's contagious she's flooding you.

**Guest:** Yes. And she flooded me.

**MJ Murray Vachon LCSW:** She flooded you and we all need to flood plan.

**Guest:** Yes.

**MJ Murray Vachon LCSW:** Step one of a flood plan is one to understand your flooded. If you don't notice it, you can't understand it. And step two is to make sure you're speaking the same language. When a child is melting down, the only language that the adult needs is to connect and comfort. Connect and comfort, but what adults often do is they want the crying to stop so they can complete the task because they believe in completing the task their child will get emotionally regulated. Did you get on the computer that day at all?

**Guest:** I ended up getting her on the game part of the day. Then she had this whole other swell of I'm so sorry. I'm sorry that I was making you that stressed out. I know it doesn't really matter if we log on to these I just didn't want to miss. Everything was fine an hour after.

**MJ Murray Vachon LCSW:** If you had a do-over, which I completely believe in and you implemented what I [00:14:00] recommended, just do a hard stop and say, honey, I can see you're so upset. Come sit on my lap, have a good cry. Could you imagine doing that?

**Guest:** I wish I had done that.

**MJ Murray Vachon LCSW:** What do you think would have happened?

**Guest:** We probably would have both had a nice little cry. Slowed down the pace of escalation. That did end up occurring and had a different hour.

**MJ Murray Vachon LCSW:** How would you put this in your own words of, okay. I want to remember this. This is what I need to do next time.

**Guest:** I think I'm going to just think about French and German.

**MJ Murray Vachon LCSW:** Every time it gets emotional, they're speaking French. Adults live in German. We have a lot to do. Got a deadline and children are living in their own world and they're appropriately and exquisitely self-centered.

**Guest:** Oh, yes.

**MJ Murray Vachon LCSW:** It takes their immature brains, which are not mature at all. They're living in a very self-centered universe, which is appropriate for them. It's not appropriate for us, but we [00:15:00] often are in our own self-centered universe. It becomes very shocking when a child interrupts our self-centered universe and is speaking French. I believe in grounding. I move my awareness to my feet. I take a couple breaths and I say to myself, I need to speak French. I need to be about them. I need to let go of my needs and that is an incredibly important skill when it comes to emotional regulation for children. We have to understand that in order to help them regulate, we have to let go of exactly what we're doing. What we often like to do is say, Just do this and we redirect them, which only then makes their emotions get bigger. If you just remember I have to go from German to French. If you understand, it's not automatic.

**Guest:** No, it's not automatic, it's not a barrier that you can leave there. You're not going to get to where you need to be next without doing that step.

**MJ Murray Vachon LCSW:** If we really understand the [00:16:00] science, the science is when a child is in emotional state they need emotional comforting. Every parent knows after a little bit of thought, what that comforting looks like. Some kids, if you say, come on my lap, they love it. Other kids they just want you to sit by them. It changes as they age. What would work with a three-and-a-half-year-old won't work with the same eight-year-old. You're noticing and you're trying to make it part of your parenting toolkit. Oh, this is what we'll call my child when they're emotionally dysregulated. If you don't know, you can ask, I see you're upset. How can I help you right now? If

you asked your child you're really upset, this isn't going smoothly, how could I help you? What do you think she would say.

**Guest:** I think that she would have appreciated a slowdown because I couldn't be doing those two things at the same time.

**MJ Murray Vachon LCSW:** When a child needs to slow down, That is your intuition saying [00:17:00] she needs me to help her emotionally regulate. One of the ways we can do that is say to the child. I'm going to take a second. I'm going to put my feet on the floor. I'm going to put my hands on my heart. I'm going to take a couple breaths we model what they need and they will often follow. One of the ways we calm ourselves, this is the same part. We put our hands, wherever the dysregulation is our heart, our head. Right in front of her kids say, I'm going to take a few breaths to calm myself down. That will be so unbelievably confusing to them. That it begins to calm them-mirror neurons They look at us like we're crazy. Yeah, but they'll go. Oh, and then you'll come and say, okay, I'm calmer. I want to help you get calmer. Would you like to start by lap and get a hug? How can I help you? But we model for them that we're going to calm ourselves first. That's putting the oxygen mask on. And then we're going to call them second. I worked with thousands of parents by now who have done that, it automatically calms I was babysitting [00:18:00] for my lovely, great nephews and they were on the trampoline, which freaks me out. And I was reregulating my emotions a whole time. And they were doing a sibling thing. And I finally said, you know what? I need everyone to stop. I feel really anxious. I'm just going to take some breaths and they just stopped and looked at me like I was an animal in the zoo. And then one of them said, Why are you anxious? And I said, because I don't want you poking each other. And they're like, okay. And then they didn't poke each other, but I think it was because I calmed myself that they got curious and they asked me, why are you anxious? The point that I'm making is calm yourself first, but share that process with children. What we want to say is stop doing that behavior. But if we calm ourselves then we can move to them. it takes 10 seconds and it's free.

**Guest:** I love it.

**MJ Murray Vachon LCSW:** Think of another time where one of your children was anxious and you [00:19:00] just didn't know what the heck to do.

**Guest:** We've had a really rough school year. He sometimes will wake up and begin crying, because of going to school. He's very anxious about grades. Not his grades cause his are fine. He's anxious about other kids getting sad from their grades. It's just so much for him. Every Friday, there's four tests for some



reason. Friday is he generally wakes up and is just like a basket case. For a long time, I had that rule following behavior where it was this is what we have to do. So, we're going to school. And getting my husband on board with this was a harder process because he's more like I had to do hard things. But I got to a point where I decided that I'm not going to do this to you. It's not worth you feeling this way to go do the hard thing that doesn't even actually make sense. So, we started participating in chronic absenteeism. On the days that it's I'm not going along [00:20:00] with that. He'll just do my day and. It doesn't take away the anxiety. He feels but I am opting him out of having to do the anxiety.

**MJ Murray Vachon LCSW:** Let's say you have a day when you want to opt him in for the purpose of the podcast. Okay. You can do whatever you want. Okay. Yeah. But part of what I hear you saying. Does he have this anxiety the night before the day with all the tests or just when he wakes up. Night before and yes. It's interesting that his anxiety is not about his grades.

**Guest:** It often is the fear of what if all of a sudden I forget every single thing I've ever known. It's so many levels of things to worry about.

**MJ Murray Vachon LCSW:** This is really common for some kids. Very uncomfortable. I also think it's an incredible learning opportunity and I think it's a process. One thing that's helpful to know and all parents know this. Is kids have their own level of intensity. [00:21:00] Some kids when it comes to emotion are low level intensity, Other kids it doesn't take much and they're flooded. I think it's helpful to share on this podcast. Dr. Becky has a nice term called deeply feeling kids, which are kids who feel very deeply. The first person who identified this was Elaine Aaron, and she calls it highly sensitive people. I believe they're talking about the same thing, but the updated version is this, but Aaron has 40 years of research about people who are highly sensitive and that sounds like it might be your oldest. I am so glad to give an example, 20% of the population are highly sensitive people. What does this mean? They can't always tell what their feelings begin and another person's end. So as a therapist, I work a lot with highly sensitive people. I also have a child who is highly sensitive so she schooled me and taught [00:22:00] me a lot that I needed to know. The number one question I have for them is this your feeling, or is this someone else's feeling and that's a skill because they take in everyone's feelings. When I think about this for him is to help him identify that he has this super power that he feels deeply. These are often children who are very creative, very artistic very good at friendships because they have these very deep feelings. One of the ways that you're coping with it right now is you give him time out. Because his feelings are so deep, and they're so intense. So, you're modulating how much is too much and that's one of the skills that we use for these kids while at the same

time being committed to helping them learn to navigate whatever the world asks of them. If you have a child like this out there, I highly encourage you. You can get online and take that, is my kid a highly sensitive [00:23:00] kid? I really like Aaron stuff because it's researched. And it's been around for 40 years. And that helps people figure out is this my kid, Dr. Becky's genius, as she gives scripts, if you don't know who she is, she's a psychologist, expert in parenting. She gives you words to say when your kids are overwhelmed, But for your child, I think one to identify for him One of the most beautiful things about you is you have these really deep feelings. It's similar a child who can sit down and draw. We say to a child who's artistic. Wow. One of your abilities is you're really good at drawing. To these kids, one of your abilities is you have these deep feelings and that allows you to experience the world in really a deeper and fuller way. I love that about you. My model of emotional regulation is tend and befriend. We want kids to understand their own experience with their emotions and we [00:24:00] want them to befriend them. If they feel flooded by them. They're not going to want to befriend them, but if we normalize, this is who you are. It's not always easy, but in the long run, it is going to be special and great. That means that we have to help you have some special skills to know when it gets too much. Does that make sense?

**Guest:** Would the goal be instead of me deciding when enough enough? Him being able to make that

**MJ Murray Vachon LCSW:** Yes and no, because the thing with kids. Is some kids push themselves too far. Some kids don't push themselves enough. This is more art than science. The science of it is highly sensitive kids, deeply feeling kids, experience the world more intensely. All five senses, not just their emotions. They tend to have very intense food preferences. My daughter can be in her bedroom and hear me chew in the kitchen and it's a good distance away. They don't like [00:25:00] tag some of them. They don't like textures. A lot of times parents will lose lots of connections with kids telling them, "no, that's good food or that tag is fine. It is this child's experience of the world. It's our job is to help them navigate the world. we teach them to cut out tags. Here are some earplugs. There's actually something on the market for highly sensitive people they're actually earplugs that help diffuse sound because for some highly sensitive kids, going to a movie theater and hearing people eat popcorn is like fingers on the chalkboard. We teach them tools to navigate that this is their own personal physiological makeup.

**MJ Murray Vachon LCSW:** Does that make sense? It's really a team project. I am not highly sensitive. I made a lot of mistakes with this child, not knowing what it was until she was like 10 or 12 years old. She's a fully grown adult. She's not [00:26:00] ruined for life, but I would have done some things differently had I known about this. I actually came upon it because a client of mine said. Have you ever heard of highly sensitive people?

**Guest:** My babysitter my son was under one year old, one day she had him and was giving him back and she said, you need to read a book called the highly sensitive child. I'd never yell at him. He never does anything. He's a baby, but if I am sharp with my own kids, yes. He'll cry for 30 minutes.

**MJ Murray Vachon LCSW:** We're just getting to understand this, so you have to help him identify that. Tell me what that was like for you. I was yelling at the dog and you felt it. That's the most important bridge when you have a child who's highly sensitive, but it's actually the most important bridge for every relationship. Help me understand what it's like for you when I yell at the dog. Then you can say, oh, part of it is that. You take it [00:27:00] in yourself. So, let's help you get it out. Where on your body does it feel uncomfortable since I yelled at the dog. You help him find it, put your hand on it, ground your feet. Just take some breaths and imagine breathing it out of your body. Breath work for highly sensitive people is the most essential tool.

**Guest:** That's amazing.

**MJ Murray Vachon LCSW:** When we go back to the school example. Part of it is to help him understand that this is going to be a process. We're going to help you learn to be able to go to school on Fridays and not have it be so overwhelming. But we don't start it Friday morning. We start having the conversation Thursday. When you think about tomorrow, how are you feeling and you just name? Oh, I feel so nervous tomorrow. There's all these tests. Where on your body? Do you feel nervousness? Some kids it's their head. I remember working with this adorable 10-year-old, she felt the nervousness in the back of her arms. [00:28:00] She would, tend and befriend her arms by rubbing them in my office. She would say, it's going to be okay. It's going to be okay. And that was very soothing for her. I taught this to her, then we taught it to the mother. The mother goes, oh my gosh. I did that to her all the time as a child. No wonder she loves it. Part of what we learn is we teach it to them and then they teach it back. But the basic skill is, oh, when you heard me yelled that got you very uncomfortable, that made you upset. Where is it on your body, highly sensitive kids they can get there in an instant. The kids who have less intense emotions, who might be, highly sensitive kids are in that, 8, 9, 10 range.

The kid is probably going to be an engineer or a surgeon. They're probably in that three or four range. They have to turn inward and pay attention. The highly sensitive kids get there in a nanosecond. [00:29:00] It's their super power. You teach them I'm going to breathe and I'm just going to imagine it leaving. And they actually are reregulating their central nervous system. That's really what you're teaching them to do.

**MJ Murray Vachon LCSW:** With this child, I wouldn't go to Friday because Friday is like a bomb. I would do it throughout the week on regular things. Just like we say, oh, I'm going to teach you how to tie your shoe. You say to both your kids, Hey, I'm going to teach you how to calm yourself when your emotions get uncomfortable, find them on your body, put your hands there. Take some breaths and just imagine the emotion leaving your body. Our emotions run on a bell curve they last about 90 seconds. It doesn't necessarily take the emotion from a nine to a zero. What breath work does is it calms our central nervous system and it reoxygenates our brain so we can think a little bit more clearly. Does that make sense? So, in your own words how would you teach it to your kids?

**Guest:** I'm going [00:30:00] to honestly say I learned this today. That's important that they know where these things come from. I would wait until the time where nobody's escalated. And do like you're showing me and ground yourself and talk about your body and how it's feeling, where, and follow their lead.

**MJ Murray Vachon LCSW:** They can also do this laying down. When you lay down. Just move your attention to your body against the bed or the couch. What that does is it begins to teach them this important mental wellness skill, I can move my mind. Our Mind runs amok with us, and it runs amok the most when we're emotionally dysregulated. One power we want to give children, is they can have their mind thinking about that flower and then we can say, okay, now I want you to think about the bottom of your feet. And they can move their mind. And that's a foundational skill in cultivating mental wellness is when my mind begins to worry about all this stuff that happens on Friday. I can move my mind to the bottom of my feet. If [00:31:00] I teach my children, I can move my awareness to thinking about the bottom of my feet, take a couple breaths then I can build on that days later by saying, now when you feel nervous, I want you to move your mind to the bottom of your feet and I want you to find the nervousness on your body, I want you to put your hands there, tend, and I want you to be friended. Just take some breaths we don't do it just for distressing assumptions. That when children have wins. Oh, my gosh. You had so much fun playing that soccer game. What's it feel like inside? Oh, it's so happy. Can

you find the happiness on your body this time? We don't want you to breathe it out. We want you to bank that happiness in your heart. Because kids are much more aware of distressing emotions. And the happy emotions go and they don't get banked. We pay a lot of attention to distressing emotions and almost zero to the happy ones. that's great. That's great. Oh, wait, did you get your lunch right? We want them to go back. What did it feel [00:32:00] like when you got that good grade on your test?

**Guest:** I really like this.

**MJ Murray Vachon LCSW:** That's one thing I encourage parents to do, at night, think about something during the day that you just felt happy about. Can you run the movie in your head of how happy you felt, where do you feel it on your body? Sometimes I worked with kids and they feel it in their hands. My hands. I just did such a good job. Can you hold your hands and take your breath and bring that happiness bank it in your heart. They'll correct you. Some kids are, I don't want to bank at my heart. One kid said to me once I want to bank it in my pocket. You can put it anywhere you want. I just want you to hold on to it. The second thing is I want you to make it bigger and have that happiness go all through your body. We live in an anxious culture. So, kids are picking it up because of mirror neurons. We want to give them an antidote for all this anxiety.

**MJ Murray Vachon LCSW:** I did it with my three-year-old niece the other day. She was so happy about the moon. I was putting her to bed and she [00:33:00] said, look at that moon it makes me happy. I said, where do you feel it on your body? She was confused, cause I'd never asked her that. And she goes, everywhere. I said, can you just stay with it and take it in? She had this big smile on her face. This is natural for kids. It's not natural for adults. We're the ones that have to slow down. Just like you said. Pause and do it. We invest in doing it upfront with kids. I think it takes parents three to six months to get this. Then we have less meltdowns.

**Guest:** I want this. I need this.

**MJ Murray Vachon LCSW:** We all need it. So why won't it work? You want it and you need it, but what's going to get in the way of implementing it.

**Guest:** Pace of life. I think being cognizant of that, is the first step.

**MJ Murray Vachon LCSW:** One thing I like to say to parents, which is probably not realistic, when my son was in second grade. I asked his teacher. How can I make him a reader? And she said, I'll just [00:34:00] read them at night. And after she had him for six weeks, she said, I want to talk to you. I didn't tell you the truth. About how to make your kid a reader. I said, oh what's the truth. She goes to truth is in second grade, don't have many extracurricular activities make him so bored that he has to read. I, so why are you telling me the truth now? Because I think you might do it. So, I did do it. I happened to be a professional who let's professionals be professionals. Yeah, she knows more about second graders than me. Same thing with emotional regulation, we're taught to regulate our emotions using an external mindset, blame and unclaimed. It should not be this way. This is stupid that they're making us log on. That's blaming it on claiming. But healthy is to have an internal mindset and that's tend to be a friend, no matter what. Is going on inside of me. I can regulate myself through tending and befriending.

**MJ Murray Vachon LCSW:** I might not like what's going on outside, but I don't need to let what's going on outside, have this much power that it's [00:35:00] going to wreck my day. So, I'm going to tend and befriend it. I call this potty training, our emotions. That if we're going to have good emotional regulation, it's exactly like potty training. One thing I have never said, this is the first time it's ever come to me. Is to do this with our children we have to do the same thing when we potty train. We have to decide when we want to do it in our life. And we have to take away some of the things that make it almost impossible to do this.

It might not be realistic for you to implement this week or next month. But you can have an eye toward the future to say. I'm going to try to have a period of time two or three weeks where we're not so busy and we can practice this. I'm going to teach my kids how to potty train their emotions, but I know I can't be over committed. Same thing. When we potty train kids, we never get them potty trained if we're over committed because we have to completely be at their whim. That doesn't mean [00:36:00] you can't teach some of these skills now, but to really have the space, because once people learn this and move from awkward to comfort it's easier just like with potty training is exactly the same parallel.

**MJ Murray Vachon LCSW:** So, thank you because you gave me that. So, anything else that would make this hard?

**Guest:** I can't think of anything.

**MJ Murray Vachon LCSW:** Okay. I want you to go back and I want you at your own pace in your own way to try this with your kids. And maybe later we'll do an episode of what worked and what didn't work. It starts with the parent. It starts with us regulating ourselves. So, I would really just practice. Regulating yourself and the number onetool.in self-regulation. Is to notice how often we get dysregulated when things don't go our way. And then to laugh at ourselves.

**Guest:** I love laughing.

**MJ Murray Vachon LCSW:** What really dysregulates us isn't this horrific event. It's this red light. It's the kid who's dawdling and we're going to be late for [00:37:00] school. It's this idea inside of us that everything should go our way. But if we wake up every morning, pretty clear that nothing's really going to go our way. We immediately have more patience

**Guest:** yeah.

**MJ Murray Vachon LCSW:** The first thing in regulating our emotions is noticing how often we get dysregulated when things don't go our way as if we were the control tower of the universe. Because when we realized oh, most stuff, doesn't go our way. Were automatically calmer. Of course, the computer didn't work. If our primary goal is to not be emotionally dysregulated, Everything will be better.

**Guest:** Yeah.

**MJ Murray Vachon LCSW:** And everything will be exactly the same. Becoming dysregulated doesn't make the kid hear us. Becoming dysregulated doesn't make the stoplight change. Becoming dysregulated doesn't make the computer work. If we say one of my goals is to be more emotionally regulated. All I have to do is [00:38:00] not let the fact that it didn't go my way dysregulate me.

**MJ Murray Vachon LCSW:** It sounds easy, but it's not. Mindset. Because the external mindset, which is blaming and unclaiming, it actually makes us where we can't solve stuff because we're giving the power away. Yeah, the school shouldn't do this. Instead of saying, their job is to do what they think is best. Their job isn't to do what we think is best. The job has to do what they think is best. And we're supposed to figure out how to get in line with that in a regulated way.

**Guest:** This has just been so lovely. Thanks.

**MJ Murray Vachon LCSW:** Thank you. You're fabulous.

**MJ Murray Vachon LCSW:** Here are my Inner Challenge Insights:

**MJ Murray Vachon LCSW:** Insight number one

**MJ Murray Vachon LCSW:** Three cheers for my guest today, who is not only teaching her children to name their feelings, but also allowing them to take a deep dive into understanding them. The same method we use when it comes to a child who shows interest in dinosaurs, cars, animals, or construction equipment.

**MJ Murray Vachon LCSW:** Insight number two.

**MJ Murray Vachon LCSW:** Emotional [00:39:00] intelligence, a concept coined in 1995, marked a shift from the previous approach to emotional regulation, which involved suppressing feelings and moving on. However, the suppression often led to intermittent outburst that there were often tolerated and then swept under the rug. Today, we find ourselves in the messy middle regarding emotional intelligence. Many of us have become adept at naming our feelings, yet often struggle with taming and aiming them effectively. This has led to many dysregulated adults in today's world. Some individuals believe that expressing intense unfiltered emotions is synonymous with authenticity. However, feelings are not facts. They are our unique response to situations. Without emotional intelligence, there's a risk of treating our emotional reactions as facts and failing to align them with our values. Aligning feelings with values is what I call aiming. This [00:40:00] requires that we not just name them, but tame them. When this step is skipped, people may lash out at strangers or loved ones at hurtful ways. Despite this behavior when asked if it's acceptable to hurt others, the vast majority of people would say no. Therefore, it's crucial to tame our feelings so we can aim them, so our actions align with our values, thus ensuring that our authenticity is rooted in a strong moral compass. After all, our children are watching.

**MJ Murray Vachon LCSW:** Insight number three

**MJ Murray Vachon LCSW:** Today's guest made a powerful statement. Subtly highlighting how children often misinterpret reality at a higher frequency than adults. Consider this as adults with fully developed brains, we often expect the world to conform to our desires. Yes. That is a pretty big misinterpretation of reality. Children, however, are even more susceptible to this tendency



[00:41:00] and they require our assistance tending and befriending their emotional responses to daily disappointments and frustrations. When we do this, we help to equip children with the skills necessary to navigate the challenges of living. This approach aids in cultivating grit, resilience and a more accurate perception of reality as children mature.

**MJ Murray Vachon LCSW:** Insight number four.

**MJ Murray Vachon LCSW:** When I suggest that it will take a human up to 25 years to learn emotional regulation. I'm not advocating treating teens and college students like toddlers. I am certainly not advocating that we give them everything they want so they don't feel emotional frustration or disappointment. Rather I'm advocating that we consider emotional regulation akin to learning to read and write. It's a skill that requires time, practice, effort and guidance from skilled teachers at each age and stage if mastery is to [00:42:00] develop.

**MJ Murray Vachon LCSW:** Insight number five

**MJ Murray Vachon LCSW:** My analogy between a deeply feeling child and a child who has artistic ability has its limits. Both traits often emerge in childhood though adults often respond to these traits quite differently. We celebrate a child's artistic ability with joy, readily supplying them with paper, markers and crayons. With a highly sensitive child, our initial reactions are often fear, anger and overwhelm in the face of their intense emotions. I vividly recall a moment where my own highly sensitive child had a prolonged meltdown. For 45 minutes, she cried, inconsolably. I sat beside her witnessing her distress, trying to do whatever I could to stop it. After 30 minutes, a thought popped into my head. I am afraid of her. She was 18 months old. Surprisingly, this thought made me laugh. [00:43:00] It became clear that fearing her emotions wasn't the answer. Thus, I sought therapy for myself, not for her. In 1995, Elaine Aron's work on highly sensitive people was not widely known. Initially I had hoped there'd be would help me figure out how to decrease her intense emotions. However, my therapist saw it as a developmental phase, guiding me to calm myself, so I could help her. The line she said to me that was the most helpful was this, "if you're afraid of her feelings, imagine what it must be like for her." So, I created an image in my mind where together I held my arms in a circle, grounded my feet and accompanied her when she had intense emotions. Yes. I helped her hold them. It didn't take me long to realize I need to do with her exactly what I'm doing with my clients. But with my own [00:44:00] child, the intensity was a hundred-fold. Over time, I learned that by being with her instead of talking at her or distracting her helped her emotions go through the bell curve faster. At times it was a wild ride but I was committed to staying calm and when

I lost it, I would repair quickly or send for my husband to take over. Most toddlers do outgrow their big feelings and about 20% grow into deeply feeling individuals enriching our lives with their unique perspectives, deep love and boundless curiosity. Not to mention their empathy.

**MJ Murray Vachon LCSW:** Thanks for listening. If you're parenting. Grandparenting or working with children, know that your emotional intelligence is one of the most important gifts you can give them.

**MJ Murray Vachon LCSW:** [00:45:00] m