

010_Episode 10 - LGBTQ Mental Health_FINAL

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Welcome to Just breed, the podcast focused on transforming the LGBTQ plus conversation and supporting you on your journey with your LGBTQ loved one. You are not alone. Welcome to Just breathe parenting your LGBTQ teen. My name is Heather Hester and I am excited to be with you to transform the conversation around loving and raising an LGBTQ child. Wherever you are on this journey right now, in this moment in time, you are not alone. So welcome to today's episode, we are going to be talking about LGBTQ mental health, our kids mental health. And I just want to briefly touch on our last episode, which was the interview with Jay Reed. And just I hope that you enjoyed it and you learned something from it. I know it was very intense, so much great information. And I feel like



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applicable



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information for us all to use. So if you haven't listened yet, take some time to listen to I promise you will not be sad that you did. So today we are going to talk about our kids mental health, our LGBTQ kids mental health, and it is specific, specific things that they deal with that other adolescents do not. And so this is a topic that I've been looking

forward to talking about with all of you. And I'm sure by now you are all realizing that I'm a huge proponent of mental health awareness. And while I am delighted that mental health is no longer that overshadowed Ugly Duckling of Western medicine, and that encouragement to care for our mental health is almost on par with caring for our physical health. Our country is still quite literally in a mental health crisis, which is kind of hard to wrap our heads around that. But a recent study actually from last year, mental health America did a study on the annual State of mental health. And their report shows that major depression and our youth has increased almost four and a half percent over the past six years, six years, despite an increase in awareness. Let's think about why that is. I really want to talk about why that is today. And I want to talk about that really specifically to our kids who are lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender. How, why is this happening? So let's first talk about adolescence, adolescence is a very critical period for mental health. Because this the time when many mental health disorders develop during adolescence and directly following this major developmental period. Some recent estimates of adolescent mental health diagnoses show that 10% of our adolescents demonstrated mood disorder 25% demonstrate an anxiety disorder and 8% a substance use disorder. And as we discussed in the last episode, suicide is the third leading cause of death for youth ages 10 to 14, and the second leading cause of death for ages 15 to 24. Those are really startling numbers and they beg answers to some really unsettling questions. First, why are the numbers still increasing when overall awareness is also increasing? Second, what are the underlying potential causes that all youth have in common? And third, what shifts are needed across the board and I'm talking mental health professionals, parents, families, schools, organizations, and our youth. As a parent, it's I know it's sometimes hard to decipher between the developmentally appropriate mood shifts and stress versus anxiety, and or depression. So I wanted to give you a basic breakdown a list of teens specific signs and symptoms of depression and anxiety disorders. So for depression, you really want to look for sadness, and I'm not talking sadness as in, you know, they're sad, because they got a bad grade on a test or they're in an argument with a friend, I'm talking prolonged sadness, that sadness, where they're really just not able to shift themselves out of that space, feeling negative and worthless. Again, on a consistent basis, all of these that I'm going to mention, I'm just gonna say it now, we're talking on a consistent basis, when they are in these spaces, and they just cannot shift themselves out of these spaces, or there doesn't seem to be anything that you can do, or say, to help shift them out of these spaces.



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Increased fatigue, and sleep problems, anxiety, irritability, and anger, changes in appetite and weight, poor performance and school or school refusal, feeling misunderstood and extremely sensitive, substance abuse, loss of interest in normal activities, or social

interaction, and self harm and suicidal ideation. So all of those that I just mentioned, are specific signs and symptoms of depression, for anxiety, irritability, restlessness, difficulty concentrating, avoiding normal activities, or social interaction, isolating from friends, frequent headaches, gastrointestinal issues,



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fatigue,



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sleep problems, poor performance in school, or school refusal. And symptoms of panic attacks. And those symptoms can be rapid heartbeat, sweating, shaking, difficulty breathing, chest pain. Sometimes it can be a feeling like they're going to pass out. Those are all symptoms of a panic attack. So the first step for us as parents is to be aware, and to support our children or our child, like we discussed in the last episode, be present. Don't take fine as an answer to how are you asked the hard questions.



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Like,



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do you think about hurting yourself? I know that's really hard to ask them. But you need to ask the question you need to open the door, you will find out a ton of information. Even if it's the last thing on their radar, they will open up and begin talking to you. Another question you can ask is, can you help me understand how you are feeling right now? Listen, without interrupting or trying to fix. I know that's really, really hard. But that is what they need. They just need a sounding board. They need to know that you are right there with them. And that moment. Just last weekend, is about my 16 year old came to me and she said she was going through some some struggles, and she was really frustrated. And and she said, I understand that you and dad are trying to help me not feel alone when you empathize with me and share things that you struggle with. But you really don't understand what it's like to be a teenager right now. And sometimes I just need you to listen. She couldn't have been more right. And these are things that I know I talk about the stuff I've have bred, you know, a million books and articles, and I write about it. But sometimes when you're in the moment, when it's your kid, we forget these things, because

all we want to do is help them feel better. Right? So really important to keep in mind. I needed to be reminded. We all do. I know it's really, really hard to listen and know that your child is struggling or hurting. But that is what they need us to do not fix it, not lecture with a story of how we dealt with something when we were teenagers. Just listen. And it's not always going to be convenient because parenting isn't convenient. We're all busy, and have lives going in a million directions. But we brought these beautiful babies into the world. And our unspoken duty and promise is to be the best parent, we can be for them. And sometimes that means being available when we're an exhausted, or in the middle of a work, project, or otherwise preoccupied. Our focused attention and unconditional love are the greatest gifts we can give to our kids. So knowing what Adolescent Mental Health looks like is helpful when understanding the mental health of our LGBTQ



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kids.



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I'm going to start out with some very specific statistics for you. And then we'll move into what to do. So recent studies conducted in both the United States and internationally have consistently concluded that LGBTQ youth report higher rates of emotional distress, symptoms related to mood and anxiety disorders, eating disorders, school difficulty or refusal, self harm, suicidal ideation, and suicidal behavior when compared to heterosexual youth. Furthermore, all of these have been shown as a precursor to substance use, abuse and dependence. I want to pause here just for a moment and repeat that list to you. So it really sinks in so you have some time to take this in and really think about it. emotional distress, mood and anxiety disorders, eating disorders, or eating difficulties, school difficulty or school refusal, self harm, suicidal ideation, suicidal behavior. Think about your child's specifically, tune in to where they are right now. Right now in this moment in time. Ask them the hard questions. Ask them about any number. If you have a gut feeling if your intuition is telling you something. If you have noticed something that doesn't seem right, ask ask them open those lines of communication. They may not say anything now. Or it may be that they just don't know how to express to you what they're feeling or how they're feeling or what they're experiencing. But knowing that you are open and knowing that you are available, will increase the likelihood that they will come to you later that they will offer up information later. Just be available. further studies where they've interviewed LGBTQ kids specifically, amazed kids ranged in ages from 16 to 20 showed that nearly 1/3 of the participants met the criteria for a mental disorder and or reported a suicide attempt in their lifetime 1/3 33% almost 18% of lesbian and gay youth participants met

the criteria for major depression and 11% for PTSD. And, and this goes back to the first one again



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31% almost 1/3 of the LGBTQ sample reported suicidal behavior at some point in their life. I know these statistics are startling. They're hard to hear and they're scary. And this is why we need to learn about them. We need to understand the why. Why is this going on? Why is this happening? What is going on is causing this, and how can we help? So the Why? It's actually a, I think a good news, bad news revelation. The good news is changes and societal acceptance of our LGBTQ youth, and adults have made coming out possible for kids at younger ages, which is awesome. Compared today's average age of 16, to the age 18, a decade ago, and 20 and the 1980s here's where it gets really tricky though. The average age of coming out now intersects with the developmental period characterized by potentially intense interpersonal and social regulation of gender and sexuality, including homophobia. So what does that mean? Well, it means that while our kids are coming to terms with their sexual and gender identity, other kids are figuring out how they think about sexual and gender identity or what they think of it, they're forming their opinions. There are several factors that really go into creating the lens through which adolescents see each other, as well as how they treat each other. One is the belief system of their family. The second is how affirmative or supportive of sexual and gender identity their school environment is. And third, what their friends or peers think, or how their friends or peers behave towards kids who are not heterosexual or gender normative. So, given the social and historical context, and despite increasing social acceptance, we can see why mental health is a particularly important concern for LGBTQ youth. So what can we do? What can we do as their parents? First and most important, is Listen, listen, listen, listen, listen, and pay attention to their unspoken cues. So it's twofold being present when you're listening and paying attention to body language, behaviors, actions, tone of voice, you know, your kid, pay attention to those unspoken cues. Second, validate them. And this is really kind of part two to listening. But validating them means showing that you're listening showing that you are hearing them and that you are either understanding or you are trying to understand. So when you validate, you say, for instance, you know, I hear that you are scared to go to school today. I understand that this is difficult for you because of fill in the blank. Can you explain to me more so, validating to them, it's just letting them know that you really are hearing them, and that you're paying attention. The third thing that we can do as parents is to educate ourselves, and to learn as much as we can. And you know, we all learn differently. We all have our different styles of learning. We all have different ways we like to learn, whatever that is for you. Whether it's listening to my podcast, or other podcasts like this, reading books, reading articles, checking out my website, I have a ton of resources on there for you to learn from



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books,



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the whole nine yards. Whatever works for you, educate yourself, educate yourself so you can better understand where your child is right now, what they're going through, and how you can best support their specific needs. The fourth thing that we can do as parents is to do our best to understand the why we can never truly understand what they are going through and how they feel. But we can intellectually understand why for example, I will never understand how it feels to be made fun of, or to be ostracized because of my sexual identity. But I can have compassion for my son. And I can support my son, and anyone else who experiences that pain, those, those pains. Does that make sense? So, really working to look at that, why and understand the why and the why for each of our kids, or the whys for each of our kids, are going to be different. And the fifth thing that we can do as parents is to reach out for professional help if necessary. Be a part of stopping that stigma, and find a mental health professional for your child to talk to find one for yourself as well, if you need support. Again, I'll have lots of links and resources in my show notes as well as on my website. So there's at your fingertips, information for you. The earlier your child learns coping techniques, the easier it will be for them. I've seen it with my own kids, all four of my kids manage their own flavor of depression and or anxiety. And over the past three years, as we've dug deep to learn all we could to strip away all these stigmas, and to see a therapist to see and talk to other different professionals. All six of us have benefited greatly from that. For instance, my 14 year old daughter grace knows that music drawing, or her most unique and absolutely fascinating, designing one of her special effects, makeup creations. All of those things help her calm her anxiety. My 16 year old daughter, Isabel uses breathing techniques, listening to music, making playlists, or actually playing music, and even quiet meditation sometimes when her social anxiety kicks in. Each one of them knows that professional help is available when they need it. It's trial and error. They're all different, all of our kids are different. So it's really just figuring out what works for them. And for them, what feels good to them. So don't get discouraged with this process. Know that it's going to be trial and error and just go for it. What we know now is that Connors mental health journey has pretty closely mirrored the statistics that I just gave you regarding LGBTQ mental health. This is information we wish we had when he came out. Or even prior to that when he struggled as a 10 11 and 12 year old with anxiety, and both anxiety and depression once puberty head and adolescence really kicked in. Knowledge is half the battle. solid information gives us options and helps us create a plan or plans of action. While it doesn't eliminate the trial and error of figuring out the root cause and coming up with a toolbox of tactics, understanding mental health will definitely

point you in the right direction. You know your child, even if they seem like strangers at times, the parent child bond speaks many, many silent truths. Listen to what is being said between the lines. This is important. This is so important. Listen to what your intuition is telling you tune in to that and advocate for your child



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if need be. Whenever I bring one of my kids to our pediatrician when they are sick, she always talks to them first checks all of their symptoms, does all of that stuff. And then she'll turn to me and she'll ask me what I think is going on, which I love because As parents, we know our kids best, even when it feels like we don't. The more you turn in, ask questions and pay attention. The more you will intuitively know your child's sides. You won't question yourself you won't do the back and forth. For example, I always know that Connor take bath means depression is overcoming him. I can tell certain things by his and Isabel's eating habits, or Gracie wearing her air pods downstairs and not just in her bedroom, or Rowan, not bothering his sisters. I know other things by how engaged they are with each other. And with us, as well as where their sense of humor is. I realized that these are all kind of random examples. But that is what I want you to know these weirdly awesome things that we know about our kids. These are the things that help us stay in tune with them. At the height of our intensity of our journey, I had one professional tell me that they knew Connors thoughts better than I did. After only meeting with him one time. And then for a period of about four to five months, we had professionals telling us that Connors issue was that he was addicted to marijuana. Stephen, I thought we persevered. We advocated insisting that they dig deeper to find the root cause. Because we just knew and our guts This is what I'm trying to get across to you. We knew in our guts, we needed answers. We knew there was a root cause was he smoking to numb the feelings of his anxiety and depression? Or was it deeper than that? Had he not fully dealt with this coming out process, we knew there was a root in there. It was not this surface issue. That was the mask that was the maladaptive coping technique that he used. So I give you that example, because you will discover that things happen all over the board. and tune in, not only to your kid, but tune in to your gut. Unleash your mama or Papa Bear if need be, I have. And don't be afraid to speak that truth. This is your child. These are your children. Understanding, supporting, advocating for. And most importantly, teaching our kids how to advocate for their own mental health is one of the most important parts of our job as parents, please take advantage of the resources I have linked to this episode and on my website. And feel free to reach out to me if you have questions. Or if you need help finding specific information. You are not alone in this. I know that I just gave you a ton of information in less than 30 minutes. So take a little while to process at all. Think about it. Write about it, make lists. And most of all, give yourself just a few minutes to breathe. Do that deep belly breathing that will help you calm and center and all of this. The mantra I

want to leave with you today is my focused attention and unconditional love are the greatest gifts I can give to my kids.



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And my tip for today is to use this episode and my resources, educate yourself and be open to the possibilities. So this is where I'm going to leave you for today. Thanks so, so much for joining me. If you loved this episode, loving my podcast, please review just breathe so it can be found by others and help others that is my mission and my goal and I am just so grateful for all of you for listening. Until



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next time