

003_Episode3_FINAL

 Sun, 5/2 11:55PM  30:16

SUMMARY KEYWORDS

connor, messy, months, thought, learn, messiness, kids, moments, years, embrace, process, lgbtq, days, siblings, jaw surgery, began, read, asheville, evaluates, supporting



00:13

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.



00:29

Welcome to



00:30

Just breathe parenting your LGBTQ teen. My name is Heather Hester and I am excited to be with you to transform this 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.



00:56

So today,



00:57

I thought it might be really helpful to talk about embracing the messiness of this process. And in doing so, I thought I would start out with just giving you a really brief summary of the past almost three years, to give you an idea of really why I am talking about this, why I

am so passionate about it, and why I really want every person out there listening to know that you are not alone in this. And there are a multitude of things that can happen will happen, maybe already have happened. And and there's a community of people waiting for you to support you. So I'm going to actually read to you from part of it is an excerpt of an article that I wrote, and I just added, I extended it a little bit, just to encompass all three years. But I thought it might be easier because if I did this off the cuff, you'd be listening for the next 12 days. So this is a summary. It's an it's very intentionally vague, but I think it will give you a really, really good overall picture. When Connor came out to us in February of 2017, he was 16 years old. While Steve and I were blindsided, we quickly snapped out of our shock and jumped into learning as much as we could and supporting him in every possible way. We learned that he had known since he was 13 that he felt, quote unquote, different. We learned that the anxiety that we thought at the time was sports related was really him trying to mask his true identity. We learned that our son, the oldest of four, the high achiever and ever the rule follower and pleaser, was absolutely brilliant at living two lives between February and October of 2017. unbeknownst to us at the time, the stakes raised in this duality, causing his anxiety to skyrocket and depression to deepen. After a major doc jaw surgery, and he 30 pounds lighter. We realize that therapy he was receiving at the time, was barely scratching the surface. While maintaining good grades at school, he began to spiral, self harming, smoking pot, drinking vaping and engaging in very dangerous behavior with the help of grinder to ease the pain and intensity of his inner struggle. He was disappearing before eyes tortured and filled with self loathing. Terrified and wrought with worry, we naively thought we could love and support him enough to rescue him from his desperate hell. We quickly realized, however, that we needed professional guidance. surviving a suicide attempt, we took him to an intensive residential therapeutic program in California two days later. What began as six weeks max



04:25

turned into seven months, as we are advised that Connor was not ready to be at home just days before Christmas 2017. We quickly researched and tapped the brains of professionals around us and decided on a therapeutic boarding school in Asheville, North Carolina. Well, communication broke down between the three of us and Steven I struggled to connect with the therapist. A silver lining appeared, revealing a mentor and therapist who also happened to be gay men. While these five months were filled with frustration in many ways For all of us, Connor began to accept who he was allowing healing to begin and learn numerous coping techniques that would prove useful in the coming months and years. We brought Connor home and June 2018, much to his siblings delight. nervous but cautiously optimistic, Connor Stephen I moved for with the help of a commitment to rebuild trust, a gay male therapist, and lots of family therapy. When he turned 18 in mid July, we began to loosen the reins on some of the agreed upon rules and allow him to

reintegrate socially for his senior year. college applications acceptance on a highly competitive community service board at his high school, and an early Christmas gift of acceptance into NYU Tandon School of Engineering helped all of us move through these months gracefully with only minor setbacks, relatively speaking, of course, as 2019 grew warmer, Connor shared that he was dating someone. Knowing that this man was likely 10 plus years older, we asked that he proceed with caution. With fewer than six months until he left for college, our job became more to prepare him for the real world than to protect him from it. When you have a kid who will sneak out of his window in the middle of the night, encouraging safe behavior, transparency, and adherence to curfew are the few tools left. And then, in a matter of days, it all changed. First a car accident in which he totaled our kids car. Then three days later, while grounded, I received an accidental call at 5am. fuming and terrified Stephen, I learned that the boyfriend had broken up with him, sending him into a horrific downward spiral of depression that relied only on the maladaptive coping skills of drugs, lies and sex. Once again in crisis mode, but much better armed with information and competent professionals. We managed to get him excused from the rest of the school year with the ability to graduate and got him into an outpatient addiction program with a brilliant psychiatrist. Once again centered and focused on the goal of attending NYU, Connor finished the program and moved through the re render of summer. And now he is two months into his new adventure in Brooklyn. In some ways, his transition has been like most freshmen, bumpy, and not what he expected with glimpses of positivity down the road. This is hard. But as with all things, Connor likes to learn from his own mistakes, and he likes to go big, like life threatening beg. But here's the really great news. He's not throwing in the towel. He's not falling into a dark hole. He's fighting his way through and he's persevering. He's working to figure it out in his way, not mine, or his dad's. But his. And that is huge.



08:18

On the phone



08:19

the other day, he brought up that it was two years since he left for the intensive therapeutic program in California. It was a lovely moment of him recognizing how much he has grown since then, and celebrating it messiness at all. So I thought that would be really helpful to give you just an overview of our story. And I'm hoping that you can identify with pieces of it, and that it just helps you take a breath and say, oh, my goodness, there are other people out there going through similar things that I'm going through. And I think this is really important, because I think a lot of people are hoping for

the pretty picture with the beautiful big bow wrapped at the end, there's an end, there isn't and I'm not going to give that to you. And it's important that you know that now, I'm going to be real with you. I'm going to share the good things with you. I'm going to share the bad things with you. And some things are are really kind of ugly. And I want you to know these things because I want you this is all part of helping you feel like you're not so alone and that there are tools, there is a light there are steps forward. This is all part of the process and part of the journey. And I want you to be okay with the fact that there will be times that are hard when you don't know the answers when you will feel lost, or sad or scared, or just overwhelmed. Because there's also going to be times when you are completely elated, and breakthroughs will happen. And I really want you to just embrace the joy. And the wonder in those moments and just really appreciate them because they will happen. Your teen is working through a really extraordinary process. And so are you. So appreciate the small victories along the way. give yourself credit for growth and change, and give your team credit for growth and change. I really wanted to break down, why it's messy, why it's messy for them, why it's messy for us into just really basic bets. But just things for you to keep in mind as you're in those moments where we just when we're in moments of crisis, or we're in moments of frustration, all we can see is crisis and frustration, it's really hard for us to think logically or think, Oh, well, gosh, this is why this is happening. So I think the more that we hear things and read them as and begin to wrap our head around why it's happening, and helps us to be calmer. And that those moments. As you know, being a teenager is hard. It's It's hard enough for them. Just being teenagers add what they're figuring out on top of just being a teenager. And it's a whole completely different level of confusion, and hormonal Nxd. And anger and not making sense. And, and that's okay, so remember that their brains are still developing that frontal lobe, which controls decision making, and impulse control, it is still developing. In fact, it doesn't finish developing until 2526 27 is still developing for quite some time. So again, I know I mentioned this a few episodes ago, but it is it's those moments where you literally within 60 seconds can think that is the most brilliant thing my kid has ever said. And they turn around and do something and you think, Oh my goodness, that is the most idiotic behavior I've ever seen. This is why that frontal lobe is not developed, it's still developing. So very important to keep in mind and definitely adds to the messiness.



13:04

The second reason it's really messy for them is their self esteem, their self worth, they are still developing that they're still working through that. And they're they're trying to understand who they are. They are really just trying to figure out how they fit in this world. And I found this really basic definition of it, which I thought was quite interesting. But it's, you know, one of those lovely, lovely things that you're like, gosh, that's so simple, but it's, it's so profound. self esteem, is how one identifies and evaluates themselves. So it's it's really

two parts. It's them understanding who they are, where they fit in this world, and evaluating themselves. And this is that internal judgment. And a lot of times as we know, that internal judgment when they are feeling low on self esteem low on self worth, they flipped that outward. So they read their own internal judgment as others judging them. So just really good to kind of recognize you don't need to point it out to them, but just to observe and gently recognize as you're watching them go through this process, supporting them through this process. I wanted to read to you a post that Connor posted recently on his Instagram that I just thought was so beautiful. He actually posts Did this on National Coming Out Day last month. And he said, three years ago, I was terrified of who I was two years ago, I loved who I was. One year ago, I was outcast for who I was. But today, I am unapologetically queer and proud. And reading that, every time I read it, I get tears in my eyes, it is just so beautiful. And I've cut it out. And I've asked him to just go back and read that on days where he's feeling low. All of his siblings follow him on Instagram and tons of friends. I've had several people comment to me on that. And, you know, his, his siblings are so proud of him. And we all just loved that he posted that. And I think that's just a lovely statement. So I wanted to share that with you. So back to another reason why this is messy for them, is the obvious social media. And, you know, I could do several shows just on social media and my thoughts on social media and what it's doing to our kids. But let's just for the sake of time on this show, say social media, that's a big thing. It affects their self esteem, and it felt affects their self worth, it affects their decision making and impulse control. So many different pieces here. So definitely contributes to the messiness of their process. And really, the fourth is they just really want to feel okay in their skin. That's what their the end goal is, and they may not be able to verbalize that. But that is what they're trying to do. So they do that in a million different ways, depending on your kid's personality and their interests. I will tell you, for Connor, you know, some kids do it by trying to blend in because they don't want to stand out as being different. They're not quite ready for that. That's not their thing. Other kids go to the the opposite end and do everything they can to stand out. And that certainly is where Connor has been and trying to figure out who he is and to feel okay and his skin. And over the years, specifically within the last two years. He initially had jaw surgery, which was not by



18:02

choice. He had a he was born with a jaw that needed to be reformed once he reached a certain age. And so that had to be done. But that certainly triggered a lot of things for him. Following that is when we started really seeing the clothing style changes. And right before he came back home from Asheville, he dyed his hair purple. He got his ears pierced. And he just continued on just figuring out hairstyles, hair colors. He's had purple hair, he's had pink hair, he's had blonde hair. His hair is currently silver. It is an experiment. I think it's lovely and beautiful however he does it. Personally I love when he lets it be its

natural curly style because I love that but you know, I'm his mom.



19:08

But he's,



19:08

he's gotten multiple piercings. Yours has no nose. And then this summer, he started with tattoos. And here's the thing, you know, two years ago, three years ago, I would have been definitely of the stance of Absolutely not. Are you kidding me? This is crazy. app. This is crazy. But now, first of all, he's 19 it's his body. It's his self expression. And I know I've learned that if I push back, it's just going to make him want to do it more. But why not let him express who he is. This is his process. This is not mine. This is his. And so I've found that by embracing this and appreciating when he shows me a new piercing, or shows me a new tattoo, and really just it, it doesn't matter. That's what he wants. And that's what makes him happy. So, these are just the little things that I personally have chosen to let go of, I am not telling you that you need to let go of them. I'm just giving you a little picture of kind of my process and his process. Moving on into why it's messy for us. It really depends on where we are on our journey, where we are starting out with our own unique backstory, where we, how we feel when we learn that our, our children come to us and they come out to us, it just, it really depends on where you are, if you're getting stuck in a certain place, if you're getting stuck on a certain issue or a certain stage, I will tell you, that for me personally, for my husband, for my family, it has taken a lot of work and not. And I don't mean that in a way of that we were ever resistant. It was a it's been a lot of work to learn, and to understand, and to expand our minds, and to evolve. And I'm so glad that we've all embraced it. And we've all done this because it is just made the journey. So much more beautiful. Not any less difficult, not any less heartbreaking at times, or terrifying at times. But it has made the overall journey. So much more beautiful. Another reason that it can be a little bit messy, is having other children to parent and to be present for you want to be on your A game for them to. And sometimes, and I am completely guilty of this, especially at the very beginning, I was so overwhelmed and I was so completely trying to learn and and figure out that my focus was 100% Connor, and I had to shift pretty quickly because I do have three other kids. And and they they needed me they need me. And thankfully, I was able to do that. And you know we for a long time there. It wasn't until you know, at least a year and a half and that all six of us knew exactly what was going on. So there was a lot of having to be very careful of information. And you know, my two younger kids were quite young when Connor first came out. So we did a lot of, you know, protecting them from the whole story and sharing everything with them.

They got a lot of little bits and pieces of information. Even to this day, my my littlest one doesn't have all the information.



24:05

So it's it's messy for us because we have to figure this out. And we have to pivot and we have to shift and we have to learn how we're going to parent differently and be present, really present for all of our kids, for our spouses, and for our other family members for our friends. It takes time. And I just I cannot reiterate enough to you to just be gentle with yourself through this process. And I haven't even mentioned having a job or other commitments or responsibilities. Adding that on top of all of this just spells messy so give yourself a little space Be gentle with yourself, as you work through this, know that it is going to be messy, you will get there as long as you are aware of your end goal. And you are aware that you want to get to a place where you are present for everyone who needs you, for your other children, for your spouse, for your job commitments, responsibilities for yourself, very important. So going into today's tip and mental shift, I have to for you. We're going to continue on with our breathing, taking that breath together at the last at the end of just focusing, and really taking that deep belly breath and holding it for two or three seconds. And then breathing out. And remembering to do that for yourself a couple of times a day, just to get yourself centered, just to get your mind cleared, just to get you in a calm place. And I know I said this the last time but it bears repeating. Know that there is no one right way to go through this process. Every one of our kids is unique. And they will have their own experiences and feelings along the way. And that is okay. And each one of us is unique. And we will have our own experiences and feelings along the way. It will be messy, and that is okay. become comfortable with being uncomfortable. Be gentle with yourself and be gentle with your team. And I want you to take this mantra into the following week. Embrace the beauty in the messiness. And to say that one more time so you can write it down and take it with you. Embrace the beauty in the messiness. This is where I will leave you for today. Thank you so much for joining me. Check out the show notes on my website. And please subscribe to just breathe and join the private facebook page and share both with anyone who needs to know that they are not alone.



27:50

Until next time,