

# Rae McDaniel Interview

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## SUMMARY KEYWORDS

people, gender, pronouns, parents, lgbtq, queer, identity, talking, absolutely, celebrated, identify, questions, chicago, feel, conversations, knob, language, gender identity, trans, shift



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Welcome to Just breathe parenting your LGBTQ T. Live podcast transforming the conversation around loving and raising an LGBTQ child filled with awesome guests practical strategies and moving stories host Heather Hester always makes you feel like you're having a cozy chat. Wherever you are on this journey. Right now, in this moment in time, you are not alone. And here is Heather for this week's amazing episode. I am so excited to introduce our guest for today.



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They're the founder of the online coaching the gender fck club, as well as practical audacity, a gender and sex therapy practice in Chicago. They've been featured in The New York Times were firing 29 and women's health. While Rey's parents were unsupportive of their identity Ray ultimately believes that gender transitions can be an exciting time filled with exploration and self discovery. They are on a mission to build a world where gender transitions are celebrated. Just like having a baby, landing a new job or getting married. Since parents do play an important role in creating that world ray is going to share how to better support your transgender and non binary team. They are going to share what it means to be transgender and non binary, including a primer on trans affirming language and the gender spectrum. Their advice to parents who want to be supportive, but are afraid of making a mistake, and how your team can find joy in their transition amid the reality that they might face rejection. So array, I am so excited that you are with me today. And I'm excited to learn from you and have this entire community learn from you because you have just Natalie an incredibly interesting background. But your journey has just been beautiful, and very eventful. And you have some really valuable

knowledge to share that many of us are just meeting and wanting so badly. So I'm thrilled that you're here. Thank you. Thank you.



02:41

I'm so excited to be here. Thank you for having me.



02:45

You are very, very welcome. So I'd like to just kind of start out by talking a little bit just so everybody gets to know you a little bit talk about your your background and and kind of where you started out and how you moved into where you are right now and what you're doing.



03:06

Yeah, so it is a wild and a very winding story. So the beginning of it is that I grew up as the adopted child of evangelical Southern Baptist Christian missionary puppeteers, which is quite the sentence.



03:24

Yes. A lot of



03:28

so many adjectives. So I grew up in the deep south and rural Louisiana to the family of missionaries. And came out of that when I went to college and also a very small conservative school in East Texas. And as I was kind of getting to, to know myself a little bit better outside of my family, I started realizing that I was really drawn to the only out gay kids on campus, which happened to be the theater kids. So these were my best friends. These were my people. And I as I was in college, I kind of fell in love with psychology and realized that I wanted to be a therapist specifically working with the LGBTQ population. And so I followed that thread all the way to grad school in Chicago.



04:28

Oh my goodness, that is amazing. That is really, really cool. So can you just elaborate a little bit more as to where you're just in college kind of that figuring out because I know that's a very, you know, common time for kids get away from home, they they have that that space, a new space that opens up to them to be able to really think about who they are and where they you know how they want to move in this world. Can you talk about that just a little bit more? Absolutely.



05:08

So Ironically, the the tiny little school that I went to was also a Christian College. So everybody took Bible classes there. And it was through taking academic classes about Christianity and about the Bible, that I think I had an opportunity to really examine my own beliefs and my own values, and realize that they weren't in line with what I had been taught my entire life. And so it was a very slow process of discovering what it is that I value, what I believe. And one of the big things that kept coming up for me is not understanding how you can say on one hand, this is a God of love. And on the other hand, say, but we really don't like the LGBTQ population and think that they are, are sinners who are going to hell, those things did not match up for me at all. And so I think that was a big part of what brought me out of that culture is really noticing that discrepancy, and not being okay with it.



06:20

I love that you were able to connect with that in such a real way at such a young age, because that's a lot. I mean, when you when you have been brought up that way, and all of a sudden, you're like, Wait a second, this is not aligning. I mean, it took me another 20 years, my God is a God of love, and how this just does not make sense to me. I'm so thrilled for you that that is something that you gave your spouse self, the space. And I know there's a big fear piece that's in there of, well, if I really embrace who I authentically AM, and these values that feel so real and true, right? You know, that they're the other side of that is hard.



07:14

Yeah, yeah, that is absolutely true. And I, I knew when I came out to my parents as queer in grad school, after I had moved to Chicago, I knew it wasn't going to go well. And it didn't.



07:31

Yeah. Did they ask questions? Or was it just fear?



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It was just fear. You know, I wish that they had asked questions. And I think that would have been something that I could engage with. Because I understand people not understanding what they don't know. Right? If you've never really been exposed to it. That's one thing, right? However, what I got back was no curiosity, and no questions and justice shut down. And really no dialogue at all. It was mostly, hey, the Bible says this is wrong. We can't accept you. Please stay away from my family.



08:19

Oh, goodness, gracious. I'm sorry.



08:25

It was a tough time.



08:27

I am sure it was, I am sure it was. and still is, from time to time. That is really hard. And, you know, having the psychology background that you have and that you've studied, you, I know, understand all the intricacies of that and, and why. Right. So I'm sure that's on one hand good, on the other hand, makes it harder sometimes. Right?



08:55

Absolutely. You know, it gives me an understanding of where they might be coming from, but that doesn't make the lived experience more pleasant.



09:05

No, absolutely not. And I important dialogue to have, I think that a lot of times we run read and hear about stories such as yours. But don't connect with them necessarily. And so I think this is really important for people to know that this is a very real thing that

happens, that doesn't need to happen. And and that is why you are doing what you are doing and I am doing what I am doing. Right. Because the biggest piece of our work is education and, and taking that fear off of the table. Let's talk about your journey into Chicago. You got your graduate degree here you have this phenomenal community that you have put together people that you work with. So could you tell us a little bit about that?



10:05

Yeah. So I got to Chicago. And I think immediately when I was in a different environment, the closet doors just kind of flew open for me. And within months, I was like, Oh, yeah, I'm queer. That's really obvious to me. Now, I don't know why it wasn't before. But here I am. So I came out as queer very quickly after moving to Chicago, I was already on the track of wanting to work with the LGBTQ population. So I got my therapy degree here at DePaul University, and then immediately started working for an LGBTQ group private therapy practice, worked there for about five years, and then hopped over to my own practice called practical Audacity. And 2018, early 2018. Wow. Yeah, it's practical. audacity is a therapy practice that focuses almost exclusively on working with the LGBTQ population, and other marginalized identities. And so it's a very niche therapy practice. But we've seen so much need, even in the city like Chicago,



11:18

for sure. Well, I am a firm believer that everybody should see a therapist. And everybody knows, I agree. I say that all the time. But I am a far better version of myself. Absolutely. The need is there. And I think especially if you are struggling with anything, as you know, stigmatized as coming out as LGBTQ, oh, my goodness, that's almost like a requirement. I mean, just right, to like, hold on to yourself, be able to hold on to yourself through that. I love that you're doing that. And Chicago is a open, accepting community. I want to back up a little bit because I want to clarify some language because I know that this and we'll kind of shift into language in a little bit. But when you say you came out as queer, I know that people have asked me and there's a lot of there are a lot of different definitions of a what that means and be who is allowed to use that terminology. Could you clarify that?



12:26

Yes, I'm very happy to. That's a term that I tend to clarify almost anywhere that I talk, because I don't know about you, but I grew up with that being an insult. Yeah, I remember my parents and my grandparents throwing that around when they were were trying to

insult somebody, it was very much a bad thing. The term queer It started as an insult, but it was reclaimed and about the mid 90s. And it was reclaimed as both an identity category and a field of study. So the best way to describe that is to compare it to the word feminist. So I can identify as a feminist, I am a feminist person, I can also go to college and take a class in women in gender studies, I can be a feminist scholar, I can read books about feminism. So queer is very similar, and that I can personally identify as queer as an identity category for myself. And you can go and take a class and queer theory. There are queer theorist, there are books about querying and queer theory. And really to put an entire field of study into a nutshell, it is really about fluidity and flexibility of identity and identity categories. So it's saying that things like sexual orientation, things like gender identity, exist on a spectrum instead of checkboxes. And that those identities might shift and change over time. It's really a way of saying humans are complicated and nuanced, and usually putting them into checkboxes isn't very helpful.



14:21

That is extraordinarily helpful. Thank you. That is literally the best answer I have ever heard. Slash read. I seriously, it is one of those and I've asked my son, and, you know, he's, he's also been like, Well, you know, in some places, it's used this way and other places. It's used this way. And I'm sure all accurate, but thank you, because that was very succinct. And I think everybody will understand that very well. So thank you. Thank you. I love the one thing that I've been reading a lot on and actually had started this a few years ago, my daughter was actually doing a writing project. And she found this article and it was written, I wish I could remember the person's name, but a non binary person wrote this beautiful article. And it was kind of a letter to the mainly Christian people in their life. And it was essentially like picking saying, you know, you believe in dawn and dusk, you believe and land and see, these things are in the Bible. The Bible didn't have room to write about marshes and streams. And and, you know, the, the Twilight and the, you know, all of these beautiful nuances, like you just said in this article. I mean, I read it over and over. And I was I have referred to it so many times, because it was such a beautiful way of saying, Hey, we are all created by God. there just weren't and everything. Everything in the Bible is very black and white, right? man, woman, night day land, see, there's not room to write the millions of beautiful variations.



16:23

That's beautiful. I love that.



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So that is the ones I always go to that. And I think See, I love that. And that to me is proof enough right there. I don't need any other proof.



16:36

You'll have to send that to me.



16:38

So I will, I definitely will. It was just such a keep it. You know, it's tabbed. And I go back and read it every couple months or so just because it was so well done. And then it will remind me who wrote it so I can give them credit next. But since we were kind of talking about language a little bit, I'm wondering if you could kind of go even more specific and talk about what it means to be transgender, and non binary. And really talk about language around both of those, because I think that gets very, I mean, I know that it's it gets confusing and people generally speaking, people want to use the right language, and they want to be respectful and just don't know.



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Yeah, and it's such a big topic. And we know that language is constantly evolving and changing. And especially in the LGBTQ community, it changes so quick that it's really difficult to keep up with so I'm happy to give a primer. Yes. So



17:45

weeds.



17:46

Yes. So generally, what I say when I'm talking to people about language is ask them to imagine three knobs in front of themselves. So I like to think of it kind of like a spaceship or an aircraft. So there's three knobs that all turn independently of each other. knob number one is assigned sex at birth. So this is exactly what it sounds like, you pop out of the womb, and the doctor says it's a boy or it's a girl. Or that is what we all think of when we think think of assigned sex at birth. But the reality is, that the number of people who

are assigned intersex at birth or have some sort of difference in sexual development are roughly the amount of people who are redheads. Or, to put it another way, twice the population of Canada form in this idea that there are two binary biological sexes of male and female science is not really supporting that. And the more that we learn about the body, and we learn about the appearance of the body, chromosomes, the endocrine system or the hormonal system, the more that we realize that biology is diverse, and that's something that we see in nature as well. So I like to just ground us and that fact, because I think that's a really great foundation to to build on.



19:24

Absolutely. Oh my goodness, I love that. Okay, great visuals. Thank you.



19:29

Okay, so second knob, first knob as assigned sex at birth. Second knob is gender identity. So gender identity is that really deep, innate felt sense of who you are, in terms of gender. So maybe you pop out of the womb and the doctor says, it's a girl, and you grow up and you say, Yeah, I am a woman that feels right to me. That means that your gender identity is a cisgender one Woman. So Cis, that ci s, it's simply a Latin prefix that means on the same side as, so you identify on the same side as what you were assigned at birth. So let's say you pop out of the womb, the doctor says, it's a girl, and you grew up and you say, that really doesn't feel like it fits. For me. I identify as a man, that would make you a transgender man. Trans is a Latin prefix, it means on the other side of so you were assigned female at birth, you grew up and identified on the other side of that as a transgender man. Okay. Yeah, making sense. Yep. Totally making sense. Great. So I also want to talk about non binary identities, which is how I personally identify. So I and I will use myself as an example, I was assigned female at birth, and then I grew up. And that felt pretty okay, but not completely, right. But I also knew that I didn't identify as a man that did not feel like it resonated with me at all, I identify as somewhere very firmly in the middle of those two identities in the middle of that spectrum of identity, like we were just talking about, right. And for me, the term that feels the best is non binary. Other people might call that gender queer, or add gender, gender fluid, there's a lot of different terms that people use, but they all generally mean that they identify somewhere in between the ends of the spectrum in between male and female, is that making sense?



21:55

It is. So just to clarify really quickly, though, so non binary and gender fluid can be used

interchangeably.



22:06

When it comes to labels, I generally, not generally, I always want to respect what label somebody feels really reflects who they are. Okay, non binary and gender fluid, gender queer, they all can be used interchangeably as concepts. However, when someone identifies with a particular label, that might mean something very specific to them, that something like gender fluid doesn't really resonate as well with. So it's really about that personal identification when it comes to labels.



22:42

Okay, that makes total sense. And that's very, thank you. That's a good, that's a good clarification.



22:48

All right, so we're on to the third knob, here we go. So first knob, assigned sex at birth, second knob, gender identity. Third knob in front of us is gender expression. gender expression is simply how each of us whether we are cisgender, or whether we are transgender, choose to express that gender to the world. So that may look exactly like how society expects that to look. So if we go to the extreme, we say, hey, someone was assigned female at birth, they identify as a woman, and their gender expression is very feminine. Maybe they love wearing dresses, they love makeup, they always have their hair done. They love heels. That's a very feminine expression. But that same person could grow up and say, I hate heels. They're very uncomfortable. I don't want to wear them. I don't like dresses. And they might choose to express their gender with wearing pantsuits all the time, or wearing clothing that society typically puts in the box of masculine and that's how they choose to express their identity. So all of these knobs are knobs that can turn independently, and someone's gender expression may or may not match up with what society expects, based on their gender identity.



24:16

Wow. Okay, that's really good. That's really helpful. I'm digesting and processing as as I'm listening.



24:26

It's a lot of process. It's a big topic. Like I said,



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it is such a big topic and he you are really breaking this down. So well. Let me ask and this might just be completely irrelevant, and or a separate aircraft. But how does or where does sexual orientation is there a fourth knob or are we good to go next door for that?



24:55

I'm so glad you asked that. Yes, there is a fourth knob. So What I was just talking about are gender spectrums, what you're talking about is a sexual orientation spectrum, which are right is a totally different knob, independent of gender identity, expression, and sex assigned at birth. So people often mush those things together is they put sexual orientation and gender identity into the same box, when they are totally different concepts.



25:29

Totally different. kind of wanted to make that. Have you say that? express in very different ways? Correct. So just and I think that we probably could spend a couple of hours like turning the knobs different ways, right?



25:46

To Absolutely,



25:48

yes. So okay, thank you for clarifying that. What I am wondering, is speaking specifically about language. When using pronouns, I think that is a very, very big question that people have. So it's kind of a two part question. How do you ask what is the right way to ask? And can you explain all of the different variations of pronouns?



26:22

Absolutely. So it is another really big topic. And it's one that people tend to get very hung up on, which is kind of interesting to me, because we all use pronouns all the time. But really, what we're talking about when we relate it to gender identity, is simply the fact that people get to choose their own pronouns. And those pronouns might or might not match up with what society expects. And I think where people tend to get stuck are gender neutral pronouns, and how to ask for pronouns like you're talking about. Right? Right. So I'll explain gender neutral pronouns, and then I'll get into how to ask, so I personally use they them pronouns, I use they them pronouns, because it is the best option that we have in the English language for an existing pronoun, that is gender neutral. Okay, that's the pronoun that feels like it resonates with me the most. And people get very confused by they them pronouns. But the truth is that using they them as a gender neutral singular pronoun, has been around for many, many, many years. We know that Shakespeare used it, we often use it in our everyday language without even realizing it. For example, I run into Sally at the grocery store, and they said that they were having a barbecue on Saturday. That doesn't sound strange to us. But when we ask somebody to use they them pronouns, because they typically aren't used to it and may have to adjust a little bit. It feels really, really difficult.



28:11

Right? Or my thinking on this is, is, is it? Does it feel difficult? Because it takes effort? Or does it feel difficult? Because it's the mental adjustment? Both?



28:28

Yeah. So our brains like to categorize things. It's how it develops synapses really quickly, so that we don't have to think very hard or at all, to know that a chihuahua and a Great Dane are both dog, we get that because our brain has said, this tiny little thing and this giant dog belong in the same category. So our brain likes to categorize things, because it creates helpful shortcuts. Where that doesn't serve us here is that we have internalized a gender binary, where our brain makes short cuts based on what society's expectations of a particular gender expression is. So if someone has, let's say, a big, beautiful beard, and it's also wearing a dress and heels, our brain says, Wait, this doesn't fit into our preconceived categories. And we have to develop new synapses for that. And then if somebody is saying, Hey, I'm changing my pronouns, because a different pronoun feels better for me, then we have to build new synapses to connect that person with their new pronouns. And that can take a little bit of effort.



29:46

Right, and it feels uncomfortable, which humans, we don't like to feel uncomfortable.



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So very true. And one of the things I say all the time is Is that discomfort isn't harm. It's okay to be uncomfortable. And I'm sure you know, as someone who has been in therapy for a long time, discomfort usually equals growth.



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Absolutely, it does. And is it hard? Absolutely. But it's, it's so worth it. Oh my goodness, completely. And I think instead of it takes it, what it takes is that, okay, this is uncomfortable. I can sit through this, or push through this or whatever it is, versus this is uncomfortable, and I'm going to fight it. And I'm going to brace myself and I'm going to be stressed and I'm going to be, you know, all those other things. So it's kind of a learning to shift that your internal experience with discomfort?



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Absolutely. Very well put.



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So yes, thank you. Okay, so another question on pronouns. Yes. And just, this is varied. And it's an I know, these are questions that are out there. So when one uses, for example, she they a, what does that mean? And be? How do you know when to use Which one?



31:23

And we're not one requested prefer? Okay. Okay. So I can actually speak from my own personal experience here as well. So I started out with she her pronouns, right, I was assigned female at birth, and then my gender started expanding personally. And they, as a gender neutral pronoun, started feeling good, as well. So it wasn't that she her was feeling bad at that point in my life. But it felt more inclusive of my entire identity for people to sometimes also use they them, in addition to she her, so I really appreciated it at that time in my life, when somebody would just kind of vary it when they were talking

to me or about me. And that was really helpful and affirming. And I realized, I also forgot to answer your question about how do we ask about pronouns? So I want you to do that as well. Oh, yeah, absolutely. It's really simple. So generally, the easiest way is to start with yourself, when you're being introduced to somebody say, Hey, my name is Ray, I use they them pronouns. What's your name? And a lot of times people will take that hint and share their pronouns as well. It can also be just as simple as asking, what are your pronouns? That's, and if you realize that you've assumed about somebody, you can always name that and say, Hey, I realized that I assumed what your pronouns were, but I have an ask, what are your pronouns?



33:04

I like that. Okay. Very simple, and very straightforward. And so very helpful. This is, it's something that I just have to share out there. Because my daughter was talking about this, I've my daughters are in high school. One is a freshman one is a senior. And since we've been in this lovely environment of remote learning, they're on zoom. Right? So they've all you know, they've started putting, obviously, their names are on there, but my daughter's have put their pronouns. And they are she her pronouns? And so somebody asked my younger daughter, you know, why, why would you do that? Your? It is? And she said, Well, because I want people, other people who may not feel comfortable, or who don't want to be targeted, or who, you know, just are unsure to know that they can put whatever they want to on there. And I was like, Oh, my gosh, that's amazing. I'm so proud of you. That's incredible. And yes, that is what, you know, I think that is such a lovely thing for all of us to do just to because it's so it's a very simple way of being inclusive and loving. And just showing that you are a safe person.



34:29

Right? Absolutely. I love putting pronouns in zoom names. I also love having them in email signatures, I think that is a great way to do it as well. And it really reinforces this idea that you can't tell if somebody is trans identified by looking at them. There's no one way that trans and non binary people look. So for somebody to say to your daughter, well, why would you put your pronouns up there? It's off vs. by her putting those pronouns up there, it's reinforcing this idea that Well, no, it's not obvious. We don't know what anybody else's internal experiences, right. And so the best most inclusive practice is to always ask or to always put them out there so that people do know that it's safe to do that.



35:23

Right? Exactly, exactly. So thank you for kind of confirming that reconfirming that and just adding to that, that this, it doesn't have to be difficult, it doesn't have to be complicated. It is just and I think as we are making this beautiful shift in society, that learning, it's just different language, like we've done for 1000s of yours language has shifted since the beginning of time, this is just another shift and language, like says the way I see it at least. So thank you very much for making that a very, this is all you have to do. It's not hard people we can all do this doesn't matter how old you are, I truly believe that we all learn new things, we can all learn new things, I firmly believe that I want to talk a little bit about the coming out process and, and coming out, obviously, you know, in my house, it was my son came out as gay, there are a million in one ways that one can come out. And, and things that, you know, this is the biggest reason that I do what I do, because we knew nothing when my son came out. So I do this to help make others journeys, you know, just a little bit easier. Right? And, and the things that especially if one is coming out as an adolescent, teenager, young adult, what they want their parents to know, and understand, they probably are not communicating. So I'd love for you to share some thoughts on that.



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Yeah, I would love to. So first, I want to give the caveat that I only work with people who are 18, and up. So I am not the expert on folks who are under the age of 18, who are coming out. That said, I was once under the age of 18. So I can share, just from my own experience, what I know talking to lots of adults who have also come out either as teens or as adults to their parents. So I think ultimately, what every kid needs and wants from their parents, when they're coming out is what every kid needs and wants more generally, which is to know that they are fully loved and accepted for who they are, that they belong, and that their identity is celebrated, I think at the core. That's it. And that's something that parents know how to do. And so I want to take some of the pressure off, that you don't have to know all the language perfectly, you are expected to make mistakes, that's gonna happen because you're not a robot. And that's okay, that's part of the process. What is important to know there is when you make a mistake, because it's not if it's a win, to apologize, figure out what went wrong, fix it. So it doesn't happen again, or it happens a lot less and then move forward.



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Absolutely. Knowing that coming out can happen in you know, in a million different ways. Right. And, you know, our one basic job is to love and support. Right, but the coming out process for them can be stressful. You know, there are lots of different they can run into bullying, they can run into rejection, they Connor, my son had a lot of self loathing. There

are a lot of these different things that occur depending on kind of where they are in their different stages of coming out, right. We want them to find joy in this process. So how can we do that?



39:41

That is such a great question. And I love it because this is really at the core of my work with trans and non binary folks, is how can we make the process of transition the process of coming out one that is full of joy and celebration and Pleasure, while also acknowledging that we live in a world where there are bullies, where there are systemic things that put up barriers for thriving. So I love how you frame that question a lot, I do have some thoughts. So number one, a therapist is amazing, I really wish that I have had access to a therapist at a much younger age, because I think that it really would have helped me get to know myself a lot quicker and with a lot less self loathing. So number one, all the support that you and your family can get, I think a therapist is a great option for that. We also know that family support family of origin support is one of the number one mitigators of distress for anybody across the LGBTQ population. So your love and acceptance, that's going to go a long way. Building on top of that, finding an LGBTQ positive community can also go a really long way. You know, a lot of schools will have affinity groups, Gay Straight alliances, or queer groups of some kind, having, you know, research caused that collective self esteem, that sense of a positive feeling about the the queer, the LGBTQ community goes a very long way in helping decrease that stress, that self loathing, seeing people who, who look like you who identify like you who were thriving, that goes a really long way as well. And there's a lot of stories out there that people can, can tap into, you know, resources like the Trevor Project, things like that are great. I also like p flag, that's a great resource for parents as well.



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It is an app. So those are assets, money, those are my two that I always recommend, depending on, on on the need. And I and they're my go twos, you know, for research as well. So they have lovely information available. Yeah,



42:15

I think some of the other things that are really important, is focusing on joy and pleasure. You know, when we have these conversations, inevitably, we talk about all the hard stuff, because the hard stuff is real. But we don't really spend the same amount or more time talking about all the good stuff. So I think conversations with your kids around? Well, what

makes you feel really good in your own skin. When do you feel most alive? When do you feel the most like yourself? How do we get more of that in your life? And I think one way to get there is what I call spaghetti wall mode, which is when you're cooking pot of spaghetti. You throw it up a wall, you see if it's done, right, if it's right, when it sticks. Yeah, yeah. It is a process of experimenting, that is very low lift and low pressure, right? If the spaghetti doesn't stick, no big deal. You just keep cooking. It's fine. Exactly. I, I love that idea of experimenting with different ways of expressing gender, experimenting with different names or pronouns, or identities is a really normal part of adolescent development. But for some reason, when you bring gender into it, suddenly it's a huge deal. Right? with a capital D. Yeah, and I don't think it has to be, I think it can be just another very normal part of identity development and self growth that can be celebrated.



43:57

Ah,



43:59

that is phenomenal. Yes, as it should be. And I think it goes back to the just making that those little mental shifts, right. Like, how do we, instead of like instantly being like, Oh, my gosh, it's it's different. It's, this is I don't freezing and that I don't know what to do and freeze, right. Yeah. And, and that is a totally normal human reaction. But then reminding yourself that you can shift out of that. This is not a big deal. This is okay, and beautiful. And ultimately, what every parent wants is for their child to live as who they authentically are. That that authentic. I mean deep down inside. That's what every parent wants. They may not realize that's what they want, but that is what they want. And it's okay that it takes, you know, if it takes you a little longer to get there, that's okay. But just taking that breath and being like, Okay, here we go. This is, this is awesome. And I just think, you know, we in our house, we talk about this a lot, the, the dynamic and our house, in the past four years has shifted in such an incredible way. The relationships that we all have with one another, the conversations that we have, the openness, the, the humor, the you know, in our house, there's a lot of sarcasm, and probably inappropriate conversations since my kids at home. But it's all quite lovely. And, you know, things that when my oldest was 13, that I was terrified to talk with him about, right. And now they're just dinnertime conversations.



46:12

I love that. So,



46:15

you, everyone out there, you can do this.



46:19

You absolutely can. And the basics go a really, really long way. You know, if your kid comes to you and says, Hey, I want to go by this set of pronouns, and this name, simply using those pronouns. And that name goes an extraordinarily long way. And that kid feeling affirmed and their identity?



46:43

Yes, absolutely. Absolutely. And on on top of that are kind of in conjunction with that, the, the process of validating that, right. Okay, great. I hear what you're saying. I see you, I love you. Let's do this. And we may be in the same place next week. Awesome. And if we're not, that's okay, too. Let's just go.



47:16

Exactly, exactly. You know, one thing that I hear from my community of trans folks, is that a big reaction that people tend to get when they're coming out, and are asking parents to use maybe a new name or new pronouns is that parents are feeling a sense of loss about that. And I understand that I do, especially when you've taken so much care to name a child, something that is meaningful to you. And at the end of the day, your child asking you to have to call them by a name that feels better for them isn't a reflection on the parents, it isn't even saying that they hate their old name. And it's, it's not about the parents. So it doesn't mean that that parent can't experience loss or feel feelings. But putting that on your child is likely going to create distance in that relationship. And so even though you might feel those feelings, being able to ground yourself and this hurts a little bit, and there's some loss here and I know it's not about me and I ultimately want to celebrate this growth in my child in the same way that a parent might feel lost. When a child is getting married. And maybe changing the last name. No there there are tears there. But more than that, there's joy and there's celebration of a new chapter.



48:57

That is a really great way to put that and I don't know really great way to frame that. Those are really really important pieces. I think one reminding all of us that it's not about

us as parents, this is this is not about us. And to when we struggle and I often what I call it the movie reel process. So as a parent, you know you you have your whole movie reel of how you from the moment that this baby is born, what you kind of pictured like naturally happens right? And then when they come out that movie reel shifts. And so it is okay to go through the process of mourning your movie reel, but that is your process. That is you know, our process as parents that is not the our child's process and that is not theirs to deal with worry about here about period. So, yeah, that is where, you know, a therapist comes in is really helpful, because that's what they're for. Right,



50:11

exactly.



50:12

One of the things, so yes, I thank you for saying that night, I'm happy to hear that. shouldn't say happy to hear. But I think it's good information for everyone to know that this is what is talked about. And you know, when when experiences are talked about that these are really important pieces that kids would like. So, thank you.



50:44

You're welcome.



50:46

Because I love your visuals. And I'm sure you have just a fabulous answer for this. What is the when someone comes out to you, whether it is your child or a friend or your child's friend? What is the best way to receive that news and be a support to that person?



51:09

Wow, that's amazing. Congratulations. Thank you can be as simple as that. You know, I spoke about celebrating transition. And I view gender transition, not as a we're going from point A to B, but a lifelong process of moving closer to your most authentic self. And so when someone comes to you and says, Hey, I have made a step towards being my more authentic self. That's a huge moment of celebration. And often what people get is, oh, like, Tell, tell me about how you came to this conclusion. And this must have been so hard. And

those are valid questions, too. But I really think the first reaction needs to be Oh, my gosh, that's amazing. Congratulations. Can we go get ice cream? How do we celebrate?



52:10

Love it? Absolutely. Absolutely. And I love that, too, that thought of, you know, viewing this as a, this is all a journey. It's not just a one time statement. Right? Yeah, that's something out. Right? We still laugh, you know, when Connor came out, he was like, I'm done. Like,



52:35

I'm getting out.



52:37

Yeah, that's, that's just the beginning of all of this. I mean, this is awesome. Fabulous. But this is a lifelong journey that we want to be majority, beautiful and joy filled and celebrated. So thank you. Thank you. I still giggle when I think you know, I told the girl, the girl who's been doing my hair for years and years. And when I told her that Connor came out, and her response was right on, and I still remember that. Great. Like, that is such a fantastic response. If I could only pull that off, I would totally think I can pull it off the way she did. It's perfect. Right? So that is great. So is there anything that I've skipped over that you would like to add? Or just bring up? You know,



53:39

I think if I could leave you with one final thought it would be that the conversation around gender, and our gender identity and gender expression is not just a conversation for trans people, or non binary people, it's a conversation for all of us. You know, we've all been put into these tiny, tiny little boxes of what society expects expects us to be based on the sex that we were assigned at birth. And that isn't to say that someone is going to change their gender identity. But being willing to critically look at, okay, is the way I'm expressing myself in the world, really in line with who I am with my values and how I want to show up in the world. That is a question for all of us.



54:35

That is awesome. And that's kind of giving permission, right? A little giving permission to

everyone to step away from the binary and just consider that things aren't good or bad, right? That I could be a cisgender woman Who likes to play tackle football? And that's okay.



55:04

Yeah, sure as they give more freedom to everybody.



55:09

Yes,



55:10

exactly.



55:11

Thank you. Oh, my goodness. Well, I am so happy you have been with me today. And I feel like we covered a lot of great stuff. And I feel like there was actually like, there probably be lots of follow up questions. But I just so everybody out there knows, I will link all of Ray's information in the show notes and on social media and on my website, and make it you know, easy for you to find her and reach out. And perhaps if you know, we have enough questions that come through, maybe we could do this again.



55:53

I'd be happy to that sounds great. Thank you so much for having me.



55:57

You are very, very welcome. My pleasure. This was so interesting, and just really fun. So thank you. Thank you.



56:06

Thanks so much for joining Heather today. Remember to just breathe. Take a few minutes

every day to calm and center yourself. Reach out anytime with ideas, questions or feedback. Please rate and review just breathe on your favorite platform. Subscribe to Heather's website, [www dot chrysalis mama.com](http://www.dotchrysalismama.com) to receive her monthly newsletter and stay informed. Join the private just breathe Facebook community to chat with other parents and allies and share with anyone who needs to know that they are not alone.