

009_Episode 9 - Jay Reid 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. You are not



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welcome to just breathe parenting your LGBTQ teen. My name is Heather Hester and I am excited to be with you today 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 today's show is for all parents, really, anyone who knows a kid for all of my parents of LGBTQ youth. This is very important information and we will explore it and much more deeply in the next episode. I'm honored to have Jay read with me today on just breathe. Jay is an accomplished and multi talented businessman and devoted husband and father of four. Two years ago in March, his life was turned upside down when he lost his youngest son to suicide. Shocked and devastated Jay wondered how they had missed the signs. In working through his intense grief, Jay decided to take action. His TEDx talk and documentary are raw and truly extraordinary. Both open viewers eyes to the devastation that is the teen suicide epidemic. And encourage all parents, actually, anyone who knows a kid to become better educated, and work toward ending this very preventable tragedy. Jay, I want you to know how grateful I am that you are here today. And just really thankful that you're willing to share your story with me and with my audience. It is heart wrenching, it is powerful. And it's really important. So I do just want you to know how much I appreciate your time, and your incredible efforts that you are taking to affect change. Since a lot of my listeners have probably not seen your documentary yet, or seen all of your TEDx talk or know your story, would you mind sharing

your story with us.



03:03

I'm a guy who has what I always thought is a wonderful family life. Spent a lot of time with my kids. I was never any signs anybody was struggling that I ever saw. My wife I hit her up to celebrate her birthday, middle of March last two years ago. And on March 21, it was nighttime. It was 11:03pm. And we had a text from my youngest, Ryan who had just turned 14 text say goodbye. There's one more to that. He sent individual texts to the whole family. That night he killed himself. It was not a spontaneous thing. had planned it.



03:58

And thinking about it.



04:00

well over a year made sure that you might run a town. He knew where to go or even be found at time.



04:11

I'll save you all that the pain of trying to get home and get to the hospital and but essentially, that was on the 21st of march on the 26th of March. We took them off life support. You know I talked about this all the time. Speak different places. And you think can we get easier to say?



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No, but



04:43

it's always the first



04:45

couple minutes. Sorry.



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Don't apologize. Please admire your strength and being able to share this because there are not words heartbreaking, heart wrenching, gut wrenching. Just thinking about what, you know what you went through what your wife went through what your children, other children went through, and what your baby boy went through. And I thought about this a lot since I first watched your TEDx talk and thinking, Oh, my goodness, you know, we think 14 is so young. And they're not aware of all of the things they really are aware of.



05:34

Well, I didn't understand. And my mission has become to help parents understand what I missed. So after this happened, I, I formed, I was I went back on that afternoon on the 26th. When I got home as I was going, what can I do? And I'm a guy who's a CEO, like coach CEOs, I've done a lot of stuff in my life. So I'm a guy who takes action. So I do what every other person will want to do as you start a website. Right.



06:09

Right. Absolutely.



06:11

So I, so what what I want Ryan to do, is I want to I would really like to, yeah, chose chose life. So when



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I get story life.org.



06:29

I'm like, that's great. That's what I want. And it was like, \$10,000. I'm like, Why that? Why is that \$10,000. And so I got it. And I started building this website called choose life.org. And I remember a friend coming to me and saying, Jay, you know, that's the old anti abortion

site from the ad. Like, totally forgot that whole way. I kind of know, redid the whole thing. And it's still choose like.org because I hadn't I still have what I would have wanted Ryan to do. Though, what do I want other kids. And I have them when I did a TED talk, my first TED Talk a year ago, a year and a half ago, very raw, and some September after the event in March. And I started filming a movie, a movie called tell my story.



07:27

It's extraordinary. It is absolutely extraordinary. Congratulations, by the way everyone should know out there, I've just this documentary called tell my story just premiered at the Santa Barbara Film Festival two weekends ago, and got rave reviews. Because it is sharing a very important message. And I think part of your message and why it's so powerful is because you are so real. And you're so authentic. And people can relate to this very raw honesty about you, and about your family's experience. I want to talk about your documentary a little bit. And one of the things that I really liked about your message is that you talk about having a new approach to mental health, and specifically suicide prevention, and young people in teenagers. Can you talk a little bit about that?



08:36

As I looked at this, and I'm not a doctor, I'm not a professional in this space. I'm just the guy last kid. But I spent a lot of time looking at this and trying to understand how we got here. So the documentary is really all about me trying to share with parents what happened and what I missed. And we go and we interviewed kids that have attempted, we talked to parents and we talked to professionals. And there's a picture that emerges of a world we live in. Now that's not the world we used to live. And it really it was meant to give you something that you can watch and learn. And hopefully go home and make some changes and the relationships you have with your kids and your friends and your loved ones. And that's the that's what I hear from people all the time is now listen, I went home and I did something different. And that's what I wanted to do with that film. But as I look at the overall situation we're in and I in my last TED talk that just did in October that just came out talks about the whole idea that and so does our website, choose life.org the whole idea you know what? Everybody wants to raise awareness for teen suicide but everybody's aware. Everybody is aware of that it exists. Your kids are aware of it. But it keeps going up every year. It's the number two killer for kids in 2017 was 5000 Kids 2018. It was 5700 kids. 2019 stats are not out yet. But early word saying they'll be higher. It's getting worse and worse and worse. And when I grew up, I'm 53 years of age 40 years ago, when I was 13 years of age, I didn't. This didn't exist to the same level as it does today. So how did we get here? We created it. It's a man made problem. We're not as

connected with our kids. As we used to be, we're on our cell phones, they're on their cell phones, we're watching TV, we're watching. We're watching whatever we're watching. They are doing whatever they're doing. They're in their rooms on their computers. When I grew up, there was a TV and it had two things on it. For five o'clock, when I came home from school, there's only three or four channels, grew up in Canada and have a lot, right. And you'd watch your shows. And they mess around your brother and sister. And eventually you get in trouble and your mom would take you outside when there's snow or not. And you figure out something to do. And you play and you come back in till dinnertime, at dinner, and then you sit at the dinner table as a family, and you hear about each other's days. And then you would go do something together. Maybe you watch a TV show together. You watch Disney, you do something completely different. Now, these days, that's not the way the world works. We are disconnected as a family. We are not connected with our kids. We're not connected with each other. And when you when you take a look at how we got here, that's how we got here. Right now there's more to it. I remember being 1314 years of age. And I remember I don't remember anything going on in the world. There were wars, there were problems. I'm sure there was I can I can look back in history and go when I was that age. That's what was going on.

 12:02
Right?

 12:02
I didn't know. Right? The news was out at six o'clock. Till 630, maybe seven. My father watched it I sure as heck didn't write. I didn't read the newspaper at 13 years of age. I had no idea what's going on in the world. And I liked it that way. Yep. You take a look at kids now. And here we are. It's no, it's February 7 2020. Your kids right now, at 12 1314 years of age, if they have a cell phone with access to the internet. Here's what they're worried about the unit read to think about are they going to die? Because the Coronavirus is going to come over the states and kill.

 12:46
You're exactly right. My 12 year old asks me that on a daily basis.

 12:51

Like the anxiety.



12:53

Yeah.



12:54

Oh, yeah. And then if that's not gonna happen, well, we only have eight years left to live on this planet, because people say they're dying to yours.



13:02

Correct. My oldest was just saying that the other day. There's, there's some countdown app that these kids can get on that tells you this. It's craziness.



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So here, I'm a 13 year old kid. And besides my bullies besides my homework, which is more than it used to be, besides the pressure to have three days, which we didn't have that pressure when I grew up, and then I've got to be, I'm on the baseball team. But I'm on the travel baseball team, because I think I've got a chance of being a baseball legend. All the pressure of just being a kid, which is even more than ever was now I've got to worry if I'm going to die if the if the world's gonna collapse. The anxiety that kids have today is so much more than it ever was when we grew up. And that's the message I'm trying to get across to parents is that we created this problem. Not intentionally, we didn't intentionally created, that we created a world where everything is accessible. And everybody knows everything. And there's fake news and this and that out there. And we don't do a good enough job as parents, I didn't have having the conversation with our kids, but how they really feel and their anxiety levels are off the charts.



14:23

You're absolutely right. They are it is truly extraordinary. And I think until as parents and as adults who, you know, I like you're on your website, if you know a kid, right? If you know a kid until we wrap our heads around that it isn't this world is not the world we grew up in. It is so different. And we understand the effect that all the social media, all of the I mean, you just named every single thing, the incredible amounts of hope. Work the pressure to

be on a sports team and to be the best to be the best at every single thing you do. Right? to never have, you know, a big thing that I've I've started saying with my kids, you know, that I they'll come to me occasionally I'm bored. Good. That's good. I, you know, I because it gives them that chance to like, decompress, right? Put your phone away, go outside, you know, talk with your friends to their faces. And not on their phones, not on your phones, right? Go for a walk with a friend take the dog for a walk. And, you know, for me, this all started with my son, my oldest and and his struggles that we became aware of three years ago. And you know, I will I will not get into that right now. My listeners have an idea of what that is. But I you I have absolutely hit the nail on the head with connecting and connecting with our kids and not being afraid to connect. And I think that's another What are your thoughts on that? Just, I feel like as I talked to people that some parents are afraid to connect, maybe because they don't know how to, or they don't understand what their kids are going to are going through. So do you have any thoughts on?



16:38

I do I think that first of all, we I never recognized. I think most person don't recognize all the things we're just talking about right now. The differences they haven't we haven't made the condition and all the differences. Right,



16:52

right.



16:53

Absolutely. Now we're looking, what do we do about it? Well, it's easy when I go check it on my kid. And they say I'm fine. You're okay, you're fine. Because guess what? I'm not so worried myself.



17:07

Exactly.



17:09

Right. So the first thing you have to realize is when a kid says I'm fine. They're not fine. There's a wide range of words they can choose. I'm great. I'm good. I'm awesome. I'm sad.

I'm mad. I'm upset. Fine is right in the middle, which means no, you're not



17:27

absolutely correct.



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And it's inconvenient being a parent. Because you like crap. Time. Right? Yeah, our lives are busy too. I get



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that it is the single most important thing we can do.



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It is. And I obviously didn't do a very good job. And then a lot of parents don't. And just because you're not a perfect parent, because none of us are doesn't mean you mean my situation. I just want everybody to pay attention to it because I didn't see it coming. I didn't realize that Ryan spending so much time in his room by himself was a sign of anything. I thought it was. So kids are these days. He's my youngest. I got four. He's just a kid isn't all that social,



18:18

right?



18:18

He's not he but he's on his computer with his friends. I guess he's doing something. Right. Recognize all the signs. And you know, he was grumpy. I thought why is this grumpy?



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He's a teenager. You said



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he's fine. He must be fine. He does laugh. We had a fun night. Last night we had dinner we sat around the table. And we were that there's no there are zero electronics at our dinner table. I wrote a freaking book called dinner conversations, which is all about the funny stories that have dinner table trying to get parents to understand they should not have their phones at the dinner table. That's how ironic this whole thing is.



18:53

And you are the guy that it blows my mind just knowing the more I learned about you that this did happen in your family because you I mean, you are connected. You were connected. You just didn't realize because these kids are very good at hiding. What they don't want us to know why didn't wanted to hide



19:18

it. Yes. But he did that. Because when you think about why you did it, right. Here I am. I'm that guy. I'm that guy who owns companies never has a problem. My kids never saw me cry. I'm a black belt. I'm an Iron Man guy. I'm people would say I'm successful. I've written eight books. Everything in my life goes great corner. Right? Right. Every the what I've shown people in my family is that I handle all my stuff and everything gets done. Everything's great. And like Ryan and my wife and my kids never knew the fact that I've failed at a whole bunch of companies that I've almost went bankrupt a couple of times. I never told anybody that it happened around them. They know Ever thought, right? So I portrayed this vision to Ryan that life is wonderful and great and never has a problem, and I can sell all my stuff. So what is Ryan this role model? He looks at his life and goes, my wife my life sucks. There must be something wrong with me. So good.



20:19

No, it's just gonna say because they don't. They don't see like you just said they don't see all of the the humaneness being human. I never showed it. Because we weren't brought up that way, either. Right? We never knew that's what we were supposed to do. We thought as parents, right? What did you think I have to be this perfect role model? I have to show my kids. That's right. Exactly. And showing him and showing everyone around you that you're human is not part of that formula.



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But unfortunately, then Ryan thought talking about his problems wasn't something he should do. So when you ask me, right, what should parents don't like you have to talk to your kids more than I did? And you have to? If you see something that doesn't look right, you have to ask them? Have you thought about hurting yourself? And that is a hard conversation for a parent to have? Because in their mind, they're like, I'm not gonna say have you ever thought about suicide? My kid?



21:19

Right?



21:21

I put the idea in their head. Well, let me help you. The ideas in their head. Most of them have thought about it, or at least aware that it exists. And if you don't ask, you may not find out. And if you do ask, there are a lot of them want to tell you. They're just like, Yes, I've thought about it, what do I do?



21:46

Right? You open that door.



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And remember, aliens the big thing too, because I was so guilty of this. They come to you and they want to talk, they finally open up and talk to you. And they tell you how they're just so overwhelmed. And the world is tough, and all this stuff. And what's our natural responses, parents, especially as dads, hey, let me tell you why you should be really happy. Right? Your life is perfect. Compared to when I grew up. You know what your, you know, my father was like, holy crap, you have no idea what it's like, why are you upset about anything? Because we want to fix it, right? We want to show them, we want to show them that something's better that their life is great. And we think we're doing the right thing. And what we're doing is you're driving them deeper into a hole. Because they just came you and told you whether it is rational to you or not. They told you they're not feeling right about life, trying to fix it just makes them go, I shouldn't talk to you about this.



22:46

We're all every, every one of us every parent is guilty of, because we we do we just want to make it better. We want them not to be sad and not to be scared not to be whatever it is. We want them to we want them to be happy. We want them to find their passion. We are in uncharted territory, right? Because there's a huge disconnect. And it seems it seems very big. between what we learned what we know, and what will help us to be successful parents and help just have that connection with our kids.



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And we want to believe that. I mean, when you talk to someone like myself, who's never experienced depression, we don't actually. So I can look, I mean, for someone who's depressed, I've learned this now. It can be a sunny day, and I look up and it's a sunny day, and what do they see? They see clouds. And you go, there's not a cloud in the sky. Now these classes guy, there's not a cloud this guy. No, it's a cloudy day. You can't understand their minds. And so don't try to understand their minds, except the fact that they see what they see. And they feel what they feel and just hold them 10 level then talk about



24:12

Yep, that is spot on. I'm so glad you brought that up because that was one of the really powerful things that you talked about. And one of your talks that I've listened to, because I think that is a really even my husband is a lot like you as well and and has had a very difficult time understanding. My my eldest has dealt with depression and anxiety. My not my oldest daughter has incredible social anxiety. My it all of my kids to a certain degree have this anxiety and and my boys you know, the depression and it is when you are a person I I have dealt with that. And so I understand a little bit more. But I also, you know, can see it from my husband's point of view. And from your point of view where you're like, I just don't get this, like, I don't understand where you are. And you are spot on correct, you don't have to understand what your kid needs is for you to love them. And let them know that you hear them. They need to feel heard. And they need to feel loved. They need.



25:37

And that's how, honestly, My mission is saying that we should end teen suicide and supposed to raise awareness about it. And that's really how we do it. As parents, we take responsibility for the mental health of our kids, the same way we take responsibility for the how they feel when they have a flu or a headache. We treated the same way. Because

this did not exist to the same level as it does now. 40 years ago. Correct? Didn't. And that's a different world. And we, if you're waiting for the schools to do something for your doctors to do something for the government, and legislators will go away. None of that's going to happen. None of that's going to happen. The only way we get a grip on this is as parents realizing it is our responsibility. And guess what, if we can fix it in our kids, we can have our kids have better, better emotional health. And they become better adults. So it's not just about ending teen suicide. Kids, it's about any team, it's about changing this over 50 years for everybody.



26:45

Right? It's about changing the conversation. Because it and and I think part of that too, is changing the conversation around being okay, talking about this taking away that stigma that there's, there's something there's something wrong with you. You know, if you struggle with depression, you struggle with anxiety, that there's something wrong, right? It is a mental health struggle. It is not something to be embarrassed about or ashamed of, or that can only be talked about in quiet circles. It is a conversation that needs to be had, just like you would talk about that 30 kids have the flu at the high school.



27:30

And by the way, for those of you listening to these one, well, I What do you want me to do baby my kids? Every time they're like, No, I'm not asking the baby kids. Because the other big problem we have is we we do baby our kids. We're creating kids who have zero resilience, because every time they go out to do something, we're there to solve it for them. When they get a bad grade on a test, we call the teacher when there's a little problem the playground we jump in and solve it for him. We we don't let them go outside and skin their knees. Because oh my gosh, you might scan your knee. I can't I can. I don't remember how many times I skinned my knee. But there's a lot. I don't think Ryan ever seen that. Right? All right. So we're creating kids that lack resilience that don't know how to deal with problems. So what happens, you know, they become 14 1516 years of age, and some girl or guy dumps them, and they've never had any problems or life. And now it's the end of the world. They don't have coping skills. Because as we as the parents that wanted to grow up and take care of our kids, differently than our parents did, who left us to our own devices. While they might have done better for us by leaving us to our own devices, right, we had the solid ones ourself, and I likely over protected Ryan, me My youngest. Yeah. So what we do my oldest, for some reason? No, I didn't. But my understand is I did. So it's not about babying your kids. It's about your kids. But understanding your kids, baby Your kids,



29:05

it's about being real with them, having these conversations and listening to what they have to say about it as well. So yeah, a lot of listening. And that is hard. That's really hard. I know, you know that. I know that. So many times I've sitting and talking, you know, again, especially with my oldest, just biting my tongue because I know, just keep it quiet, you know, don't jump in there either. Let them just go. And that is the best thing we can do. Because you can. I mean, there have been times where I've started talking, and you can literally you can visually watch them shut down on you. So what they need is to talk and be heard. What we need to do is talk about the tough stuff and allow them to fail. And that's hard. You You know, we both know that there are fine lines there, right?



30:04

Well, and I again, I can't tell you that here's the perfect formula to go do this. And I'm not sure there is a perfect formula, there's, I mean, there's not a perfect way to do any of this. But we can all probably do it a little differently than we're doing it today. We'll find our ways our parents found their way. Our parents figured it out in their way, so that this problem did not exist 40 years ago,



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our our job and our generation is to make sure this is not happening 40 years from now,



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yeah, it's not going to happen overnight. No. But I and when I say I want to emphasize I get Of course I do. But we make a huge dent in it, we can make a huge dent, we can reverse this track the way this is going in this couple years. If we all get on board and say we need to do it.



30:55

Absolutely.



30:56

If we don't give 12 year old kids cell phones with unlimited access, which I get, I regret. So

that's why I've done all the content I've done. There's a goal cast that comes out here in the next couple of weeks. I've been working on for about a year, the film when it premiered. We're working on how we distribute the film, I believe the way that we're going to end up distributing the film is habit so that it's not the kind of thing I want parents to watch by themselves, it's kind of thing that's more of a community event brought in by PTA and churches, to where you can come in and watch it together and have an adventure around it, where we you bring in a psychologist after the event to talk about the local resources for parents. I know there's a big demand for this. I spoke in Seattle a couple of weeks ago, it was all elementary school and middle school parents. And they sold out the event weeks before I got there, and there was no screening in the movie. It was just Jay's gonna come up and talk about this. And that's how scared they are. They're 789 10 year old kids, parents, and it's all in the audience. And they were all crowded in this room. I'm going wow, wow. And we were supposed to end at 830 minute 915 lifeis, they're gonna kick us out of here, I have to stop. Like that. That is the the anx out there. That is the what's going on. So this movie, if you keep we're redoing the Choose life.org website. So it's, so we'll have all the information on the film. But if you pay attention to that, put in your email address, we'll be able to get you information on when that's all coming out. But it'll be available, hopefully by April. And we'll be hopefully having a whole bunch of screening parties parties, we're going to call it that events for the foreseeable future.



32:45

Well, on your website right now there is a trailer for it. So everyone can definitely watch the trailer, watch. Jays, Ted Talks, TEDx talks, they are phenomenal. Get your email in there, I know that I'm going to do some work on on getting you to our high school here. We have just in a year lost two kids. And that's sure to too many people are wanting to know what to do, we will have to talk about that. I am so beyond grateful to you for what you're doing and for your voice. And this and and just you being so very human. So thank you. Thank you very, very much. And thank you so much for being here today.



33:38

Thank you for having me.



33:39

You are welcome. So my lovely listeners. I know this was a lot to take in. Like I said at the beginning Jays story is absolutely heartbreaking. And the sad reality is that it is happening all around us. So what can we do? Two things to start one, really click in and

connect with our kids and to become a part of Jays powerful mission to end teenage suicide. My show notes we'll have links to his website and Ted Talks, and for all my parents of LGBTQ kids. The next episode we'll take a deep look at their specific struggles with mental health in general. Remember, you are not alone. Until next



34:32

time,