

474: How to Support Adults Who Are Struggling



Full Episode Transcript

With Your Host

Jody Moore

[Better Than Happy](#) with Jody Moore

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Whether it's your adult children, your siblings, parents, spouse, or friends, being loving and supportive to another adult who is struggling is difficult, because we're talking about people who have their own thoughts, feelings, desires, and we have our own emotions and agendas that get wrapped up in all of it. In an ideal world, everyone agrees about everything and behaves in a way that we all like and we live happily ever after. But that would actually be boring and weird. The real world is so much better than that made-up world because the real world gives us opportunities for true connection with ourselves, with others, and for growth. This is episode 474, How to Support Adults Who Are Struggling.

This is *Better Than Happy*. I'm your coach, Jody Moore. And on this podcast, my objective, just so we're clear, is to change what you've been taught and have likely believed about yourself up until now. Here's what I believe about you. I believe that what you think is real is mostly imagined. And what you imagine is actually creating what's real. I believe that in the ways you desire to achieve, you 100% have the capacity to succeed.

And finally, I believe that joy, love, and miracles are your God-given natural state of being. And any time you feel far from them, the way back is much simpler than you think, but that's about to change. Are you ready? Let's do this. Welcome to *Better Than Happy*, I'm Jody Moore and I'll be your coach today.

What's up, everybody? Welcome to the podcast. Hey, next week, I am teaching Nail Your Niche. If you are a coach and you aren't clear on your niche, you can't tell me who you help and what is the transformation you provide for them, then you need to join me for Nail Your Niche because this will keep you stuck. This will keep you spinning. I know you've already experienced it. You're not very focused. You're not very confident about what you're saying because you're not sure you've got it right.

Come to Nail Your Niche. It's less than a hundred dollars. We're going to spend two hours together, and by the end, you're going to have your niche nailed down. I'm going to give you a whole list of possible niches that I think

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are awesome to try out. But more importantly, I'm going to tell you how to find the right one for you. So I will see you there. Head to jodymoore.com/niche, N-I-C-H-E. Again that's jodymoore.com/niche, N-I-C-H-E for all coaches. I'll see you at Nail Your Niche.

Okay, so today's topic totally just appeared for me in the coaching that I did this morning. Just had a coaching call with some VIPs from The Lab. And then also a question that came in a little while ago, actually. This has been sitting in my inbox for a while, but I felt like the question went along nicely with some of the coaching we did. And so it feels like this topic is in the air for some reason, and I want to speak to it. So let me go ahead and play the question that came in. And again, if you have a question you would like to send me, you can always reach out to me, leave me a voicemail at 888-HI-JODY-M. That's 888-HI-JODY with a Y, M as in Moore. All right, let's play the question. Here we go.

“Hi, Jody. My name's Julie. And my question for you today is how can we as wives, mothers, and individuals continue to love and support our kids as they're getting older when we're so used to putting so much emotional energy and physical energy into them and then it becomes no longer appropriate to channel that towards them and it needs to be redirected towards something else. I'm finding myself at a loss as my kids are getting older, half of them out of the house, half of them in the house, and realizing that it's no longer appropriate for me to put all of the emotional energy into them. They don't want it. They don't need it, but then it makes me sad. I need to find something. So, I guess my question is, how do we balance that changing life stage in a way that's honoring and loving to myself and to my husband and to my kids. Thank you so much for all you do. So much appreciate the coaching that's available through your podcast. All right. Bye.”

Well, hello, Julie. Thank you for that beautiful question. So I'm going to talk to you about how to best support your adult children. But again, I wanted to make this episode relevant in a lot of different situations because it's going

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to be mostly the same, whether it's my adult children or my sister or my friend with a few tweaks in a certain space that I'll address in just a minute.

Okay. So there's a couple things in the way you asked your question that I want to point out, even to those of you that don't have a struggling adult in your life, maybe your kids are young. The way you talk about as your kids were younger, putting so much emotional energy into them was the verbiage that you used. And I'll be honest, that terminology kind of worries me a little bit. Not worries, like you haven't done anything wrong, but I just want to question it.

I want to call it out because I don't think it's actually ever really appropriate for us to put a whole bunch of emotional energy into our kids. I think it's appropriate to love your kids. And I think you're going to have a lot of emotions as you raise and love your kids and teach your kids and parent your kids in whatever way you want to. But I worry about parents, and it seems to be more common with mothers, but it can happen either way, overly pouring themselves into their children in this way. I don't think it's actually healthy or useful. I don't think it's what our kids want, and I don't think it's what they need.

And I think that as they get older, they become more aware of what they actually want and need, and they become able to express it, or even in some cases, maybe create boundaries, as they realize they don't want our emotional energy poured into them. Whereas when they're younger, they're maybe not aware, or they're certainly not able to verbalize it or navigate the relationship. So I don't think that that part changes. If you have young kids, I think this is still going to be really relevant for you to consider.

And so I bring that up, Julie, not to say that you've been doing it wrong. That's not what I'm saying at all. I'm saying, let's rethink about your role as a mother, what it could be for your younger kids and what it could be for your adult kids. Because I think there's only one part of it that needs to change as they age, and that is how you love them.

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And I know that's probably what you mean when you ask me the question this way. What you mean is how do I best love them? But just the way you describe putting so much of your emotion and your effort and your attention and your energy into them concerns me. Honestly, it does.

I think that our job when it comes to raising these kids is not to think of our children like a project. I see a lot of parents still thinking about their kids as a project, like we have these first 18 years to first of all, protect them and take care of them and then teach them and guide them and "parent" them, whatever that even means, right?

Maybe have rules and consequences and guidelines and monitor their phone time and force them to take sports or whatever parenting means to you. And then, hopefully, if we can do it to the best of our ability, then by the time they turn 18 or by the time they leave the house or whatever, then they're going to be confident, resilient, good people who go to church, make good decisions, are healthy, are smart and educated, are kind and compassionate. And if we turn out that kind of an adult, then yay, our project worked. Okay?

I know logically when I say it out loud, it sounds kind of ridiculous, but that is still the mindset so many parents are operating from. They think of their kids like a goal, and there's an end to this goal, which is we hope they turn out a certain way, or at least we hope that they feel loved and that they know God loves them. Sometimes we try to like whittle down the goal as we realize like, wait a second, this kid is making his own choices, it's very disappointing, I don't like his choices, he's not, he's not always happy, he's not always confident, whatever it is.

So maybe we just whittled the goal down to like, now my goal is just that he knows I love him. That's still, I don't think, the healthiest approach. It still is you believing that your job is to somehow manipulate this child into thinking or feeling or believing something. And I just don't believe that's our job. I know it's not even possible because I see it backfire all the time.

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The best parents with the best of intentions who have kids that don't turn out the way they thought they were going to. What went wrong? And suddenly we're confused and we're heartbroken and now we're judging. Maybe we didn't do it right. Maybe if I had done a better job on this project, I would have gotten a better result here. And I'm saying, no, no, no, you're thinking about it all wrong. Your kids are not a project for you to pour your emotional energy into them. And then once they become adults, you're done with that project. And now we have to figure out what's next. That is not, I don't think the most useful way to think about our role with these kids.

So what is the way? Let me just be clear. I have no idea what is the right way. I'm just going to tell you the way that I found works really well for me and has worked well for a lot of parents to think about our role with our kids. I think that we only have three jobs, that's it. I think it's actually really three simple tasks that can be challenging to figure out how to execute and to keep our heads straight in staying in our lane of these simple tasks and not adding a bunch of other stuff, but it is actually pretty basic, okay? And I'm going to put them in this order on purpose.

I think our first job is just to get better at feeling our own feelings as we go on this journey of raising kids, okay? You're going to have a lot of emotions if you're like me and like most of the people I coach, okay? Being a parent means that I have felt the most intense love I've ever felt in my life. I've felt extreme joy and happiness and gratitude and love. And being a parent also means that I've experienced more stress, anxiety, heartache, concern, disappointment, probably than ever in my life as well.

Now, my kids are not creating any of those feelings. I'm creating them with my ideas about how the world should be, about how my children should be, about myself and what they think of me or what I think of me or how we interact with one another or whether or not I'm missing out on something or whether or not they're missing out on something. Like all those stories in my head about the world, about myself, about them, about other people are creating those emotions and it's all good. It's all natural, normal, nothing wrong with any of the stories I have, just lots of feelings.

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Okay, there was another question. I can't remember if it was on our hotline or where it came in, but somebody said, can you help me not think so many thoughts and feel so many feelings? I'm like, no, that's not the goal. The goal is not to stop thinking thoughts and feeling feelings. The goal isn't to dehumanize you. The goal is to reconnect you with your human self, to lean into your human self, to first and foremost, allow feelings, to learn how to process them, to take deep breaths and relax and let those chemicals circulate in your body and let your body process them in whatever way it needs to. Maybe you need to cry. Maybe you need to throw up. Maybe you need to go on a walk and move your body. I believe that moving your body helps move your emotions through you. So there can be lots of ways to do this. We spend lots of time in The Lab doing this. I do this with people all the time.

I just had a woman today on the call who was struggling with something with, ironically enough, her adult son, and she was sad. She was like trying to move on from it. I'm like, "No, no, no, let's be sad first." She's like, "Well, I think I can get past that part, but what about this part?" I'm like, "No, no, come back to me. We're being sad. Why are you trying to run away from the sad? Let's just be sad." And we did a little sadness together for a minute. It was really a beautiful moment. And it wasn't that painful and it didn't paralyze her. And it actually, I could see that human connection show up again. And she had incredible wisdom that came after we just allowed some sadness.

Okay, so that's your first job as a parent is to get better at feeling the feelings that you're going to create for yourself as you raise children. Welcome to the human experience. Your second job as a parent is to manage your own mind. What I mean by that is to choose intentionally what you want to think and believe about your children.

This is an example of it here. When I say to you, this is the way I think about my job as a parent. This is a story or a belief system I've chosen on

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purpose. What I mean by on purpose is I sat down and asked myself, what is my role as a parent? And of course I have lots of things trying to inform that decision, right? I have the way I see people around me parenting, the way my parents raised me, what I think my kids prefer, what I've seen on the movies, what I've read in books, what I've listened to on podcasts, all of those things are informing my decision and that's fine, but rather than just take them as they come, I'm stopping and going, "Wait a second, based on what I know and my experience and what I just choose to believe" - that's mind management.

It's choosing intentionally what you're going to believe. And then as your brain tries to go, oh, maybe I should be doing this differently. Maybe I should be more like that person. I go, no, this is what I decided. And I feel good about that decision. Come back to me, brain, unless we need to revisit it. Then we're going to stay here with this story.

And so you'll have opportunities to do that all the time. You'll have opportunities to decide what you're going to believe about your child's choices, about whether or not they should go to college, about whether or not they need to go to school at all, about whether or not they should be respecting you, or their struggles and challenges are unfair, or whether or not they can handle them. There's going to be all kinds of things that you'll have the opportunity to manage your mind around. That is your second job.

First job, process and allow feelings. Second job, manage your mind. Third job is to love them. Now, I know that sounds really vague. What does that even mean? Well, it is vague because it changes as your kids grow and change. And it might even look different from one child to the next. How do I best love them in this situation? When we have little babies and little ones at home, there's a lot involved in loving them.

Loving them means making their meals and cleaning up their messes and changing their diapers and making sure they don't run in the street and listening to them and playing with them. And there's a lot to loving a toddler

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who's highly - or a baby who's very dependent on us, right? Or a young child.

As the children get older, loving them changes form. So how do I best love them? This is an amazing golden question that I recommend you keep in your back pocket. It's useful with your kids. It's useful with your siblings and your friends. It's useful with any person. How do I best love them right now in this situation?

Now, notice I'm not saying, how do they want me to love them? Because the way they want me to love them may not be what I think is the best way to love them, right? This is obvious with kids. Like the way they would like me to love them is to have no rules, no restrictions, anything goes, we eat any kind of food we want and whatever else your kids might want. Okay, that you might think, maybe that's not good for them. Maybe limiting screen time, maybe having some guidelines and some regulations and things, maybe that's the best way to love them. Okay, I'm in.

But at other times, what's the best way to love them might be to leave them alone, to give them space. It might be to honor their wishes and desires, even when they feel contrary to my wishes and desires. It might be to be curious about why they view the world differently than I do instead of feeling threatened or making it mean something about myself or my parenting. Having a boundary of my own and saying no at times or backing off, right? How do I best love them?

Now, I can't love other people more than I love myself. That's just my personal belief. So you have to also be doing the work of loving you. How do I better love me and how do I love them? And in any given situation, how do I love both of us? It's a great, great question to ask yourself.

Okay, so with your adult children, if you're sensing that what they want is a little space, a little distance, a little bit more respect for their agency and allowance for their own decisions and a little bit less guidance, a little bit less communication, whatever it is, if you feel a pushing away a little bit,

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like I sense a little bit, Julie is, then I love the second part of your question, Julie, where you say, "What do I do with this desire that I have?" I think you said, "How do I channel this into a different place?" And I love that question so much for you. And it's a difficult question. I don't know the answer to it, but I want to guide you to try to find the answer for yourself, okay?

So first, what is this I'm trying to channel? What is my desire or the void that I've now created? Like it literally might just be that your kids took up some of your time and now you want something to fill your time that feels challenging and rewarding.

It might be that you have a real desire to love and nurture and guide and teach, and that's a beautiful thing and we need to find a way to direct that. It might be a creativity desire, that being a parent, if you have some creativity that can be really useful, and now you don't have a place to utilize that like you used to, okay. Maybe you're a really good listener and you used to be with those kids and they needed someone, a listening ear a lot, and now they don't need that. What am I going to do with my skill and desire to listen and hold space for someone?

So these are all beautiful things, whatever it is for you. When you say, I need to channel this into something else, what is this? What is it that you have a desire to do or be or contribute that used to get fulfilled as you were raising those children that now you feel this void in?

Because as you identify it, let's say you realize like, I just love teaching and guiding. Okay. Well, what do I want to do with my skills and my desire to teach and guide? The sky's the limit. There's a lot of things I could do. Are there any people in the world that could use somebody with the skills of teaching and guiding? Heck yeah. Okay. Maybe that's my calling next. Maybe that's where I channel this.

So we really can take on now a project or a job or a degree program we enroll in, or a volunteer opportunity we choose to spend our time in, like, sky's the limit, a business you want to start. But it's such a great and cool

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thing, I think, that we have these desires and these unfulfilled sort of needs, if you will, that they get met sometimes in our relationships and then those relationships change? So yeah, I love that question. What are you going to do with it? Let's figure it out. And don't make it a big existential, I have to figure out my purpose kind of thing. Just like what sounds interesting and fun to me right now?

Like today, I really would encourage you all to keep your minds a little bit more open. I know a lot of you struggle with this, finding my purpose, especially after your kids start getting older and leaving the house. I try to really keep my mind open to like, I'm curious about this thing. Maybe I'm going to explore that. And then sometimes I take a class and realize, no, I don't want to go that way. Other times I keep going with it for a while.

I even, the other day, walked into Anthropologie because I just kind of wanted to get out of my house and walk around a little. And I thought, oh, I'm going to go to Anthropologie because it's always so pretty in there. And I love that store. And I walked in and was walking around and seeing all the things I love. And it's really pleasant in there and I was realizing I don't really want to buy anything. I don't need anything from this store. I have plenty of clothes and home decor and all the things and there's things I like but I don't really want to spend my money on it and I don't want more stuff in my house right now. So why am I here?

And I realized I just like this environment and I had this thought, "Maybe I should just go get a job at Anthropologie or a store like it." Just a small part-time job not because I want to make extra money necessarily. Just because I want to get out of my house, be around people, different kinds of people, people with different values and you know people that aren't just like me and have an opportunity every day or every time I go to work I should say to meet new people and interact with people and serve people and be around things that are beautiful and smell good and maybe that's all I'm seeking.

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And part of my brain is like, “Oh, that's dumb. You're not going to go get a job at Anthropologie. Like, why would you do that? That doesn't make any sense. And you already have this business and you're so busy and you've got four kids and blah, blah, blah.” Okay, so don't listen to that brain right away. I'm not saying that I actually haven't put in an application at Anthropologie or anything, but I just let it be there and I let myself be open to it. And I might actually, I might.

I let myself genuinely be open to ideas that sound kind of like they don't exactly make sense. I know that's not like a huge outside the box thing that I'm describing, but I have others sometimes that don't make any sense at all. And I would encourage you to stay open to those, especially as your kids are leaving the house. You got to be open to like, I don't know why I want to do this. It doesn't exactly make sense logically on paper, but I'm going to maybe explore it and see where it goes.

Okay, so I want to take this to now, those of you that have, maybe it's not your kids that are struggling, but maybe it is your siblings. Maybe it is a close friend. Maybe it's a parent, okay? And they're struggling in some way. Maybe it's really obvious, like they've gone through something that you know would be challenging.

They're experiencing grief from some kind of tragedy or they have a health problem, or a mental or physical health problem, or both, or something that you can easily point to and go, that thing was the catalyst into the struggle they're in right now. Other times it's not so obvious, right? Other times we're just like, I don't know why she's suddenly mad at me, or I don't know what's going on. I thought things are fine. Suddenly I got this nasty text message. I don't know what's happening, okay?

So either way, if people are struggling, your job, just like in parenting, is threefold. Number one, feel your feelings. It would be weird if we didn't feel any negative emotion when people that we love are struggling. And especially if they're struggling in such a way that they're creating “

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problems” for us. I'm just going to say that in quotes because we always are creating the problems in our minds. But here's what I mean by that.

Maybe you have a brother who's going through a divorce and he needs a lot of support and help, and at times he sends you text messages saying he's disappointed in the support and help that you're providing. He doesn't think it's enough or it's not right, or he doesn't think you're supportive at all or whatever. Okay?

So maybe he's acting out in a way that you're like, wait, I get my brother is struggling, but now he's mad at me and now I'm struggling. Okay? So again, of course I want to be sad for my brother or whatever emotions come up for me, clean pain about his struggle. And then when he's mad at me, I want to feel sad about that too. I want to feel disappointed. So I got to do lots of feeling feelings.

Here we go, this human stuff, but I'll tell you, as you feel feelings, as you practice it, as you breathe and allow and relax and move your body so that you can move those emotions through you, it is actually really easy. It becomes part of your daily routine. It's just something you do naturally. You don't have to have a timeout and a quiet space for it. You'll get better at doing it the more you do it. So that's job number one, feel your feelings.

Job number two, manage your mind. Choose intentionally how you're going to think about your brother, otherwise, if your brain is anything like mine, it'll start building a case against him and how ungrateful he is and how we can't believe he did that. And then another part of me will build a case against me and how I'm a terrible sister. And then I will start trying to manipulate his feelings and I will be walking on eggshells, afraid of upsetting him. And all of that doesn't help my relationship with my brother or with myself. So you got to choose intentionally how you're going to think about this story.

And then finally, I'm going to love him. I'm going to love him in the way that feels best to me, that honors both my love for him and my love for myself.

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What does that look like? I don't know. It's a valid question though, right? How much am I willing to do? I'll tell you, it involves telling the truth, being as honest as possible, not pretending, not trying to manipulate, not tiptoeing around things, just having honest conversations like, "Gosh, I love you. And I, I'm so sorry that you're going through this. And this is what I'm willing to do and this is what I'm not willing to do. And I hope you're not mad at me because I, I like it better when we're getting along. But if you want to be mad at me, you can, it's your prerogative. And I'm just going to be over here loving you in the meanwhile." It's loving them, right? It's loving the people who are struggling.

Okay, now here's the last thing I want to say about this. Actually two more things. I just want to make sure and emphasize loving people is not people pleasing. It's not trying to control them. It's not making sure they never feel bad or trying to make sure they feel supported or that they feel whatever, something positive. That's not the same as loving people.

Loving people is something that you feel and then you choose to show up in a certain way. They may or may not feel it. They may or may not feel appreciation or supported or any of that. It's not manipulating people and it's not trying to mold them. Even our children. It's not trying to control them. It's not trying to step on their agency. It's just allowing people to have human emotions and human experiences, even if they blame us for them, and loving them and loving ourselves, which might include boundary work, et cetera, right?

Okay, so the last thing I did want to say is I want to speak to a concept that was introduced to me a couple of years ago when I was going through a challenge with an adult relationship in my life. And it was so eye-opening to me and so helpful to me. And I've brought it up several times in coaching since then and found people have a similar reaction of like, "Oh man, that makes so much sense."

So I want to preface it with, again, as you know, I'm not a therapist. I'm not a clinical specialist. So I'm not an expert in trauma or grief or depression,

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okay? But I have coached a lot of people to have witnessed this in the real world. So that said, let me just tell the story. I think that will be the most useful. So I was going through a situation where a close friend of mine was upset with me. And this was a friend that I felt like I'd gone out of my way to help a lot. And I wanted to continue to help. And I had zero resentment about that. I was happy to help.

But then the friend suddenly got mad at me and started pointing out my weaknesses and flaws of which there are many. I felt a little bit attacked and was unsure why this was happening. And as I talked to another coach about this topic, she said, "Well, your friend sounds like she's depressed." And I was like, "Oh yeah, I think she is." Like she definitely struggles with her mental health a little bit. And I think she would even be the first to say that she's depressed or anxious or something.

And she said, "Well, don't forget that depression fights really hard to stay alive. And depression tells the person who's struggling that they are a victim." Okay. So a victim is helpless. And I'm not saying that people aren't victims sometimes in real life. We really genuinely are sometimes, but even if we have been a victim, the victim mentality portion, right, at a certain point will keep us stuck.

So victim mentality says you can't do things on your own, and the world's not fair. So victims, in order to stay alive, the depression fights to find villains and saviors. Okay? If I'm a victim, then I need a bad guy. I need someone or something or some life circumstance or people who are wronging me. Those are the villains, right?

And then I also need saviors to come in and do the things that I'm not capable of doing because I'm a victim. Okay? So what I realized was that this friend of mine was putting me into the savior role, and I was playing it. I was going right along with it. And that didn't feel good to her, so she put me in the villain role for a minute. Maybe. I don't know what was going on in her head. But all I know is I don't want to be a villain or a savior. I don't want to contribute to that. They may do that in their own minds. There's

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nothing I can do about it. But I don't want to contribute to that for the sake of my friend, because I love my friend. Because it keeps the depression or whatever is keeping them down, it keeps it alive. It reinforces that powerless, painful story that they are a victim.

So what I had to do was stop playing those roles. We stop playing the villain role by stopping the drama that our brains go, maybe it's true, maybe you're just not a good friend. Maybe if you were a better mother, a better daughter, a better sister, a better husband, or a better boss, or a better whatever, then this person wouldn't be upset. You are playing into the villain role, okay?

And when the person - when you jump in, I should say, whether they ask for it or not, sometimes they're asking for it, other times we're just jumping in with, "I know, I'll come over and do this for you, and I'll solve this problem, and I can send you money, and I can come in," whatever, fill in the blank, all the helpful things, in an attempt to try to help them feel better, we can be contributing to the savior role that they've created in their minds, which reinforces, "See, you can't do this on your own. You need the help of this other person. You need them to save you."

So what's the alternative? If we're accused of something wrong and they're putting us in the villain role, sometimes I pause and go, I can see where they're coming from. Yeah, I actually do do that annoying thing, or I'm not good at that. I want to acknowledge my shortcomings, but I'm not going to overly indulge in that experience. I'm certainly not going to get dramatic and try to manipulate them. That's just not necessary and not useful, okay?

More often what I see is people stepping into the savior role, unknowingly reinforcing the problem. So you have to pull away. You have to stop playing the savior. You have to step back and go, "Listen, I love you so much, and I'm so sorry you're suffering like this. What do you think you're going to do about it?" That's it. I can't tell you how many times I've been coaching somebody about their adult children, and they don't know what to do, and they don't know how, they know it's their journey, but I want to help, and I

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want to support, and I don't know what to do, and they kind of are pushing me away, and I'm like, "Yeah, the next time they call you with a challenge, you just say, gosh, I'm sorry, that sounds so hard. What do you think you're going to do?" That's it, you let them come up with the ideas. You show them that you believe in their own ability to find the solutions to their own problems. The depression can't survive that, right?

If they believed that they had the solutions to their problems and they were capable of handling their challenges, then they would stop being victims in their own minds. And depression doesn't like that. Mental illness doesn't like that. It's going to try to fight against it. And all I'm saying is I don't want to contribute to the problem.

Now, it doesn't mean you can't follow it up sometimes with, "Is there anything I can do to support you?" But don't just jump in there saving the day with your cape on anymore. It's really not useful, even with your children, okay? I know this is not easy to do. It requires that we pay attention to our own minds, that we do the jobs one and two of allowing your feelings, feeling feelings, and then managing your mind.

You've got to do those two things in order to be able to do this effectively, but we can do it, I promise my friends. All right, thanks for joining me on today's podcast. I love you, and I will see you next week for another episode, bye-bye.

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