

## Alexx Chats to Dr. Deirdre Ryan

A: Can you just let us know what drove you into the field of psychology and how you found yourself settling on the children's niche?

D: I've always been fascinated by human behavior and what makes us tick and what makes us thrive in certain environments and maybe why we find certain things more challenging and really thinking about some of the biological factors as well as the environmental and social factors that lead us to function and behave in the way that we do but I think that the core of it, not to be too cliché but I've always had a passion for helping people and think particularly mental health carried not so much today but has carried with it quite a lot of stigma and it can be quite a taboo topic so I've been really motivated to make it more open to the masses and make people feel more comfortable about mental health.

## A: Beautiful. And why kids? Why did that happen?

D: I always just loved kids, I've really vivid memories of what it was like to be a kid myself particularly being a teenager as well and all the really positive and wonderful things about that but also the pressures that came with being a child and it came with being a teenager, trying to fit it, really wanting my independence but also still needing parents to look to, to kind of guide me in where I should go in my life. I think in her is something that a seed was small within me very early in my career when I was looking more at the body image and older adults. Gradually then my research took me where I was looking at prevention of eating disorders in high schools. I had the opportunity to go into high schools and talk to teenagers about what crashes they were under particularly in regards to attitudes toward food and body image. It was just an interesting journey in just hearing what they had to say and I just wanted to keep going with that. So that kind of drove me to look more at the younger kids again, work in primary schools, at the younger levels seeing where those perceptions of self begin and then going even younger and working with parents and kind of seeing how they experience their own body image and how that might impact on the little kids.

A: So doing Thrive, we've been discussing obviously real food and developing a genuine love for it as a family, we've been talking about family meal time, the importance of getting kids in the kitchen cooking with us not just for the sweet cakes, but learning to make the old Bolognese on a Tuesday night and all of that stuff as well. Fussy eating has come into it and obviously body image as well, nutrient density, eating for a better immune function, all sorts of things and it's all part of the puzzle but obviously the mental health part is a huge part of the puzzle as well. And something we find that quite a few of us struggle with as we transition to eating real foods is you become the weird family. We are in a society where barbecue shapes are more normal than carrots and hummus. And the carrots and hummus are seen as the weird kid food. We're just really conscious as shoppers as we get to be for this beautiful thrive community to make sure that we empower families, to know how to kind of troubleshoot when some of these anxieties, or I feel different, or any of this kind of stuff arises, not just for the allergy, kids, or the sensory processing families or the autistic families but just for families eating real food because that in itself is deemed abnormal certainly in a party environment.

Can you start to maybe, let's have a look at some tips around when we're teaching kids about fake, processed, additive laden food, how to help them feel confident that we're not the enemy, and it's not like a parent against child issue. Let's start there, what are your thoughts on that?

D: There's so much to think about as parents and parents are always just trying to get the balance. They want to give their child enough autonomy and independence to make their own decisions but at the same time they want to protect them against danger, and they want to protect them against, like you said, those kind of additive laden foods that might have a really quite immediate impact on the psychological functioning or their behavior as well. An example of maybe the impact certain foods can have psychologically. I think a range of foods, I've always been really interested on the food and mood connection which is so intrinsically linked and that starts from day one, as we know as babies when we're hungry and we're not it's just the same responses when we need to go to the toilet. Somewhere along the way that kind connection gets a little bit interrupted and as a psychologist that's something that I really strive to reconnect you know that basic





instinct that we have. Certain foods can have behavioral and psychological impacts because of certain neurotransmitters that are released. An example of behavioral changes that can happen, if you have additive laden food especially for breakfast or early on in the day, that can have a behavioral impact within minutes where children will get more distracted, it's much harder to attend in school, they'll feel a lot less contained sometimes coz their anxiety levels might kind of skyrocket and they're more likely to be more impulsive as well and have some emotional disregulation. Whereas if you have foods that are more slow releasing over time the blood sugar levels are just a bit more constant so children are much calmer, they're more relaxed, they've got more capacity to learn and to attend in school. So essential things like having a good breakfast, or having an enjoyable breakfast with the family, if you can even have one family meal in a day then you're doing a great job, and if that family meal can be breakfast, even better. So really good opportunity for not only kind of having an awareness of how your kids are going with with regards to eating but it's a good opportunity to chat about how things are going, bonding experiences. Meal times are really beautiful social events in all our lives. I reflect back on my Saturday stew with my mom and even though I think about the lovely stew, I also think about what a really nice experience that was and a lovely tradition that was for us to have. It's a really enjoyable thing and I think it's worrying when food becomes something scary, when food becomes something to be afraid of and that's something as parents that we're in a really nice privileged position to build resilience open our kids against some of those factors that you mentioned at the beginning. Peers can be difficult, they can pick up on preferences for food they can pick up on a person's voice, they can pick up on how a person thinks and feels. Children are constantly trying to fit in and that can be a really difficult thing to say for parents, to try and reinforce that individual differences are what make us unique and what make really cool, the world will be really boring if we were all exactly the same. And I think that's the message that is so important to reinforce to kids but that starts with being a role model, it starts with yourself as a parent, you have to be aware of your own soft spots, you have to be aware of your own body image and your own attitude towards food coz kids are like sponges and soak that up.

A: They sure do. And I think especially when let's just say there might be a few families going through the course and this is the first time that perhaps you've ever looked at what's on a packet, you know first time you working up to it and one of the initial responses can be anger and fear, as you think oh my gosh what have I been feeding us, or oh my gosh how did I not notice and so it's like a real mix of anger and fear and it's just really important to see food as friend and actually call anything from the additive laden land not food. It actually becomes easier then to establish a healthy relationship and to move forward excited about what we're gonna change instead of guilty about what we're used to do.

D: Exactly. There is no blame in anything, we're all just trying to find our way in the dark in a lot of ways and it's never too late to make changes, you can really establish changes at any stage in your own life, at any stage in your child's life as well. The most important thing is to really try to get the whole family involved and to do it in a really fun, flexible and relaxed way. This isn't a scary thing, food isn't scary, it's an inanimate object in a lot of ways, but it's the emotion that we project on to food, that's what can make it scary. And it's really important to comment again, just look at what your own perceptions are and these start with us, they start with how our own parents used to think about food and going back generations, there were different mentalities for some families who food was very scarce so it was a very valuable commodity, it was something to value in a lot of ways and to hoard, to gorge when you had it, that guilt and that shame if you don't eat everything that's on your plate, you're made to feel shameful about that. And shame leading on to that is a really interesting emotion that is a big risk factor for the development of each disorders. We're seeing children as young as 3 and 4 engaging in restricted diet and behavior. And I read a really interesting article that 34% of 5 year olds have reported that they have been dieting to lose weight, which is a really scary thing. One of the main risk factors for instigation, I'm sure restricted behavior is shame, but also like I said children hearing messages and then trying to make sense of them and then internalizing them. An example that comes to mind for me and has always really stuck with me was when I was working with a little boy and we were just doing some research into healthy attitudes towards food, and eating disorder prevention in the school and this kid was no more than 4 years old and really slight and really tiny little guy and one of the questions I asked him was okay you need to fill out this little questionnaire and there was just a statement here to agree with or disagree with and the statement was I want to lose weight, and he ticked the box I want to lose weight. We're not really meant to probe why children responded the way that they did but I had to ask and I just said why is it that you feel you want to lose weight, and he responded with, well I have a wedding coming up, I'm page so gotta lose a lot of weight. But it really stuck home for me that this was obviously a comment that you've heard somewhere. And again this is a scary wondering because fat talk, diet talk is very much the norm in modern day society, we're fed by the media and some of the





main influencing factors in any child's attitude towards their body or food is parents obviously, then you've got your extended family, or your grandparents, you know kind of having their own ways and attitudes towards food and kids are around that, and aunts and uncles and then you've got friends, of course they're gonna be a bit of a social marker for maybe what's cool and what's not. And then you've got the media which is almost like the super peer and there's someone who's saying what the perfect ideal is and particularly advertising, children are very, very, very profit-making margin of society and the advertising companies will target them hugely thinking about any of the additive laden foods, they're just so fun-looking and really appealing. So it's really important to provide education to your children, have conversations with them, know what they're watching and talk to them about that, about what advertising is, about how it creates the need and then say wait actually I got the answer. All about education is really really important in kind of building up a bit more of a tough skin towards those pressures.

A: I think you're absolutely right and that's something we suggest in our course which is to really let them know that it's not us being the bad guy, it's the companies. And that is not like cheap deflection, it's actually the truth, we re not the bad guy for wanting them to eat beautiful healthful food. But it doesn't mean, you brought the word up a couple of times, peers, it doesn't save the fact, it's lovely to teach them yes being different is one of the magical things about being human and how wonderful is it that you're different from your friends, that doesn't help little 6 year old Johnny at the birthday party not feel different, let's just say he's either got an allergy or he gets really sensitive to additives and so the parents prefer that he doesn't eat those foods.

How do we build resilience in the child to feel strong rather than them missing out. Is there a way we can do that?

D: There's a multitude of ways and that's in regards to particular things like food practices but generally for a child's overall well-being in order to make them more confident to speak about it and stand up for themselves. One of the main things we need to foster is a really healthy self-esteem. There's a lot of ways that you can do that and some of them are what we talked about before is being a motion coach spiritual journey, you know really role modeling what nice, respectful interactions are with your partner, be complimentary towards them, comment on their interaction style, wow you've been really caring, or you're really funny or you were really strong there the way you kind of suit up for yourself.

A: It's true, we have these kids and then the kids become our world and then the partners take a backseat, it's true.

D: And we forget that, we forget that these people around us, they may be small but we need to speak to them in just a respectful manner as we speak to each other, if they see us being respectful towards each other and being assertive and saying how you feel, I feel angry because, I feel happy because, you're giving your child some really lovely labels to be able to go out into the world and actually feel confident to be able to say how they feel.

A: I love that. And just that simple fact, if you've got a real smile on your face when you pick them up from school sharing why and telling them about that.

D: With your own body, commenting on the things you like about your body, I think my hair looks great today. Self esteem isn't about your child thinking they're perfect all the time. Balanced self esteem is about having acknowledgement of the areas that maybe you don't like so much about yourself with the areas that maybe you're not so great in, so you go oh you know I'm not really good at math but actually I'm really good at this. When a child goes to the parts you've been and they have their comments, oh why don't you eat that, you know I like a different food so I can actually run and play and this food makes me feel really good, this food makes me feel that yuck and I'm not able to play them and everybody's different, and everyone's body is different and that's pretty cool. If the child thinks that there's much more to them than just how they look or what they eat, then they've got that really good foundation, they've got that ground and their self esteem will help them to negotiate whatever comes at them in the world. We can't protect them from everything, kids can be cruel but kids can be really amazing too and are found from going into schools and doing this work. Particularly the primary schools, it's just so amazing when you chat to young kids and they just get it. They are taking everything in and when you give them small messages like it's okay to be different, it's not only okay but it's brilliant. Put up your hand and tell me what you're





good at and they're shooting their hands up and they can't wait to tell you they're great at taekwondo, they're brilliant dancing. But then 8 or 9, less hands go up, they're a bit more ashamed to say what they're good at until you model it and then they get a bit more confident. It's just all about fostering that really really quiet confidence that will help them to go out into the world and not take on those media messages, not feel that peer pressure as much and be able to come home and talk to you about it. Communication with your child is really important, it cannot be overestimated.

A: Absolutely. And I found rather than asking how was your day to my 6 year old boy who goes whoo, or I can't remember to actually say was there a sad part in today or what was the happiest part if you had to choose one. And then just to try and get a real focus in on something, an emotion that they might have felt and the stuff that comes out, is there something you found really tricky that made you sad today coz you just never know. And I did this a couple of weeks ago coz I always ask those sorts of questions and my little guy went sniff sniff I can't do a U, and he was just really really sad about not being able to draw a U properly and so we spent 20 minutes on writing out the U and I taught him whatever tricks that helped him at the time and the beaming little face at the end of it. The trick is half the time especially with little dudes is to try and get in there in the first place which is actually in itself an art form.

D: Absolutely. And that sounds like such a gorgeous interaction that what we do as parents is we're almost like a feedback loop for our children for when they're babies. They're communicating something to us, mostly non-verbal and we're trying to respond to that and interpret what it is and then feed it back to the child so that they feel understood and it's really nice lift that happens. And if you're actually looking at it and like you said asking very specific questions, kids aren't great with the whole abstract thinking, they're not amazing with the open-ended questions, they're a bit tired, a bit flogged, they'll just give the yes or no close-ended questions or answers back but if you can be really specific and pick up on those little signals and have fun with it. There's a really nice model called the PACE model, it's done by Dan Hughes a psychologist in attachment therapy and the PACE model is about using 4 key things in parenting. Being playful, that's the P, so being playful about trying to get things out of your kids. They say that the part of your brain that is activated by shame is deactivated by laughter, so if you can use laughter as a way of communicating with your child when they are feeling a little bit down or a bit ashamed, it can be a really nice way of validating that experience. The A is for acceptance so really accepting where the child is at so if your child says I'm not good at this, rather than immediately saying yes you are, of course you are, you're the best child in the world, which a lot of people like to do, it's about validating that experience for the child and going oh that must really suck to feel that and it's really important to accept the child where they're at.

A: And this is perfect for say, teenagers especially or pre-teens with the body image thing. I'm not good at this or my body's not good enough, it's like I totally understand how you feel, I felt like that too, that would just relieve them to know that they weren't alone in ever having felt such a thought.

D: And then it's a really validating experience when someone just rather than immediately trying to fix it, which we do want to do a lot and naturally it's coming from a really good place but sometimes if we even think of ourselves as adults, sometimes we just need to be heard and we just need to be accepted and understood. The C is curiosity, so in really curious with your child, I wonder why maybe you could be feeling like this, I wonder what could be going on, let's do the problem solving around that and I can be focused around eating as well, thinking about foods as good or bad, or junk or not junk, again they're emotional label so we kind of changed the language a little bit so let's call them everyday food that we have everyday and sometimes foods that we have sometimes. Again, it's just about opening the conversation, being curious for children. And the E is for empathy so instilling empathy, instilling understanding and awareness of emotion and what it's like to feel different emotions and how that can have an impact on your child. The PACE model is a nice one to have a mind about how you can respond to your child in a very holistic way rather than immediately trying to fix or immediately trying to kind of brush it away or not listened to.

A: Absolutely. That is so so key, coming to them and having the chat instead of going oh don't be silly, you're great, you're gorgeous. And you could just so totally see how that would make them further ashamed almost because oh you don't even see. I remember being a kid, that whole you don't understand me feeling.

D: In a lot of ways we do let go. We kind of slip into adulthood and forget what that's like. Children and teenagers, they are negotiating so much on a daily basis and it can be really really hard work. And if on some level they feel even a tiny bit of





understanding or there are those conversations that the interest is there from their parents it can really go a long way in helping them to just instill a bit of hope that even at times when things are tough, I get it, I'm here for you, let's talk about it. And just to be aware in regards to eating disorder prevention, kids do get that little older, to be aware of what messages are out there and noticing on what their language is like, are they body-checking a lot, are they engaging in a lot of fat talk or are they getting on top of the latest fad diet and to not be afraid to talk about it. A lot of parents are afraid sometimes of their teenagers but I heard a kind of a nice way of phrasing it that when children are you know before they're teenagers, his parents were managers, we kind of manage what they're doing in a lot of ways, we manage their school, we manage their extra-curricular activities, we manage weekend activities, a lot of ways, managing their food. But when they become teenagers we're almost demoted to consultants so we need to be the ones they can consult rather than managing. If you can kind of adapt that position then it can foster some really strong relationships.

A: So when we do have a child coming to us or we do observe a bit of dieting creeping in, or not wanting to eat a certain food because that makes you fat or that makes your skin or you know whatever they picked up from the internet or their friends, what's the practical first step to take there?

D: Yes, really scary isn't it. I think first of all parents just freak out, so much anxiety. Disordered eating in general it is on the rise for both men and women and I think that's an important thing to know as well so this isn't just a female disorder, this is happening more and more for guys as well with more emphasis on this muscular physique. But the main thing is if you are kind of feeling that maybe something's going on here, do your research, get online, go to some of the really good websites like the butterfly foundation and eating disorders Victoria, have a look at some of the symptoms and they will kind of give you a bit of an idea of what you might be looking out for. And talk to your child, ask them what's happening to them, how do they feel about their bodies, how do they feel about themselves and just open up a bit of space for that, you don't have to push them, you don't have to question them all the time but just let them know you're there for them if they want to talk about these things and let them know you experience things with your body too but that main thing is having that communication and educating yourself. If you see dramatic weight loss, if you feel that your child is skipping meals a lot, their mood is changing, it's really erratic then those can be signs that maybe your child is experiencing an eating disorder. And also looking at those mood changes, are they irritable, is their mood a lot lower, are they withdrawn, they stopped activities that they used to enjoy. And with that being a line there, it's just about kind of really really being a bit of a detective and starting to understand what the behaviors are and what the changes are and then building on those protective factors coz there's a range of protective factors that can protect some of them getting an eating disorder. One of those like I said is having good self esteem and self esteem is about putting emphasis into all aspects of themselves not just on appearance being the most important thing. For a lot of people, girls in particular from when they douche people are commenting on their appearance like how cute she is, look at her dress, look at her eyes, look at her hair, kids love attention, they love them, they're like okay if I can have attention for how I look, brilliant, that's where I'm gonna put all my energy in because that's where my worth is.

A: Oh my gosh you just summed it up in those last 2 sentences. The whole feeling of failure we have as women in terms of not living up to an ideal, it's there you just said it.

D: It's there, it's in the fairy tale so we have beautiful Cinderella and we got the ugly sisters, ugly is bad, and it is changing those, I guess if you look at things like Shrek and those stereotypes are changing which is wonderful to see. But it's still there and if you can again notice in your own body image, it'd be critical of the media with your child laugh at some of the silly ads that are on TV, the whole wave now of oh, do you wanna do healthy eating which is just rebranded dieting, with these bollocks that they're selling, it's very clever what the advertising companies do, they know that the word diet now taboo so they change it to healthy eating but what is this and what does that really mean. School achievement, really reinforcing them being assertive, self-directed problem solving, they're all really important protective factors for helping someone avoid kind of going down eating disorder route and the easier you catch this the better. But for the younger kids as well, it's important to understand the function of the behavior, if they're becoming really preoccupied with food, if they're avoiding food, it's about understanding what the need is, what the function of that behavior is, and usually it's some sort of emotional, psychological function, anxiety, shame, depression whatever that may be.





A: So I'm thinking it would be quite a fine line we tread as real food families, being the odd ones out especially in the big social occasions, how do keep our kids resilient and healthy in that fine line and not turn it into eating real food being an eating disorder in itself?

D: I think again, family meals like you mentioned before such an important time to be able to enjoy food, to show that it's not restricted is a really good model core division of responsibility which is something in the program I work for body confident child, it's an evidence based model that you decide when and what the child eats and the child decides how much. So it's not restrictive in any sense, they're getting to learn when they're full or when they're hungry and you're allowing them the autonomy to do that. But also so they're getting at the food pyramid, showing kids that at the top of the food pyramid and a tiny little thing, there are sometimes foods, it's okay to have those at some occasions but if you want to be able to run around, if you want to have energy, you have to have more of the everyday foods and that's not an eating disorder, it's just a really healthy balanced choice. But doing everything as a family, doing the physical activities as a family, making it fun. So when you're doing those silly dances, they're out there sitting with your cats, wow, darn we had it earlier, really have loads and loads of energy so they can actually convert okay food is something that's for energy and when they get to those parties, you'll probably notice your anxiety triggered a little bit when they're kind of running to the table but as much as possible be relaxed, just stand back a little bit and trust that they probably will be able to come to their own decision-making process as well and they are a lot more perceptive than what we give them credit for. So if we're possible being a little bit relaxed around the sometimes foods but also noticing your own anxiety around comments from parents, it's exactly the same anxiety that your child is feeling. So if you feel the need to explain yourself or to feel defensive about it, then that's gonna happen for your child as well, that's gonna replicate but if you relax about it and just say yeah this is just the attitude that we have at home where we like to kind of get lots of different types of food and I'm like really, they don't really work for us. I love food, it's great but change the subject, we move on to something that's not so boring and parents will move on very very quickly but it's getting aware about the talk around your child as well. And if particularly extended family members your noticing that they're commenting a lot in their own bodies, a lot on dieting, there's a lot of stigma around appearance, that's something that's really important to model at home, that we don't stigmatize based on appearance, that eating healthily isn't about being thin and looking certain ways, about having energy to do the things we want to do. And those are really important messages that children will learn and not just stigmatize people, that thin doesn't mean healthy and fat doesn't mean unhealthy. They're not messages that are appropriate for children.

A: And I guess thin doesn't mean better accepted and fat doesn't mean less accepted and all the things that we attach to thin and fat.

D: Exactly. So being very respectful and appreciative of lots of different shapes and sizes and acknowledging that that's okay is a really important part of making children not feel like they're being restricted in any way and being relaxed yourself as well. And again just education, education you know get your food pyramid, and if your child's saying I want the sometimes foods all the time, start saying but if you're having the sometimes foods all the time then you're not gonna be able to do all the things that you want to do, sometimes foods are there to have sometimes.

A: And the sometimes foods we're obviously talking about are really beautiful home-made cakes or at least made that are additive free because unfortunately I find one of the faults with the food pyramid is those sometimes foods is something that the companies then come, well Coca-Cola is a sometimes food, and Twix bars and Kit Kat are sometimes food, and they're non-food so to me the sometimes food are the beautiful cupcakes, cakes, custards that mom makes and things like that. You know, home-made is definitely an emphasis because then we've got control on what's in them. There's another confusion in our food culture in Australia or America, in the UK which is the blurry lines of what that sometimes food piece is when it gets taught in our schools and processed food is in there.

D: That's a really good point. Advertising companies what they will brand as sometimes foods or everyday foods like some cereal bars or some things like that, that are packed loaded with sugar they're not an everyday food but they're being sold and targeted towards children. And third is as you said about educating yourself so you can educate your child and seeing what is in things. Yes, sometimes foods it means that's something that's a treat but I think it's really important to know what the not-treat as well for your child. And again, it's about dong what you need to do for your family. I think that people





maybe might get more frustrated and you might encounter some challenges when people interpret that as something that you are advising them and that's where conflict can begin. But if you can be relaxed and confident and comfortable in your own decisions with them regards to what you do as a parent then you can go far along.

A: I love that Dei, because there's a lot of tension at that social exchange moment and it's something I felt a little bit at the start certainly when my little man was having an issue and we had him off dairy for years. Dairy is just everywhere with small children, the cup of milk comes out in every opportunity at every house and I had that re-visit at 12 years ago when I was deemed gluten-intolerant and I though oh my God here we are again, I'm that person again, I was very used to being gluten-intolerant 12 years on, but then I had to do it with my child and I just felt horrible. But moved through that pretty quickly when I realized that that anxiety projects to them, they're like little dogs aren't they they just pick up on anything, every possible emotion you're feeling it's like on your sleeve and in their heart.

D: And that's not something to be scared of either. That naturally is seeing real emotion, anger, sadness, those are really important things for children because they learn that those emotions are okay. It's okay to be scared, it's okay to be a bit confused and to name that. I think again education is such an important thing that schools can do, teachers they're also in a privileged position to educate children. I've had a few clients who also have had allergies but the other kids in their classes so respectful of that because they've had a lesson on it, they had a lesson on what gluten intolerance is or what dairy intolerance is, some of the effects of that. And they're so protective over their classmate that you have any allergies, it's really sweet.

A: that's a beautiful thing to bring up so maybe for our parents who have the allergy or have the autistic child some on that spectrum, ADHD and things really really affect. We're always scared of and quick to judge and pass things we don't understand, so why not help the people that don't understand but offer in to come in and do a quick 10-minute class talk, and maybe make a treat that is gluten and dairy free if those are the allergies, or egg free or nut free, whatever it has to be, how yummy are some of the foods that doesn't have those things in it that little Johnny can enjoy. I love that idea, great. Just to turn this into a proactive positive pace where we can educate others on allergies instead of feeling really alone about that allergy and really defensive about it, flip the coin, get proactive, educate even if it has to be you, doesn't matter if you've never given a speech before, you're just in front of a bunch of 10 year olds, like just get in there and have a chat, maybe download some printables from online if you find them.

D: If you're giving out free food kids are gonna love it no matter what it is. And it's just sort of normalizing it once children are exposed to something in a repeated safe way, it becomes normal, it becomes accepted, it's not taboo anymore. It's when children don't have enough information and then they make assumptions about things because they're confused so if you give them enough information then they can come to their own decisions. But education really is key. If we can get into schools and start at a primary prevention level, the younger the better. You're doing theses workshops with parents, I've learned so many tips from parents that I feed on to parents then, and it's just a really lovely opportunity for parents to get together in a supportive way rather than a judgmental way and that's what creates progress, and that's what fosters progression like I said. And it's fun, it's really fun to just sit down and have a chat about current issues and things that are relevant in any parent's life. So that's what I would say, talk about it, education is key, prevention is key and to just be perceptive, have your antennas out, be a little bit of a detective. Noticing and having awareness, if you have an awareness of your own attitudes towards yourself then you'll just be that but be more careful to avoid speaking about those in front of your kids who might internalize them as their own.

A: I love that, and then in the social context, to teach them to be really relaxed about it. As a family, we've realized that this works for us, so for your allergy or your kids' allergy, affected kids, yeah that just really really makes me sick so I don't eat them when you're at someone's house and teach them that it's not something to be stressed about, it's just a fact and you move on and I love how simple that is. Quite often we over-complicate things, life's gonna be difficult forever because of little Johnny's dairy allergy. If we actually just make it not part of his story, not being this big thing that we all have to carry as a family, just say yeah dairy just doesn't work for him so we've worked out this really delicious way to make custard now, I'll bring some next time, don't worry about it and just make it really really relaxed. And I think that in itself for some of the more anxious parents in our community, is a skill to build. Don't feel bad about yourself if you haven't got that relaxed vibe today or tomorrow the next week. It might be a little habit to sort of focus on cultivating.





D: Absolutely. And it takes a lot of practice and it takes time to be able to sit with distress is a real skill, to not act on that is a real skill and knowing that any distress you feel, it will pass through you like a wave. You just have to ride that wave a little bit and then kind of see how things turn out. Have people to talk to, have support for yourself, communicate your concerns to someone. Lots of parents go online, there's always lovely forms of how parents can speak to each other about their concerns, and courses like these that you're running are a really visual opportunity to do that as well. I think the main thing is that message of just trying to get the balance and there is no right or wrong.

Just to let you know as well that myself and my partner, my co-partner, Jojo Cowman, that we've established an organization called Magnificently You. We wrote a book called The Magnificent Toby Plum, the book is just a children's book around accepting differences and the main character goes on this really fun journey around the world, and really wants to fit in at the beginning and be the same as everyone but he kinds of learn pretty quickly that it's his unique traits that make him who he is and make the world fun. And we've got some discussion points for parents that they can go through the book and talk about with their child and have the book as a focal point. If you're interested in that you can find that at our website and I'll give you all the information. And also, just to finish, I know parents love lists of do's and don'ts, what we have here is promoting positive body image and healthy eating in your family, just a list of do's and don'ts, which if any parents want, I can send off to them as well.

