

8. Trauma is a thief- taking back your power

Emily: [00:00:00] Hi everyone. Welcome back to Stay Tuned Supporting Transition Age Youth. This podcast is brought to you by the Transitions to Adulthood Center for Research at UMass Chan Medical School Department of Psychiatry, and in partnership with our research sponsor, the National Institute for Disability Independent Living and Rehabilitation Research.

I'm your co-host, Emily.

Mei: And I'm your co-host Mei and today, I know I say this a lot, that we've had extra special episodes in the past, but this time I really mean it. On today's episode, we actually have one of my childhood best friends, Joan Sullivan. So we have been friends since we were five. You were five?

I was four, yeah.

Joan: Yeah, I think so.

Mei: And she currently works as a recovery navigator with the Edinburg Center. And she's a young adult with her own lived experience [00:01:00] journey that we're gonna get into today. But I wanted to give a little bit of context and why this episode is so special, because it's really come full circle for us.

So Joan and I, Emily is over Zoom, but Joan and I are sitting in my childhood bedroom right now. And it's funny because there's a window in my room that faces right into Joan's old house. We were next door neighbors up until high school. Oh, sorry, college.

Joan: Mm-hmm. College.

Mei: College, yeah. Up until college. And it looks right into their dining room, which sounds so stalkerish. But I grew up and I had a lot of traumatic family events happen. I, I lived in quite a tumultuous household and growing up I used to look out my window into their window while they were having dinner and just think about like, [00:02:00] how lucky Joan was to come from such a healthy family with no conflict.

And I mean, they ate dinner together every night. I was so jealous. Little did I know what was happening behind closed doors and you know, it didn't come to the surface until we were out of high school is when I realized like their family isn't necessarily picture perfect and all those years staring out my window, you know, I really made a lot of assumptions.

And so today we've invited Joan on to tell some of her story and how it's shaped her experience in the workforce and her goals for the future. Joan was diagnosed with P T S D.

Joan: Mm-hmm.

Mei: How old were you?

Joan: I was probably around 19 or 20,

Mei: so she's here to talk about her P T S D story.

Joan: So I think Mei did a great [00:03:00] job setting it up. High school was when the issues really started happening in my life. But I did a really good job of making it seem like everything was fine on the outside. And I really, I tried to hide everything, but what was going on is my dad is an alcoholic. And in high school it really kind of was coming to a point where it was unsafe and unhealthy for us to be living in that environment.

And what the incident that really caused the P T S D was my mom and sister were in France and my dad was taking me to a softball tournament.

And I, there had been a fight with my dad and he didn't come pick me up right away. And there was a rain delay at the softball tournament. So I was left in the rain alone, and my mom and sister were somewhere I couldn't reach them.

So I felt so alone. And that was, that was the main incident. And that's one that I work on a [00:04:00] lot now in therapy. But there were other instances where, I just, I was put in situations where I felt so powerless and like I couldn't help myself. And so it took, it took a few years after this really happened in 2017 and it took about until 20 19, 20 20 to realize that there was more of a problem.

And I was still kind of reliving those moments. And in situations I would get more upset than I should have because I felt, again, powerless and I started to notice. I felt like I was back in those situations where like with friends or someone would be late or someone wouldn't show up, and I would just feel so threatened by that.

And so I started, I. Talking to my mom about it and I started talking to my therapist about it and they both kind of realized and said like, listen, there might be more going on here. So that's when I started E M D R therapy, which I still do today. And it's helped [00:05:00] immensely in how I respond to situations that used to be really triggering and sometimes still are, but I've noticed an incredible amount of progress.

Mei: Thank you for sharing Joan. And how old were you? Oh wait, you said 17?

Joan: Yeah, I was.

Mei: Okay. God, that is so young.

Joan: Mm-hmm.

Mei: Even though like that wasn't that long ago, you know, cuz we are what? You're 23. At 17, you know, you're still in high school, like you're still a kid. That is, that's hard. But I'm so glad you brought up this idea of feeling powerless because the theme of today's episode is taking back your power and you don't necessarily have to have P T S D to feel like you're powerless, especially as a teenager going into their adulthood. I think in a lot of instances, obviously we don't [00:06:00] have the means to take control over our lives and our situations. We feel like we're too young and our parents have a lot of say over us, which makes sense. They're our parents, but, You know, there are times where these situations do turn toxic and they really have lasting impacts on your self-esteem. And as you grow up kind of coming into yourself and learning through living, you know, you kind of get opportunities to take your power back. So a lot of our questions are gonna focus on how do you take your power back?

How do you learn to grow into your power?

Emily: Yeah. You know, when you're, when you are like 17 or 18, like that is a very transformative time and like, you know, it's a, it's a very big part of like, becoming yourself. And so things like that can definitely have a huge impact on [00:07:00] you going into the world and like becoming independent, becoming yourself and everything.

And so I guess that does kind of segue into what our first question was, which was, we were wondering how, like your education, or you talked about how like your work was impacted by your P T S D and you, so you, we, how do you find that your, sorry. And do you find that being a young adult in the mental health industry is helpful for your recovery?

Or do you find that it could be triggering at times?

Joan: I think sometimes it can be triggering, but I also think that it's been immensely helpful. I, I see a lot of people who have been through traumatic events and learning how they decide to cope with it or how they approach their recovery from that has been, really helpful.

But I also, I am in the field of psychology. I'm gonna be getting a master's in social work. Next year I'll be starting at Boston College. So I feel like [00:08:00] just learning so much more about P T S D and mental health as a whole has really helped me be able to say, Hey, these coping skills or these different types of approaches to therapy could be very helpful for me. And with E M D R specifically, I, I knew about it and I understood why I was doing what I was doing in therapy, and I think being able to kind of come from a perspective where I understand what's going on really helped me open up.

Instead of only telling part truths, I was able to say, listen, I know that the more honest I can be, the more I'll get out of it. And so I think, I think working in the field I work in and having the education I had, it helped me be able to approach my own personal recovery with more openness.

Emily: That's great that you're getting your master's next year. I, I'm getting my master's right now in psychology too, and like [00:09:00] I have also found that like, there's just so many more types of therapy that I like even knew existed. I didn't even know E M D R was a thing until a couple years ago and now, it's something that I have friends who have tried it and they've have found really great results from it.

And like, I've even thought about like maybe looking into it. So it's definitely a really great tool for, you know, helping other people with their own healing. But then also like, Taking control of your healing as well.

Mei: I mean, as someone who doesn't really have much of a psych background, like and who is in therapy.

I think I offered a different perspective here because I have had my psychiatrist throw these random treatments at me, but she doesn't explain what they are beforehand and like I'm like there are times where she asks me, what color are you feeling right now? Or like, where in your body are you feeling that sensation?

And I'm like, I really want to put my [00:10:00] all into this session, but it's so hard for me to get behind these like goofy kind of questions when I don't really know what she's trying to get at. So I can imagine having that psych background and understanding like, okay, why is it necessary to put your all into these questions? Why is that beneficial?

Emily: Yeah, and I think it comes with like, you know, finding a psychiatrist that their sort of modality works well with you. And like, I think definitely explaining it is helpful. Like for clients that might not know what that means, cuz it definitely is its own little world with its own language. Like there's so much in psychology that I feel like most people, you know, you'd have to explain it to them.

Mei: Yeah. Hmm. Maybe this is illuminating. Maybe I need to switch psychiatrists.

Joan: Well, I mean, another thing too is I think sometimes people are, [00:11:00] Can be, there's a little bit of a stigma around mental health and so sometimes people don't want to be as honest about it and think they have as much of a problem as they might actually be experiencing.

So I think also I come from a standpoint where I'm very open to mental health and talking about my own mental health and other people's mental health. So I think I also have worked past the stigma where I say, listen, this is how it is, and if I want to change it, I need to. I need to address these issues.

So I think coming from a mental health background has been helpful in just saying, listen, I want to fix this problem.

Emily: Right. Yeah. I think that having that authenticity is really important for your own healing. But I'm sure it also helps a lot with like, cause I know you're a recovery coordinator, I'm sure that's also very helpful for the people that you work with, because then, you know, if you're kind of.

If you're living it and you're like doing the healing and doing the work [00:12:00] and then talking to these people who also need healing and are also trying to like, you know, go down that journey like that, that can be really inspiring, I think.

Joan: Absolutely. Yeah. I, I completely agree with

Mei: that. Yeah. I think that touches on peer work, right?

And the value in having I guess supports that also have lived experience, cuz that way it's not like you have someone talking at you, it's like they're talking with you and, and they know what you're going through. So, I mean, I don't know if this is the case, but I think that a lot of mental health roles should require li having lived experience.

That's just my opinion though.

Emily: Yeah. Well, there's a reason why it's important for, if you're going to see a therapist, it's really important that they also see their own therapist and they have supervisors and everything. Like it's definitely important in this field to make sure that you're also doing the work if you are a provider.

Mei: I [00:13:00] didn't actually know that. Is it required like as a therapist to seek out your own therapy?

Emily: It's not required, but it's very highly encouraged. It's like, like I'm, I'm in my master's program right now and my professors talk all the time about how, like, you know, if, if you haven't started therapy yet and like you're going into this field, like it might be a good time to start doing some work.

And like as you're seeing clients, you're on your own. Like you should probably also be seeing your own therapist because there's just a lot that can come up. That can be triggering or that can, you know, kind of interfere with this work. And so if you're not doing your own work on the side, then it,

it might, you know, end up hurting your clients in the long run and also yourself.

Mei: I see. I mean, that makes sense. I don't know why I never considered that.

Joan: It's definitely, it's a very challenging position to be in cuz you sometimes you just hear these. Traumatic experiences that [00:14:00] people have gone through. And so sometimes that can put a big burden on you as well. And so being able to talk through that with someone else is really helpful.

So, kind of what Emily was saying too, it's, it's important for therapists to take care of themselves as well and therapy's a great tool for that.

Mei: Absolutely. That makes sense. I wanted to quickly go back to how you mentioned E M D R Joan. For our listeners at home can you explain what EMDR is?

Joan: Sure. So EMDR is a technique of therapy that engages both sides of the brain through guided eye movements. And the goal is to help the brain kind of process those experiences or traumas.

Because what P T S D is, is kind of, your brain still feels as though you're in this situation where you're in immediate danger. So for me, what e MDR looked like, I started it In 2019 before the pandemic. So I used to go to my [00:15:00] therapist's office and sometimes what she would do is she would have me follow her fingers across with my eyes.

and we would be sitting in silence and I would be processing specifically the softball event is what we would mostly target. But, so I'd just be following her fingers with my eyes and sometimes I would also hold these balls that are designed for EMD R therapy where they switch sides vibrating, so it, it again is kind of a side to side type situation. And now what we do is, because it's virtual cuz of the pandemic, there's a computer

program that a little dot will move across the screen. And so while I'm doing therapy, instead of looking at my therapist, I'm looking at a screen that is just completely blank with a dot moving across it.

And I'm instructed to follow it with my eyes. And the whole point is to really immerse yourself in [00:16:00] the traumatic experience. We will dive deep into basically minute by minute how I was feeling, what I was seeing, what I thought was gonna happen, and kind of go back to what's the worst case scenario.

What, what did I think was going to happen to me? How did I think I was gonna get home? And then how the session kind of ends is you recenter yourself. In the present moment. So say I'm not there anymore. I'm, I'm 23 years old, I'm not 17, I'm here right now. I'm not at a softball field. I have my own car. I can drive, I can get away.

So it, it's about being in the moment and then kind of coming out and realizing you're not there anymore again, to. Help your brain get out of this cycle of saying you're still there, you're still in danger. So just processing that, that trauma. [00:17:00] Yeah.

Emily: You talked about you know, feeling like you're stuck in that moment.

I think, I don't know if this is just like the side of like TikTok and the internet that I'm on right now, but I've seen a lot recently about like. People being stuck in survival mode. Which I think kind of speaks to that. So where your brain, so like if you're kind of stuck in like that fight or flight mode which is like controlled by the amygdala, then like it kind of shuts off part of like your frontal lobe, which is like higher thinking and like executive function and all that kind of stuff.

And so it can really be hard to like critically think about things and like, you know, remind yourself that you know, you're not in that moment, you're not 17, you're not at that softball field. Like it can really feel like all encompassing. And that's why a lot of times, like I. You know, people can

get triggered and it can just like, feel like really debilitating.

And so that's [00:18:00] really interesting. I didn't know all about the M D R stuff, like with being able to do it online and like those, like the balls that you can hold, that's really cool. And I think that that could be a really good tool for a lot of people who, you know, deal with trauma and like triggering, triggering moments and stuff.

Yeah, I think

Mei: I'm, I'm curious how you found that, I guess since the traumatic event. How had, how did that initially impact your day-to-day versus now that it sounds like E M D R has been such a helpful tool, how, like, how has that progressed?

Joan: Yeah. I'm. Well, I kind of, I noticed these behaviors that I have in myself, and one of them that I noticed was junior year of college, I had a car and anytime I heard any sound outside, I would look to make sure my car was there.

And that's not really a normal behavior, but I, I talked about it with my therapist and [00:19:00] she said, "Hey, listen, maybe it's that when you were at, in this traumatic event, you didn't have a way of escaping. Now you view this car as a way of escaping." And once she said that, it kind of clicked for me that I was, I was always in these situations making sure I had a way to get away if I needed to or like just be okay and be able to control the situation.

And even before that, I would, I noticed to myself that I would have a hard time like not getting upset if something happened outside of my control. And I would get really angry and just feel so. Really anxious where I just didn't know what to do. I felt like the world was ending sometimes, and it, it wasn't.

And so I'd have these big moments of just tension with people, and then I would calm down and a few hours later I'd be like, listen, I was wrong. And so addressing that with my therapist has also helped see, oh, this is a little bit of a trauma [00:20:00] response. How can we prevent that? So a lot of it's doing the work outside of these traumatic experiences so that when I face these traumatic experiences, I'm a little more calm and I'm able to tell myself like I'm not here and recognize when something might be coming up that would be upsetting for me.

Hmm.

Emily: Yeah. Yeah. I think you know, that like feeling stuck or like wanting to make sure that you have an escape that sort of goes back into like how you're talking about feeling powerless and like, I think that's, you know, ironically that's a really like, powerful feeling. And I think a lot of people deal with that, especially if they have been through trauma.

So you've spoken a lot about, you know, feeling powerless in your life, especially as a teenager, and I think a lot of us can relate to that feeling, especially like people who have been through trauma.

I'm wondering , what does the word powerless mean to you? And like, how have you been able to regain your power and a sense of [00:21:00] control over your life and like grow into a stronger version of yourself? And I guess also like going into that, like was there a moment when you realized it was time to seek help or like when you sort of discovered E M D R and you thought that would be helpful for you?

Joan: Absolutely. to me I think powerlessness means kind. When I hear that word, I just kind of think stuck and alone. And so that, that's really for me, even something that sometimes I'm worried about being alone. I, I, I don't wanna be abandoned, I just. So for me, that's kind of just isolation. And I mean, I started, started thinking, Hey, this isn't normal.

When it was affecting some of my, relationships and social relationships, I was just, I was pushing people away and I just, I couldn't handle normal or regular interactions that sometimes, sometimes people are late, sometimes people have to cancel, and I just wasn't. [00:22:00] Able to process that in a healthy way.

So I, I really wanted to seek more targeted e MDR therapy, especially when my therapist said, Hey, listen, you might have P T S D. And even before that, I had, I'd been going to therapy for years and years and years, but it had only been talk therapy. It hadn't been anything deeper than that. And. I, I noticed as I got older and as I went to college and moved out of the dorms and into my own apartment, I, I started kind of realizing just on my own that I am in control of my own life.

I'm not a little kid anymore. My parents don't have the power to say, oh, you can and can't do that. I was able to say, listen, I'm going out with my friends tonight, and I didn't have to ask for permission, and I just started to see that, oh, I'm safe with myself. I'm able to make the decisions for myself. If I need to leave somewhere and I don't have a car, I [00:23:00] can, I have a phone.

I can use Uber. I can get out of these situations on my own, and I didn't have to feel like I was stranded. So I think, I think growing up a little bit and having my own freedom helped realize that I, I do have power over my, my life and my situations.

Mei: When you said that you realized I'm safe with myself, that really like resonated with me

Emily:

Yeah.

I was gonna come on at that too. I really like that a lot. Yeah.

Mei: I just, gosh, I think. I mean, I used to struggle with panic disorder. I haven't had a panic attack in a while though. But I think that really speaks to coming into myself and like you were saying, feeling safe with myself because I used to not be able to go out into Boston without having a panic attack because I just, I felt alone and I felt like I couldn't take care of myself.

I was like, [00:24:00] where are my parents? Or I need. I need an external person to kind of cling myself to, to feel safe. But now that I'm older, I guess it really has just been, what's the word? Like a desensitization of sorts, because I was forced, you know, it's like go to college, live in a dorm, move out, do my own thing.

And well, I'm also moving back home to my parents next year for completely different reasons. Primarily financial, if I'm honest. But I, I am afraid, like, will I lose that part of myself that I worked so hard to establish? And I, I just don't know, you know, only time will tell, but I, I totally get what you mean of like just the more that you have to grow up and have those, I guess, Hmm... literally coming of age [00:25:00] experiences. Like the more you learn that you can trust yourself, you, you've taken care of yourself for this long, you know that you'll be okay.

Emily: Yeah. I for me, like I moved back home for the summer, like after I graduated undergrad and before I moved up here for, For grad school.

And I definitely like can relate to that sort of feeling of like, it's, it's weird from like going from being more on your own and more independent in college and like living in the dorms and everything and then kind of having, or like feeling like you kind of have to like ask permission for stuff again.

And like, it was just like kind of an awkward, like in between. That reminded me a lot of like how I did feel, you know, as a kid or as a teenager and like, Really, I guess, put into perspective like how much growing I had done, you know, being on my own and like starting to like, you know, become my own person.

And I think that really is like, I mean, obviously we're [00:26:00] in a very like, transformative period of our life right now. And I think that it, you know, it can really do a lot in terms of like, Our self-worth and like our sense of safety and like, there's a lot that goes into it that can really like set up your life to like be better than maybe it was when you were a child, you know?

Mei: Yeah. I mean, I think we need to get a developmental psych expert on.

Yeah, that would be great. Yeah.

I think like an, you know, a big part of regaining your power or realizing your power, especially in terms of P T S D, is.

More than just, you know, having these lived adult experiences, but also like learning to forgive the past and let go. So Joan, like how, how did you go about leaving or not leaving those experiences? Cuz you can't [00:27:00] ever leave them, but. Forgiving, I suppose.

Joan: Absolutely. For me, it was a real clear turning point right before the pandemic really started.

So it was probably February of 2020. My aunt, who I was very close to, got diagnosed with pancreatic cancer and , no one in my life had ever had any serious life-threatening illness, and I'd never, I'd never faced someone I knew facing a real, real life-threatening challenge. And so I started really thinking about life and I kind of realized resenting my dad or resenting things that had happened in the past weren't hurting my dad.

It wasn't causing my dad any pain. It was just causing me pain. Cause I was living with this anger and just this frustration and I, I really kind of threw myself into thinking, listen, alcoholism is a disease. It's not something my dad said. Hey, I'm just going to drink and it doesn't matter [00:28:00] who I affect, it, it, it was a disease.

He, he couldn't control it. And he, he's, he is sober now. He's working on himself. And so I said, listen, like it, life is too short for me to never speak to my dad again, to never have these conversations. So, I really, I tried to view it from that standpoint, and now I'm very close with my dad. We get along great.

I love him. He, he was just, he was going through a really hard time and should it have happened? No, and I'm, I'll never let go of that, but letting it control my life was only hurting me. And so I did the same thing with a lot of other issues in my past with fights with friends, or I just, I started just trying to let go and just move forward with my life, cuz staying stuck in the past for me was just holding me back and not letting me just again, going back to [00:29:00] powerlessness.

It wasn't letting me have my own power because I was letting these past experiences control my life. So just learning how to move, move beyond that was immensely, immensely helpful for me. And during the pandemic, especially in the real quarantine period, I was doing a lot of thinking and almost in a way, the isolation really helped me just see a bigger picture of what I was missing, what I, what I was kind of taking from myself. I didn't see my dad. I wasn't really talking to my dad. I wasn't seeing friends and I was able to just say, Hey, like this. I need to learn how to let go of this. And I was, I was able to do that and it, it did take my aunt getting that cancer diagnosis, but I was able to see a more full picture of what I was doing.

Mei: You know, as well as anyone that I've had my fair share of family stuff and I still have my fair share of family stuff, [00:30:00] but I have not gotten to that point of forgiving yet and I don't know how to move past these things. And I just remember cuz you know, I was with you throughout all of high school when you were going through this with your dad and I remember when it reached a peak at the end when you really just weren't talking. And I remember you told me you would never forgive him, and just, obviously I'm your friend, I'm gonna support you no matter what, but. Listening to this, knowing what I know about your current status with, with him, it's just you've made so much progress.

Mm-hmm. And I'm so happy for you that you've come to these realizations and you know, you've done what was right for you. Obviously, you know the way in which it happened, not great. Mm-hmm. I'm so sorry your aunt had to pass in order for you to learn this, but. I could take a cent or two away from you and [00:31:00] learning to forgive but not necessarily forget and being a bigger person, I think it does help when the other party takes accountability.

But right now I'm stuck.

But

Joan: yeah, I, I, I think it depends really situation to situation. Just, and I don't, I don't think every situation you need to forgive, some things are unforgivable. But I think kind of realizing what you can control and what you can take ownership of and what, what you're able to move on from without it damaging you.

Because if you just walk around life just forgiving everybody. It, it can do some damage to you where you kind of let yourself be walked over, I think what's important is forgiving in your own terms and deciding what you're okay with and what you're not.

And for me and my [00:32:00] dad, if, if something like this were to happen again, I probably wouldn't forgive my dad again, but I'm able to see his own growth too. So I'm able to say, Hey, this situation seems safe now I do have more power. I go, my dad lives lives far away now, and I, I do go visit him and I go spend time with him and I know if something goes wrong, I have a car and I can drive away.

And I do have that power. So I still, I'm able to maintain my power and also move forward with my relationship with him.

Mei: Yes. mic drop.

Emily: Yeah, I, yeah, I mean, Mei I feel the same. There's definitely a lot of like my own stuff where I haven't gotten to that point of forgiveness either, and like I think that's a really. Like admirable skill, to have to be able to let go and to be able to forgive. And you know, obviously not, not every single situation warrants it, but I think when it [00:33:00] does, it's really beneficial to be able to like, recognize that and actually do something about it and not just like harbor that resentment and kind of like, feel stuck in it. And I'm sure that, you know, being able to forgive him has helped you sort of regain your power and rebuild that relationship.

Joan: Absolutely, and I mean, even growing up, my dad was a very important person to me, so it was, it was really sad for me, especially in that time where we weren't speaking to feel like, hey, like I don't feel like my dad's there.

I don't have him. And so it was, it was healing for me to be able to say, oh, I have my dad back and. He's, he's a really great dad. He really shows up for me, especially now. And so I think moving forward and saying, listen, I'm gonna treat him on his actions now and not, not what happened. But also if, if an issue happens now, I, I won't be hesitant to let go of that [00:34:00] relationship.

But for now, I, I, I feel like I'm gaining a lot from it.

Mei: Girly. Just keep it coming. Like literally preach.

Yeah. I guess, I guess part of taking your power back is being able to recognize growth in other people that once made you feel unsafe. And like, I guess, You know, working on yourself enough where you're in a place to evaluate rather than act on your initial emotions.

Cuz I know it's so easy to just get stuck in that place of like, no, this is how you treated me during this time. Like, I, I refuse, I refuse to take the, the goggles off or whatever and, and recognize like, you have grown and let's be real like, I know for you, I know for me, I don't know about Emily, but like

our parents are [00:35:00] such important people to us who they were our superheroes growing up.

They did so much for us and to, as you got older, to kind of, you know, take the rose colored glasses off and realize, hey, some of these things aren't okay. It's, it's a tough realization and then that is where you feel powerless cuz you feel like you don't have that support system anymore.

You don't really feel that safe. But like we were talking about earlier, You know, moving on, pushing yourself to do the adult things, quote unquote, having those experiences going to therapy, putting in that work can really help you, I guess, repair that relationship which reinforces you know, your feeling of safety with yourself.

It's kind of like a, is that a feedback loop?

Emily: Right? Yeah. I mean, it sounds like you've been able to become like your own support system which I do think is kind of a big part [00:36:00] of getting older and like, you know, starting to do that healing work. And obviously like therapy is really helpful tool for that.

Aside from E M D R, what sort of coping skills or tools have you found useful in your day-to-day life? And if someone, you know, out there listening doesn't have access to therapy or in O R E M D R, but they're struggling with something similar, do you have any advice that you would give to them for starting their healing journey?

Joan: Yeah, I mean for me, what I do when I'm not in therapy or not doing EMDR, is I really do try to remind myself that I'm not 17, I'm 23, especially sometimes when I'm driving, cause I do a lot of driving for my job. I go meet clients at their own house or apartment. I, I think like, Hey, listen, I'm driving right now.

I'm able to get away if I need to. I'm [00:37:00] able to do whatever I need to. So in those moments where I feel like I have control, I try to highlight

that for myself and take, take some deep breaths and say, I'm here now. And I think for people who aren't able to access therapy or able to access E M D R and are struggling with these feelings of powerlessness. I think highlighting moments where you feel powerful is important because I think when you start to look for it, you notice a lot of times in your life you have more power than you think, and it's even in small things like choosing what you want for dinner. You have that power and it's your parents aren't making you dinner anymore and you're not being fed food you don't like.

You have control over that. So I think really picking out those moments in your life and just kind of remembering that helps break the cycle of feeling. Powerlessness and feeling like you don't have control. [00:38:00] So finding those moments.

Mei: That's a great tip. Because I know for myself, Especially when I'm in a downward spiral cuz of my depression, I tend to think of things as glass half empty rather than glass half full. And I know when I get into that negative mindset loop of everything's horrible, you're awful, all this awful.

Like, you know, things we tend to tell ourselves in the back of our head. It makes everything worse, you know, like there's no room for positivity. You're just focused on the negative.

Emily: Yeah, I think that was really well said, and that's definitely important to remember that you know, you're not in that place anymore.

Or even if you are, like there are certain things that you can do to help yourself, like come down from any like triggering moments and like just remind yourself where you are and like the power that you do have.

Mei: Breath work. It's very important too.

Emily: Yeah. [00:39:00] Grounding work, mindfulness, all that is really helpful.

Yeah.

Mei: And from someone who used to think it was genuinely all mumbo jumbo, like until I actually did it myself and you know, this was way before I worked in mental health, but like, damn, it works. It really does work. So don't knock it until you try it.

Joan: I, I agree too. I, I would sit in psych classes in undergrad and they would talk about mindfulness, and I was like, okay, sure.

I'm, I'm sure that's really something. But then during the pandemic, I would listen to like the, they have plenty of tapes on YouTube that you can just play and listen to and 10 minutes even. And I was, I would do it and I'm like, oh, oh, this, this is doing something. I feel more kind of. Grounded and less on edge all the time.

So I'm def definitely an mindfulness advocate.

Mei: Don't get me started on journaling too. I was like, am I five [00:40:00] years old? I'm gonna journal? And then we like had a moment in the pandemic during quarantine cuz we lived so close to each other. So like we would visit and we would like journal and reflect and stuff.

And I was like, oh my God, I get it. I'm a big idiot. Like, It works, man. It really, it really does work. Having a positive mindset is so hard to have when you're in that place, but once you start, you'll realize like why it's worth keeping up. And not to say I haven't slipped back into my old ways of drowning out the thoughts with more TikTok Scrolls and Instagram whatevers.

But I do get it. I really do get it, and I don't think it's nabo jumbo anymore.

Emily: Yeah, there are a lot of really like really helpful tools out there that they can seem really simple, but then once you start implementing them

and like actually taking them seriously, like they really can do a lot of a lot of good and be very helpful.

And. I [00:41:00] ironically, I actually have therapy right after this, so we do have to like kind of cut it a little bit short. But Joan, thank you so much for coming on because your story was, it was really inspiring and I think that a lot of people can relate to feeling powerless and like, you know, just starting their healing journey or like not knowing how to start.

Thank you for, for coming on and sharing with us.

Joan: Well, thank you for having me. I also, Wanna, wanna highlight too. I'm still working on it. I am far from perfect. But I, I've seen the progress I've made and I still, I still have plenty I wanna resolve, but I just, I think being open to the process is really what'll lead to the positive change.

Mei: Mic drop again, period. If you would like to contact us, you can email us at stay tuned @UMass med.edu and check out the transitions ACR website, UMass med.edu/transitions acr, thanks for being here and be [00:42:00] sure to stay tuned for next time.