

Transcripts for No Guilt Mom Podcast Episode 160

Joann: Welcome to the No Guilt Mom podcast. I am your host, JoAnn Crohn. Joined here by my co-host, Brie Tucker.

Brie: Well, hello. Hello, every buddy. How are you?

Joann: I resist to urge to sing Brie. Aren't you proud of me?

Brie: (Singing) Now you got me doing it.

Joann: Everytime. If you're here with like the No Guilt Mom podcast, you know, we just break the song all the time. It's like, why come up with something to say yourself when you could borrow somebody else's words? . Exactly.

Brie: It's either, it's either breaking into song or breaking into quotes from movies and tv. shows.

Joann: Movies and TV shows. Exactly. Exactly. Well, we have such an amazing interview for you today. They're with our friends, Cindy and Jen. You might have seen them on the Happy Mom Summit. They wrote the fabulous book, The Parent Compass. Cindy is a 10 time published author, Mama four and a retired college counselor. Jen is an author, mom and current private college counselor. Together, they authored the book, The Parent. Navigating your teens wellness and academic journey in today's competitive world, they help tweens and teens navigate middle and high school, culminating in a college admissions process. And we hope you enjoy our interview with Cindy and Jen.

(Intro music)

JoAnn: Welcome to the podcast, Cindy and Jen. We are so excited to have you here and talk all about Teen Wellbeing through these high school years, which Brie and I have just entered

brie: It is scary

JoAnn: our children. So welcome,

jenn_curtis: Thank you so much for having.

Cindy_Muchick: They're scary years, but they're doable. We can do them. We can survive.

brie: I'll just say, I always say it's scary and JoAnn hears me say this all the time because my expertise, my background is in zero to five. I've been pretty much winging it since they were six the whole teenage years. I feel like I've gone back to like the toddler preschool age, but with way better vocabulary and a lot more eye rolls,

Cindy_Muchick: Well, Jen and I, we love teens.

joann_crohn: I personally love teens. I love them even more than little kids. I'm like, Oh, you're so cute, but what do I talk to you about And with teens, it's like they get sarcasm. You can get in with like a deeper level with them.

And so I. I love it and I'm so excited to dig in with you guys about your work because this issue of teen wellbeing really comes up a lot, especially in our Balance coaching community because we have a lot of parents in there whose kids are entering high school and just like how to really make sure our teens are.

jenn_curtis: Yeah.

joann_crohn: mentally and are, are handling all this increased pressure that they have on them? Well, and what we can do as parents. I mean, what are you guys seeing in terms of the pressures that teens are facing right now?

Cindy_Muchick: I mean, Jen and I like you you know, Joanne, we have devoted our careers and our, you know, passion and our love is working with teens and they just have a soft spot in both of our hearts. You know, whether we've parented them or not, and I've parented a few of them.

But I think, you know, we are seeing obviously great increase in pressure that's been, added onto by, you know, the results and the impact of Covid. But, kids who are stressed out, anxious, depressed, overwhelmed by school, by their parents, by the college process, by the world that's surrounding us with all sorts of icky news. And that was really a big part of the reason why we wrote the Parent Compass together to try to kind of get beneath that and pay really close

attention to the mental health of these teens and what parents can do to help improve that.

joann_crohn: I love that. Because it's, it's hard seeing like what our teens are going through right now and it's hard to find, figure out, like how do we help them through it? what can we do as parents?

jenn_curtis: Our field is education consulting. So we are college counselors and have been both working with teens for each of us over a decade and a half. And so I would definitely say that things have changed over time and the big catalyst for us was the college admission scandal. As Cindy mentioned, we had been noticing that teens were stressed out and, and burned out. And so we wanted to write the parent compass because, were tracing a lot of that to exactly what your question is, to parenting patterns. And we were seeing this cohort of kids that came into our offices and they could not speak for themselves and they could not, even schedule appointments with us.

They didn't have opinions. They couldn't articulate who they were, what their values were. And then we were seeing another cohort of. Who really were thriving, who could have really meaningful and in depth conversations with us, who could schedule appointments with us, had lots of opinions, lots of interests, and we were tracing those things to these parenting patterns.

And what it seemed to come down to was this kind of keeping up with the Jones's mentality and the micromanaging and the overscheduling and the, Well, you're not gonna get into college if you don't. But that's actually not what the research shows. And so we wanted to kinda get this message out there.

We wanted to get the truth out there, which was I guess if I could boil it down to one thing, it would be that the research does show that it matters more what a child or teen does in college than where they go. And so we really, and that's a challenge, success. If anyone hasn't heard of Challenge success go check them out cause they're awesome. And we, but we really wanted to get that message out there that our kids thrive when we equip them with the skills to thrive. Not when we push them into something that we think that they should be doing.

brie: I, 100% go with that because I, I feel like, as a parent of my, my oldest is a sophomore right now, and I just am constantly. going back and forth between am I teaching you enough life skills to do things on your own? And that's the other thing too, like I have to tell you, and I, I don't know everybody else feels about this in podcast land, but a lot of times when I'm pushing my kids to do stuff on their own, like, Hey, make your own orthodontist appointment.

That schedulers looking at me and I'm like, I'm not in charge of your schedule. You know very well when you're going to band practice and when you have something after school. And then we had the added joy being. A divorced household. So my kids have two different households and I'm like, you know when your dad can take you to the orthodontist, I don't know his schedule. Trying to have them like have those life skills that they can do things on their own, but at the same time, not making, like I'm my kids when they're like, Well, so and so's parents do all this stuff for them. And it's just like, Ugh, am up in every step?

Cindy_Muchick: Yeah, I want you to know that you are following your parent compass by doing just that, by equipping your kids.

Learn. Learn those basic, basic life skills. You're not taking anything away from them. You're not punishing them, you are equipping them. And so you should feel good about that.

So we will just say from our expertise, exactly what you should be doing and you should be doing that, you know, in, in other ways as well. And it doesn't mean we cannot ever help our kids. Certainly when they need to brainstorm or when they want to role play or figure some challenge out and they want your input, if they seem receptive to it that's always a good thing to ask. When you're sharing this with me, do you want my 2 cents? Or do you just wanna kind of get it off your chest? But that being said, I think that's terrific. What you just described.

brie: I'm gonna record this play it every day.

jenn_curtis: Yeah. Yeah. I will tell you to piggyback on that. And, and we actually wrote this into the book, one of my most impressive students who just had it together and like, just really was Just, I just so impressive. I, I sat with her the last day that we worked together and I'd watched her over time.

She was meticulous. And I said, What is it? What did your parents do? You know, I think we're both always trying to learn from our students and you know, I think our, our students are our best kind of parenting instructors when we're looking at other, how they were parented. And she looked at me deadpan and she said, made me do hard things. I mean, just without skipping a beat, she said that. And I just, that has always stuck with me. And so I think that's sort of what, what you're saying, you know, your kid has to do hard things and that's how they grow in their resilience.

joann_crohn: It's true. And even like I click on the click bait parenting articles where it's like parenting expert says One skill parents need by the mom of successful kids. And it's Esther Wilkey who is like the mom of YouTube, CEO 23, and me founder, like she has all these successful kids. And the thing she said, her parenting advice. Don't do something for your do on their own. And I was like,

Cindy_Muchick: Yeah,

joann_crohn: It's great advice.

Cindy_Muchick: it's funny because as we're raising them through the high school years, we're trying to equip them with some skills that will help in college, like the ones, like doing laundry and , changing your sheets and boiling an egg and some of those basic skills.

But Jen and I, talking a lot about how important this is in everything we're seeing with mental health in teens, that you have to also prepare them for the mental health piece of when they leave the nest. And a lot of that happens while they're in high school. To be able to have those conversations and those check-ins to let them know you're in their corner to get them help when they need it.

Professional. You know, medication, whatever it might be, to help them through some of these times that can be pretty tough in these teenage years. And so for them to feel, feel supported and listened to and and you care about their mental health they, you know, they respond well to that.

They see you as, you know, less of kind of the, the bossy parent and more as a kind of partner or a supporter or a cheerleader.

joann_crohn: Yes. And one thing that you say that parents need to do is to ask good questions. And when you're looking at that, like what kind of questions do you recommend parents ask?

jenn_curtis: Think we're all conditioned to ask when they get in the car, when they, you know, trudge in the door, How was your day? Yep. And that never leads anywhere. Right. Fine.

Good. You know,

joann_crohn: grumpiness from my

jenn_curtis: daughter

whatever. Yeah. Just a, just a

joann_crohn: ask that

jenn_curtis: response. So we actually, we even consulted question experts. We listed ton of sample questions that you can ask.

They're all listed in the parent compass. One of the ones that I like is, Did you ask a good question today? And that actually comes from an example that we gave about a Nobel laureate who tells a story about how when he got home, all of. friends' moms were asking, you know, What did you get on your test today?

Or how did that assignment go? And his mom, what he asked was, What was your good question that you asked today? he credits that to all that he then achieved. And so I think that's, I don't know, Cindy, if you have another one that you

that's one of my favorites that

opens up the door and gets them thinking, Oh, I, I should be asking good questions.

What's a good question I can ask tomorrow?

Cindy_Muchick: Yeah. And I mean, you can get more fun and funny with them too. Like, you know, if, if today was a theme song, what would it have been? And then your kids can start thinking about lyrics of, of songs that they like, or you're, maybe they think you're weird for asking that. So a lot of times,

brie: JoAnn's kids, JoAnn's kids could knock that one outta the park.

jenn_curtis: There you go. There you go. And, you know, kind of the rose and the thorn, like what was the highlight from today and a lowlight from today, But even to be more creative. One of our questions is what is your tennis ball? Or what was your tennis ball today? What was the thing you were chasing after?

So what excited you or what was something funny that happened? You know, so we, we kind of distilled down our favorite probably 40 or 50 questions and I personally, on my own, try to kind of rotate through those with my kids when I feel stuck cuz one of my kids is mumblor.

Just, he doesn't emote much. He kind of talks with his head down a little bit and the words kind of blur together. And, and my to me and I turn to him, We're like, Did you understand what he just said? And so, if we can get the right question and get him on a topic that excites him, the mumbling goes away and it becomes, you know you know, a conversation instead of just a, a grumble

brie: And doesn't that make you so excited when you've got a grum? When you've got a mumblor or the one that just gives you the one word answers and suddenly you've managed to find it and they start talking and you're like, Oh my God, I don't say anything. Don't move. You

Cindy_Muchick: might scare him!

No, I know. No, we high five after that.

brie: right?

Don't

Cindy_Muchick: we high five. We're like, that just happen? That just happened.

brie: it. Play it, play it calm, play it chill. I don't want him to know I'm into this conversation. Can't let him know I'm into conversation.

jenn_curtis: So true.

joann_crohn: That's so true. But with teens it's very, very like tricky like that. You have to monitor your own emotions because they're so aware of changes in your tone. And sometimes I mean, the teenage brain, it's been known, they misinterpret things. the time. And that is something that, I feel like I'm navigating through right now as a parent, is knowing that my kids' reactions, to things aren't necessarily things I've done, but things they're misinterpreting that I've done.

Cindy_Muchick: Like really another language, right? We've gotta about what we ask, and oftentimes the time we ask it. So food really helps devices away,

obviously help from the distraction. Sometimes the car ride is good because there is less to do in the car. But I do think that, you know, finding that right moment and when they get right, when they walk in from school, the last thing they want is to be peppered with questions. They just, you know, I think do need that downtime we all do, Like we just sort of wanna, you know, decompress a little bit before we download our day.

brie: Yeah, I think it's a good point.

joann_crohn: Asking good questions is like one component, but there's also once you get the answer to a question, you have to be a good listener. how, how do you recommend that parents listen to their kids?

brie: Because it's more than just, I sat there and listened to what you said, right? There's gotta be more.

Cindy_Muchick: Yeah.

jenn_curtis: I think one of the challenges is that as parents, we really quickly wanna jump in and fix or solve or give advice, and the reality is, The vast majority of the time, that's not what they're looking for. They, they want to vent, they need to get something off their chest. And something that I saw long ago but has stuck with me is the this image of the, the fact that the words listen and silent are equal.

They have the same letters. They're just in a different. And I think that that is, think about it, right?

joann_crohn: never realized

jenn_curtis: think about it. And so I think that it's actually such a wonderful image and depiction for what it means to really listen. means that we need to zip our lips and be silent and absorb whatever our. Kid is telling us. So I think beyond that, I think some techniques I would have would be mimicking body posture is a really great way to show that you're attuned. So if the person that is speaking to you is sitting there with their, you know, legs crossed and maybe hunched over a little bit, try that and see if it makes them feel like you are with them in the. Another

back to them. Not only does it force you to stay in the moment, cause it's easy for our mind to wander if our, if our teen is talking to us about this or that, but paraphrasing means you have to pay attention. You have to be in the moment

with them. And then also it makes them feel understood because you're repeating back to them in your own words, meaning you digested what they said and, and saying it back to them.

So you can say something like, So what I hear you saying is, and then. And then go there. And then also maintaining eye contact. I think in our world of distraction, the ding of our cell phones is so intoxicating. I think that you know, if, if we're talking to anybody, I think a lot of these skills go toward not just teens. Honestly, anybody a, a spouse or a friend or whatever the case may be. If we're looking down, you know, every time our, our cell phone dings, we're not listening or we're not showing that we're listening. So I would say to make sure to, you know, maintain eye contact and either put your phone away, put it in another room, keep it on silent.

Keep it on do not disturb.

Cindy_Muchick: Just wanna add one more comment on Jen's listening, which we were really fortunate our book, was endorsed by one of our all-time favorite authors. And also podcaster and PBS host Kelly Corrigan,. written some wonderful books and her recent book they're all New York Times bestsellers, it's called, Tell Me More.

And just using the title of her book and the words me more, or mm-hmm. , I hear You. Or What Happened Next are all you really say your kid is unloading, because it's another way of acknowledging that you're there and you're with them. And, and if there's more they wanna say you're there to receive it.

brie: And then also don't take offense when you say, Tell me more. And they're like, There is no more. I just told you everything is.

Cindy_Muchick: Yes.

brie: like, you're like, I got half a story, but, Okay.

Okay.

Cindy_Muchick: Yes.

joann_crohn: And it's just, it's just how they work. It's just how they work right now. Through the high school years, is that really making sure that you're supporting your kids their own interests instead of trying to steer them in a way you think they should go? How have you seen this show up in your work with

Cindy_Muchick: For me, the way it's shown up with kids is the ones who tell me, you know, I'm only doing this because my mom dad are making me, and, or, you don't really wanna do it, but I've heard it looks good for college. Or, you know, those are just cringeworthy moments to have as college counselor with a kid because It's heartbreaking.

They're not choosing to do something because they enjoy it.. They're choosing it because they think it's an, you know, a means end or they've been told that they kind of need to do it. And we do share some pretty brutal case studies of kids we've worked with or kids we've met way in our book.

And the one that comes to mind is this student that I talk about that my family and I met on a vacation. We were on the same tour bus and this poor kid, he was traveling alone parents. He was an only child. He was a high school junior getting ready for his senior year. So this was in the summer and we just started making conversation cause we on a bus ride and our kids were about the same age.

And I said, What kinds of things are you interested in doing for fun? And he kind looked at both of his parents and he said, Well, I'm a diver, but I really hate it. It and the parents kind of turned red. And then he sort of, and I said, Oh, I actually might have said, Tell me more, . And he said, Well, my parents have made me dive and swim, you know, since I was really young.

And I'm just, I don't like it anymore. I wanna quit. I'm really burnt out. And I said, Wow, that's, that must be really, you know, challenging. What, what else would you wanna be doing? With your time. Instead of that, I said, Well, yeah, it takes so much time. I wanna write a article for the school newspaper, or I wanna have a girlfriend.

I wanna go to the prom. I wanna, know, do different And this was the one thing, and obviously he was, you know, reaching out and desperation with a family of strangers, but, heard similar stories in our offices of kids who are just unhappy with the things that they feel like their parents have chosen for them. And our comment would be, hang on, hold the phone. Like we once were teens and we got to do teenage life. It's their turn, right? So even if they're choice for an activity or something that just doesn't

joann_crohn: is.

Cindy_Muchick: collect, click with you or appeal to think it's not worthwhile, or this or that, it's up to To choose that. In fact, the best ways we can engage

with them are to support the things that excite them and to let them educate us and teach us more about the things that excite them. So we've really gotta be careful that we're not pushing our kids into things that they don't. Like spending their time doing because honestly they'll grow to resent you.

It's pretty terrible. will be miserable and we're not telling them, you know, we see you and we wanna let you choose. You can try a things and then settle in and it doesn't mean some things won't get hard or you might get bored over time or you might get a little bit of burnout and take a break and maybe then go back or maybe not go back.

But those activities and, and are, really not up to us to choose. It's up to us to drive them those places if they need a ride,

joann_crohn: And what I hear you talking about is making kids stay in long term activities so that it looks like good in a college application. Like that is, No, no bueno, but like sometimes. As a parent, I find that my, my kids are really reluctant

I have to be the one to be Listen, I just did it with a leadership camp this past summer with my daughter.

It was a week long camp. We got a friend to go with her. She didn't wanna try it, and I'm like, Listen, it's just a week. It's a day camp. Just go and try it and see what it feels at the end. And I really got pushback on it. Like the first morning it was like, Mom, I don't wanna do this. Like, you're forcing me to do it.

Parents shouldn't force their kids to do things. And I'm like, Short term, try it out. Turns out she loved it

Cindy_Muchick: Right.

joann_crohn: There's like a difference between

brie: That's exactly what my question was. Like I, I, Cause I feel like, feel like with the way things are, you guys were talking about this, like everybody with their phones, like especially with recently with the pandemic, I feel like. So many people, kids and adults, we've all gotten used to being our little, our little cocoon, our little home. Staying here. I can talk to my friends online. That's fine. I don't need to be in real life. And I feel like as parents, we're a lot of times like, Okay, I have to come on, push you out the door. Get the heck outta dodge. You need to go do something. But at the same.

It's like JoAnn just totally exquisitely put together of the whole, like where do you find that line Right, of what's pushing too much and, and what isn't?

I don't know what's needed. I.

joann_crohn: Yeah, that's good. Where is the line? When do you know? Like it's not beneficial for the kid anymore?

Cindy_Muchick: I mean, say it, it really comes down to communication and following what you think are kind of some of those signals. We've all been there as parents and wanting our kids to just be exposed to certain things, but I think it's the reaction sometimes to it if that exposure didn't go well and wasn't so successful and it should never be like, See, I told you so I knew you would like it.

It could just be like, I'm so glad you liked it. I'm so glad

got to try that. That's a really neat life experience or good job for trying, and now we know you don't like it. You know? So I think that that fine line comes just with communicating. With your kids in a more open way and the check-ins of, you know, how are you doing with soccer practice right now?

You know, I, I'm seeing, you know, a lot of, a lot more exhaustion than I usually see, or a lot more bruises or a lot more, you know, disappointment when you come home from practice. What's up? Or, do you wanna try something new? Is there something new I can help you explore? Or, you know, what ever it might be.

So I think it's kid by kid, but it does come to.

joann_crohn: Mm-hmm.

Cindy_Muchick: the fine line, but I think we kind of know when it goes from, let, let's just try it. I think it would be great. And you know what, if I'm wrong, totally my bad. But if I'm, you know, but if it turns out to be great, I'm glad you did it. Yeah. Check it off.

Exactly. Exactly.

jenn_curtis: And helping them know that if they realize that they don't like something, I think that it's just as valuable as finding out that they do like

something. So a lot of kids put all this pressure on themselves to. Have it all figured out when they're a freshman in high school.

That's just not age appropriate, quite frankly. And so you know, I like to tell my students to explore. And if you figure out that you thought you were gonna like engineering, but you absolutely hate it, great. Now that gives you a little more information on what you might like. so just kind of reinforcing that message that it's always great to try.

And then if you find out that it's not working for you, it's all right to move on and find something else that.

joann_crohn: Absolutely. I, I think that this, this discussion about making, trying new things, asking questions of your kids and then making sure that you're listening to them and that they know you're listening to them, is, it's so important. I've read The Parent Compass. It is a phenomenal book and everybody listening should go out and get it right now.

Thank you so, so much Jen and Cindy for

Cindy_Muchick: Thanks for hosting

us.

us

jenn_curtis: Thank you.

joann_crohn: talk to you later.

Brie: Okay. As a mom of teens, I was so excited to talk to them because I constantly feel like I, I like a compass spinning. It's a perfect example. The whole parent compass, I feel like a compass that is spinning. I never know which direction to go with my kids. Am I going the right way? Am I going the wrong way? I don't know.

JoAnn: It's interesting how they said, like, usually with your parent compass though, you know the way you wanna go. And it's all about tuning out that outside noise and, and following like your gut for what's best for kids. Like, especially you, Brie, because I mean, you have all the knowledge and you have all the expertise and your gut says yes, but like all these outside forces are coming at you and being like, No.

Brie: Right? And oh my gosh, am I doing this wrong? Maybe I should be doing this differently. Yeah, you're right. Sometimes it's just a matter of listening to our gut and feeling a little bit more sure about what we should do. But everything that they said, for people that watch this episode, because we're recording them now and they're on YouTube, you can see me the whole time shaking my head Yes. Yes. Uhhuh yes. So

JoAnn: yes, there's so much good in it and, uh, we hope that you got a lot out of our interview with Cindy and Jen. And until next time, remember the best mom's a happy mom, take care of you and we'll talk to you later.

Brie: Thanks for stopping by

(Outro music)