



Episode 44: Prenatal & Postpartum Challenges in Life & Relationship, A Conversation with Meg Duke, LCSW

Liz Higgins (00:02):

Hey, y'all... Liz Higgins here! And welcome to the Millennial Life Podcast, where my main goal is to share conversations that will inspire you and drive you toward the life and relationship you desire. I'm here to share what I've learned as a licensed therapist and relationship coach specializing in millennial relationships and wellness, as well as transformative conversations with other professionals. Thanks for listening, and enjoy today's episode!

Liz Higgins (00:34):

Hello, hello, and welcome to the podcast! I am so excited to be here today, and I have a guest that is somebody that goes way back with me here to do a crossover episode. So, um, you'll get to hear all about both of our podcasts, both of our journeys... But for those who haven't been following me, or are just tuning into The Millennial Life Podcast, I'm Liz Higgins, and I'm a licensed marriage and family therapist and supervisor in Texas. I'm the founder of Millennial Life Counseling, where we focus on helping this generation have epic marriages, relationships, and lives. And everything about relationship! And this, this phase, um, especially in this crazy context we're in (pandemic life and all the things) is just my jam. It's my passion and my love. And I'm so excited to be having this conversation today, um, regarding parent life, because I'm coming off of a little hiatus myself with the podcast and it was a bit of take a break, take a pause, pull back, take care, and devote time and energy into my family. And so I'm joined today by Meg Duke, who is a licensed clinical social worker, supervisor, and a chemical dependency counselor... All the things! Meg specializes in perinatal mental health too, which I'm really excited about, but I'm gonna let her introduce herself a little bit more. Meg! I'm so excited to be doing this with you.

Meg Duke (02:08):

I could not be more overjoyed. I am. I am aglow. My face is gonna spill open with excitement right now. I am, I am physically excited. I, this is such a great moment and I appreciate you. I'm so excited to be introduced to your listeners. I'm excited for you to be introduced to mine. I love

a crossover moment. This is the first. This is epic. Um, it's actually really interesting - if I can be quickly tangential - but on point of the crossover, I actually found out about one of my favorite podcasts. I don't know if anybody out there has heard of My Favorite Murder, but I used to listen to on Anna Fare's podcast and they did a crossover onto hers'. And I was like, "Who are these people? They're amazing." And then, and so I, I love this opportunity because I listen to your podcast obviously.

Meg Duke (02:49):

And hopefully people who listen to mine will start listening to yours', and vice versa. Um, so I'm really excited. So yeah, my podcast is Let's Discuss with Meg Duke. I am, as you mentioned, a licensed clinical social worker, supervisor and licensed chemical dependency counselor. Um, I work with people, I think we're, we're all trying in the, in the industry trying to use the word perinatal, like meaning around the time of like the age of possible procreation <laugh>. And, and I think when you say things like postpartum, like that's a very specific time. And, um, that also, you know, I work with people who are having fertility issues or working through their pregnancy as well. It's not just those six weeks after you pop out a baby and then after that you're on your own. It, it goes on much more than that. So that's what I'm really excited about and really excited for us to get to chat about today - about parenthood and overwhelm.

Liz Higgins (03:43):

For sure. Hashtag relevant!

Meg Duke (03:46):

Relevant. Yes! So I did wanna ask you, how do we know each other Liz?

Liz Higgins (03:51):

Oh my gosh. OK. You know, before we hopped on this call, it was like, I have to think about this for a second. How long ago? 'Cause in some ways we were just babies totally starting out, um, over a decade ago. Right? And so we met in 2014, I think. Yes.

Liz Higgins (04:09):

Yeah. That, that sounds a hundred percent, right? Yes. Cause it was not too long after I had gotten married that I went into that job. Well, I was there for a couple years, but yeah, I remember when you came along and everyone was like, oh my gosh, man, amazing energy. But we were together in an inpatient rehab. And so did that whole jam, which was a wonderful experience, I thought, and lots of opportunity to just learn and grow as I was starting out my career. And you were just such a joy, a support to all of us techs and, and that whole thing, but... Oh my gosh. We could just, you know, make this whole episode about memory lane regarding that. Oh my goodness. That time in our lives? We'd be going on for hours!

Meg Duke (04:51):

Oh we could. Absolutely. And I know you and I talked earlier and I'm, I mentioned it as well... Um, in my podcast that released this week was about getting that new role as professor at

University of Kansas. And, and I'm really excited cause I do my specialty, you know? I've done all the trainings on, not all the trainings. I've not done ALL the trainings. What am I saying? I've not done all the trainings! I've done A LOT of trainings around perinatal mental health, but also I do have a real passion for substance use recovery. Um, and so when they were like, Hey, we've got a substance use course, an 800 level substance use course for the MSW program, and we need a professor. I was like, check please! Yes! Sign me up! Absolutely, put me in. So it does make me reflect back to those days when we worked at that rehab. And yeah! You were doing the Lord's work as a, what did we call it there? Behavioral health?

Liz Higgins (05:39):

Yeah. Yeah. BHTs. BHs.

Meg Duke (05:42):

Behavioral health tech! Uh huh. Um, yeah, we were really doing the Lord's work and yeah, I remember it was 2014 cuz that's the year I got married. So I remember like even for my honeymoon or, you know, leaving for my wedding and our clinical director threw me, like, a little bridal shower. Very sweet. So anyway...

Liz Higgins (05:57):

Oh my gosh, good times. Really. And it's just been so fun to watch you. And it's like as we grow and move away from those experiences, and into new things, and having our own families... I mean, we just kind of kept in touch and kept tabs on each other over the years. So, it's so exciting because I just see you deepening in this work that you're in and it matters so much, especially right now. Right? Like in this time where we're all just navigating new challenges, and, like, my kids are toddlers and I mean, I just have that 'oof'. That empathy for people out there. That, that - I guess - personal awareness of what that is like right now. And then navigating all these other things that I'm sure you see in your practice, like the infertility challenges and how people are doing that.

Liz Higgins (06:43):

But absolutely. Yeah. I don't know. It's like where do you even start? Right? Because parenthood in and of itself is a challenge. And yes, I constantly find myself telling clients ('cause I work with lots of couples), like, let's pull out. Let's take a bird's eye view right now on the context of your life. Of course you're having challenges. Of course you wanna rip each other apart like every other day. Like, of course. And so normalizing for me, first and foremost, has been a big north star to trying to do my best and be healthy as a parent.

Meg Duke (07:20):

Yeah, absolutely. And I think that's what's so nice, too, is that we did stay in touch. And I remember you had your firstborn before I did. And so then we became pregnant at the same time (actually weirdly with two other amazing human beings who also worked with us as therapists at that same rehab.) And so we had our little babies everywhere, text thread, and it was great because you not only like... Not only have you been such a bright spot for me, uh,

just... I've been so excited about your professional growth and how you've been doing with everything. And I'm like, what a role model for me! But then also too, you were able to help me so much because you had a child, and I was like (or you know, you had been pregnant before) you were pregnant with like at the same time. We were bump buddies. And so I was like, what about this? What about that? It's so funny to have the crossover - literally, literally. <Laugh> Professional admiration, like, oh my gosh. How do you navigate this messy clinical issue? And yeah. Um, what kind of butt paste is the best?

Meg Duke (08:20):

Right? Absolutely. And so it is, I know, I, I know our topic today with like overwhelm, I those at the time that's actually not to like give away, you know, bury the lead. But like that's how I really did help myself as much as I could to avoid the overwhelm was like, I know Liz knows, I trust Liz. And when I ask her, she's not gonna gimme some sort of BS response, she's gonna tell me like exactly how it is and it's gonna come from a place of care and knowledge not, oh, well I Googled somebody. So you know, whatever, because yeah, that's, I think the problem for millennial parents right now is that while there are so many times that I've been grateful to be able to Google or you know, like I'm in the wonder weeks groups for both of the months, if my kiddos were born and, and I've seen a lot, there has been a lot of great stuff going on in there, but it's like, what, when does information become too much? It's too much information like, well, this Google says this and this Google says this and, and this person who has five kids, so she's doing something right. I think said to do that, but this person says this and it's -

Liz Higgins (09:21):

Oh my gosh.

Meg Duke (09:22):

- so much. And so that's what was really nice for me with our little text thread is to be able to be like, well, if Liz, if Liz did it, I'm gonna try it. I'll see if it fits. So I might wear it outta the store. We'll see if it fits, you know? Um, yeah. So that's been that, but yeah. Anyway, so we'll go back now and talk about what we're actually gonna talk about, because I, like I said, bearing the lead, but that has been very helpful for me.

Liz Higgins (09:46):

Well, and I think that is like, what we wanna talk about today too! It's like part of the quote unquote solution in overwhelm, I think, really is honing in and finding your trusted support systems, the trusted resources. Because what you were just describing a moment ago, I'm like, yeah, that is like millennial life in a nutshell. I mean, we are the generation seeped in information overload. And it's, it's a blessing and it's a problem because it can lead to choice paradox, analysis/paralysis, constant friction, all relationally. Because we like to feel like the path we're choosing is the right one. Or we believe that we're conflicted about things. And then there's a million arguments for why the thing we're conflicted about is wrong. And you see it everywhere in life. And people are nasty online! And so, um, both out in the wide interweb world and in our own personal networks, families, circles, it's, it's really important to find those that

you feel like, you know, you can go to them and they'll give you their honest, and thoughtful, and caring opinion.

Liz Higgins (10:56):

And I don't know, Meg... I'm, I'm diverting, but I'm like... Do you think it's because we're therapists, too, that <laugh>, we can do this in such a healthy way? And it's never been NOT because we're therapists, but I think that becoming a therapist for me has helped me strengthen these muscles big time of being relational with others. And existing in these supportive circles where we have different beliefs and different ways that we deal with diaper rashes, and fevers, and like, right? We don't judge each other. We just like, listen and okay, cool. Like curiosity without judgment, you know?

Meg Duke (11:28):

Absolutely. And it's really, it has been interesting, I think, because I work so hard to help people with their, you know, setting boundaries. Appropriate skills, and the ways that you figure out to whom you can open up in what ways. Because I have a number of mom threads and I learned through some (I mean, nothing terribly traumatic), but I've learned through some experiences, like, let it go. Like, who cares? Say it, got it. Do it, love it. It's not a problem because there is no judgment. Here's what works for me. Take it or leave it. There's no energy, there's no jealousy... which is a very strange thing. I have other text threads with other people where it's like, okay, well I can only really share the positive because I'm gonna get something like, "well, my kid does, and I do..." And so even in your personal situations, right? But then also, too, setting those boundaries of like, you know, heaven forbid, but like, our dog has been not feeling well.

Meg Duke (12:30):

And um, so we had to take him in yesterday. And I think some people see their fur babies as human - or not as human, but as family. And I think my fur babies are family. So we took the puppy in yesterday, and he's seven. He's not a puppy. But me and my husband started Googling what it could be, because our girlfriend is a vet and she is amazing and allowing me to text her. And she's like, "oh, it could be pancreatitis." So he starts Googling pancreatitis. And of course he was like, "it could cost us \$5,000 and he could be in all this pain." And I'm like... this is why I tell my patients and clients to stay off Dr. Google. That's catastrophizing, and that's the worst thing that you can do. And you know, it ended up that he has to take a couple of pills and have a couple of days with some different food, and he's gonna be great. But that's the thing is like, there's so much information out there about like, oh... You type in a couple of symptoms and you've got cancer. <laugh>

Liz Higgins (13:24):

Right. Exactly. Yeah. Yes.

Meg Duke (13:28):

And it's just so crazy to be able to, like I said, to go back to being aware of who can be what for you in what space. Right? I like to be able to help people as much as I can. I woke up this morning at 6:30 and I have friends who live in New York. So they're obviously an hour ahead of me. And I had pages of text because one of them, their little one is sick. And I'm texting. And my husband's like, "wow, you're at it early." And I'm like, well... Normally I don't like to get on my phone in the morning. I just check to make sure nobody's died. And then I put my phone away, get on with the day... But I have a friend who's asking for help and I can help with this. So like, yeah, it's 6:30 and I'm at it. Like I'm going. And I like to be able to be helpful for people. And I know the people who can do that for me. And I do think being a therapist has helped me in having these conversations with other people to, you know, have that practice of it myself. And then implementing that in my own life. Having those boundaries, having that awareness... Yeah. I think it's, I think it's been helpful.

Liz Higgins (14:25):

Okay. So what do you think about that in terms of partnership? For those that are listening that are in relationship to somebody else - co-parenting, you know, whatever status it might be, but in it together. Like, because I think everything that you said right there applies relationally for couples. You're not gonna agree on every single matter that comes up about parenting. And we're so colored by, like, the experiences of our own upbringing and stuff that this is all... Well, a lot of it, I think, in so many ways is just new territory to navigate when you have your first kid. And then as we go forward and I mean, you've got some great insight as a perinatal mental health practitioner. I'm like, I'd love to just hear insights you have of, about like, some of the relational challenges and how people navigate that.

Meg Duke (15:16):

Well, I like what you said about getting a high level view and, and like, what is your north star and figuring out from there. I think that's really helpful because we do get (especially in COVID pandemic times) I mean, we literally moved here. We left Houston on St. Patrick's Day in March. So 2020! We got here on a Thursday and Monday was shelter in place state order in Kansas. So like, we knew nobody. We had, you know... So we'd literally, we would go to parks outside. We would... As, as we progressed through the pandemic, we would go to sit outside on patios and eat. But like you - especially now - are at home, you are with your children, you're with your family. And some people, not. Some people are like, COVID doesn't bother me. I've been out, I've been living my life the same way.

Meg Duke (16:04):

For us, it's not been that situation. And so you can just get so mired in the situation. Like I, this is all my worldview. And being able to take a step back and say, okay, this is our new normal. This is our new reality for now. Hopefully it won't be forever. What are we going to do when we catch ourselves having these things? I think that self-awareness piece is just, it's so key. I have the conversation so often with so many people. Self-awareness and non-judgment - I think I talk about that almost every single session that I have with people. Because being able to say like, oh, I'm recognizing that I'm getting shorter and shorter rest because the baby's not sleeping. Or because I feel like you are not picking up your end of the bargain in this.

Meg Duke (16:55):

And instead of just sitting there and letting it fester and becoming resentful, having those open communication moments. But knowing when to do that, like when you're at a 10 and ready to snap someone's neck, that's not the time to have the conversation. Right? So then that's setting those boundaries in a different way of like, we need to... I'm gonna take the baby and go watch a movie. Or I'm gonna go for a run, or get on the Peloton, or whatever it might be to be able to do that. And I know that might sound a little easier said than done. But it is - it's one of those things that if you're thinking about it mindfully (while you're in a calmer space) you're more likely to do it when you're starting to get in that space where you feel like your head's gonna explode.

Meg Duke (17:33):

And I think that really is key. And then the non-judgment piece of like, when you feel overwhelmed, when you feel upset, when you feel exhausted and you just can't maybe do whatever it is that you need to do... And, and accepting those emotions as they come in, riding them like a wave, letting them go back out, versus trying to fight against them. And you know, all emotions are, you know... There are no bad emotions, right? Like, they are what they are and you move with them and you go through them. And I think the biggest thing relationally is being able to have those conversations. It is tough with some things - I know not this was not on our outline today, so I'm sorry. This is where I've like, come in my mind, though. Like circumcision, right? Like that's an all or nothing thing. Right? So you're -

Liz Higgins (18:13):

Oh! You went there. Like, here we are.

Meg Duke (18:14):

Yeah. But like that's a really, really dramatic topic, right? Like a very, like a very dramatic example. But some people really have situations and it's like, how... And I'm not, I'm not here to give suggestions. I'm not gonna tell you what we did. It's none of your business. I'm not gonna ask. I'm not giving examples. I'm not a medical professional. But I'm just saying like what, from a solution focused space, how do we find that? How do we reach an agreement? Who can you trust? Who knows what they're talking about? Not someone on Google, not, you know, like a medical professional. Right. What are your values? What are your things? So that's a very dramatic example, but, and that's a black and white situation, either circumcise or you don't. Right? Whereas everything else from there is on a, is on a gray scale. Or one of my supervisees says "functioning in the rainbow", which I love. Um, like it's not black or white, we're functioning in the rainbow. So I love that. I love that. I try to use it as often as, as often as I can. It's just so cheerful. He's a great guy. He also just passed his LCSW about a month ago, which I was very excited.

Liz Higgins (19:16):

Oh, woohoo! Shout out. Huge. Congrats! Um, it's so true though! Because like, I, I would almost say that more subjects are gonna be in the range of the rainbow somewhere, right? As opposed to those, right. Oof.

Meg Duke (19:31):

That's why I'm not, I'm not giving any examples or, or suggestions on it, but that's a really dramatic example. Which I'm sure some people listening are like, yeah, we got into many knock-down drags over whether or not we were circumcising our child born with a penis. Like, right. That's a very dramatic example. But then everything else, like bedtime, sleep training, foods that you're gonna hate, sugar... Right? Like all of these breastfeeding/not breastfeeding. Again, that's chest feeding. That's the person who's going to be utilizing their chest to do it. It's more so for them. But having those -

Liz Higgins (20:04):

You, you know what I think the lingering, the underlying just deep level fear question vulnerability around all of those things is yes. Especially for millennials, I think it's, am I doing this right?

Meg Duke (20:19):

That is exactly right.

Liz Higgins (20:22):

Because like, why? Because we want to be good parents. Because we want to do things differently than how we experienced. I mean, I hear these things straight out of the mouth of my clients. And I felt these things myself, too! Like, how will I know I'm doing right for my kid? What is right? What is the best choice? And there's a million. So I always pull back. I'm like, we're asking the wrong question. Right? We're just asking the wrong question. And it induces so much anxiety - so much. Um, I heard this term once - the new OCD, obsessive comparison disorder.

Meg Duke (20:56):

Well, I haven't heard that. Oh, I love, I mean, I hate that, but I love that.

Liz Higgins (21:00):

Well, right. Because it's like anybody listening that's a parent is like, oh yeah, I have that. <laugh> Turn on your Instagram in five minutes and you'll see something that tells you. 'I didn't do it the right way. I probably should have done it like them. Oh look, they're so happy. Like they know what they're doing.' And that's, what's so CRAZY. I literally have Pinterest memes written down on my little list of things because that's where I would like this conversation to go to. And my very first podcast that I did out of the gate was gratitude. Virtue signaling is because -

Liz Higgins (21:29):

Oh, I know. I really liked that one!

Meg Duke (21:31):

Thank you! I, I felt really proud of it, but yeah. Because I was, I was so passionate and then I was like, this is it. This is where I'm starting a podcast. Like, I had been contemplating and I got up to it because I'm thinking I'm like (and everyone knows this. This is not new information that I'm sharing right now.) you know, that people post... A lot of times they post the positive, they post the pretty, they post the flowery. Right? And so for you to try to put yourself at, that's your barometer. That's not, you know, I'm in. I'm, I, I try... I'm in a couple of like Montessori play space Facebook groups and stuff. And, and some of these photos, I'm like... I mean, obviously you put it together nicely the first time, right? And, and so I'll, I'll look at it and I'm like, well, that's for the gram. Like, that's the picture? That's the ideal. That's like, wouldn't that be nice if my child came and sat quietly and played with this and then put it back away and then played with this and then put it back away and da, da, da. And it's like, the Pinterest mom syndrome. I love that obsessive comparison disorder because there's so much knowledge and information. Not knowledge. There's so much information out there for us to, to compare ourselves to.

Liz Higgins (22:36):

Yeah. And, and we are in essence, meaning making creatures. And so what are we gonna do? We're gonna say, if that's out there, then what does it mean about me? Yes, exactly.

Liz Higgins (22:49):

And it's not that we have to, like, break away from that. I mean, I think sometimes that process can guide us to more curiosity about ourselves. And like, huh! Maybe there's a different way of, you know, trying something out. And I, you know, that's, I think one of the things I love the most about social media, even for myself. But like, man, especially... Actually really immediately postpartum for me, like, with having my daughter and stuff. I mean, you know, it's those moments when you're like, I have no idea what I'm doing. What does that sound mean? And you're in your bed at 3:00 in the morning and you're Googling. 'Cause, and you're just, like, survival mode. I don't even care. I just want information. That's gonna tell me what I'm supposed to do. <laugh> But there was a time, and I remember this clearly, where I had to stop. I had to stop that. I had to tell myself, this is too much. It's driving me, it's driving me into a hole. It's affecting how I'm turning to my husband and judging him for not being avidly Googling throughout the middle of the night. And telling me I probably need to relax. Like, it's none of it is <laugh> ...it's not working. It's not fruitful to like, to this relationship and how I, like you said, like how, how I view my partner. Yeah. How I communicate that resentment piece. Absolutely.

Liz Higgins (24:03):

Yeah. Nothing like parenthood will really propel your relationship quickly into lots and lots and lots of opportunities for growth <laugh> Yes.

Meg Duke (24:14):

But that's right. Opportunity for growth. That's the optimistic, positive therapy way that we know.

Liz Higgins (24:20):

I know. Right. But it really, it... I think that's the gift of it. Because now I look back and I know four and a half years past bringing our first little one home. It's like, yes. Okay. Wow. Look at where we've come. And oh my gosh, like allowed us to get here and not tear each other apart or separate! Or, you know, kind of do what our feelings probably wanted us to do a lot of the time. Um, absolutely. I really think it brings me back to the essence of what I believe in as a couple's therapist is like, we were both working on a healthy relationship practice with each other. First and foremost, like nothing was off the table. If we needed to sit and talk, like we, we knew we had developed kind of a system, I guess, for ourselves on how to do that. But it's both. And it's the work. And it's that individual piece of personal accountability. Like I'm, I'm being accountable to this relationship with you. And that means I'm looking at my stuff and I'm owning it when I've had a bad day, which is fine. We can have those! But like, of course, owning that was big for me. 'Cause, well, my worst, I like to take things out on people <laugh>.

Meg Duke (25:28):

Yeah! Well, right. And I think we all can relate. I don't know what you're talking about. <laugh> Um, but yeah, I mean... I think that that's so important too, is like when we recognize it in ourselves and, and, and saying like, you know, I've got a two and a half year old and he has all the big emotions. And sometimes we expect a lot out of him because he's been very verbal from very young. And so then, when you're talking to this small human who's talking to you in sentences and describes things as delicious, and you're like, who are you? I don't even know how you learned that word, but great! And then there's this meltdown and it's like, okay. But like if, if my husband were having a meltdown, I could have this rational conversation with him. And it's like, we have to make sure that we're having our expectations met, right, where they should be. Not lowering them, but making sure that they are where they need to be, and catching ourselves, and, and having to be the adults and the parents. Which is still crazy to think about as millennials. I know there are so many millennial memes out there of like adulting, like the word adulting. I did, we created that. I, I think we did, you know, like I...

Meg Duke (26:41):

Right? Because, like for us, we still picture ourselves as Saturday morning watching Rugrats or, you know, insert - I love, I love Recess, but you know, like insert cartoon here - and like, we think of that. And then at the same time we're in these marriages, or partnerships, or having these children. And then, so it, it's just kind of all over the place where you're like, I'm supposed to be trying to keep myself together. I'm trying to keep this relationship together. I'm trying to keep this human alive. And I do think sometimes going back to that Pinterest mom thing that we talked about, um, you know... I have a podcast where I talked about motherhood and entrepreneurship, where it's like, you know, some days you're gonna be 100%, top-notch, top marks at your job, at your agency, at your company that you're working at, you know, you, you own millennial life.

Meg Duke (27:29):

And on other days, you're gonna be 100% best mom in the world. Somebody called, you know, Doctor Spock - I've, I've created all of these new wonderfols. Right? And then some days you're gonna be good at both. And that's okay too, that you're not. But I think sometimes we are! So

we put this stress on ourselves to be perfect, to be, yeah. I'm like, where do those expectations come from? Social media? Look, I don't wanna sound like a crazy person, but it's social media. Like, I genuinely believe that we have created, we've created adulting, which is, you know, a millennial thing. But we've created the new OCD, the comparison. I don't wanna be that honest on my social media, because if I have a problem or a need, I'm gonna, I'm gonna text you. I'm gonna call you.

Meg Duke (28:13):

I have done so. Right? Like, Liz... I'd be concerned about this - which is healthy boundary practice. Yeah. Right. So I don't, I don't use social media. I, I do it to share. I do it because my grandmother lives eight hours away from us. Now with two under two it's a 10 hour drive. But she gets on Facebook and, and that's how she sees my children. I mean, we have Alexa shows and stuff now that we can use, but that's what I... And I'm not gonna send her like, oh my son pooped the bed overnight. Like I'm not gonna take a picture of that and post it. But people think that that is real life. And I'm like, no, if you wanna get to know me as a person, I will be. So I did let's become good duties. Let's talk about the things. Let's, let's support each other in strength, but don't look at my Pinterest page. Or, well, don't look at my Pinterest page, because I don't really have one, but don't look at my Pinterest page or my Instagram or whatever, and use that as the barometer for yourself.

Meg Duke (28:59):

And I, I feel like I've worked really hard myself in having, in fostering these relationships with moms that I trust versus being able to do that. But we have this weird (and I'm a perfectionist in other ways, don't get me started. Brene Brown and I could talk for ages. I'd love to, would love to talk. Wouldn't that be great if we could get her on the, get her on there? Yeah. Um, but anyway...) We have this weird thing about perfectionism and, and my own shortcomings, but as a parent, I think that that's what we need. Where we really need to just give ourselves some grace. Did your child live today? Right? Like did they, did they maybe learn something? Did they not learn anything? Great. Like, my kiddo was sick once and we watched three Harry, no, we didn't watch three Harry Potters.

Meg Duke (29:41):

Did we? We watched two and a change of Harry Potter. That's all he wants to watch. Right? And like, we don't watch a lot of TV cuz I try to be a Montessori mom. And we've got a playroom, and we've got the things... Which it's not Montessori. 'Cause he's got a play kitchen, which is not Montessori, but you know what I'm saying? Like we don't watch a lot of TV, but sometimes when his dad is in New Mexico for work and his sister is, you know, awake and breastfeeding and da, da, da, I'm gonna put on some Harry Potter. And no one died.

Liz Higgins (30:05):

No one died. Right. And that was a big shift for me too, when everything shut down with the pandemic. 'Cause I, I was definitely doing my part to try and integrate all the kind of "progressive parenting" things that I know are just generally good for children's development

and all the things. And being a therapist, just really, yes, enforces all of that. But it was literally survival mode and I'm like, yep. You know, I'm pulling on the things I need to get through the day at this point. And yes. Yeah. And so like just, just permission to, to, to allow yourself to release expectations, and feel the grief or the vulnerability that comes along with that. Right. This isn't what I thought it would be like, this isn't how I thought I would be, but you know what? I am. And I think it's so relational. Like I will be showing up better relationally with my child and I can hold them and not be feeling all this anxiety to do these things that are gonna help support me for sure.

Liz Higgins (31:05):

Yeah. Absolutely. I'm like, I don't know if you've heard of the podcast The Drive. Um, Peter Attia, he's an MD and brings on all these fantastic guests. Yeah. Lots of different conversations, but he promotes therapy, and mental health stuff, and all these things. And he's all about, like... He's had Esther on his podcast a couple times. It's very up there kind of stuff. But the other day he made this really cool, um, story, I think on his Instagram, and I was watching it and he was kind of talking about millennials and modern couples and he is like, man! You know, like parenting is so hard. It's like, and it's just these like nuanced challenges throughout the day of like, I'm just trying to get these little people to eat. To just, like, sit at the table and eat their food.

Meg Duke (31:45):

Oh, sit at the table.

Liz Higgins (31:46):

I was like, <laugh> I know, right? Or like, you know, whatever. And he's like, why do we stress so much about this stuff? And he was kind of talking about some of the generational shifts about how intentional we have become as parents. Not that past generations were, but if you sit and have a conversation with a boomer parent and beyond, it's like, we just really are overly caring about things that they weren't sitting around, like, being so thoughtful and intentional about. And that's not a judgment, but it's like, the time was different. The circumstances were like, it's just where we are. And we have so much information about how to do these things. Right? That it's just up to a level of us caring and trying to find the right path for us. And right. He was bringing all this up too, because he, um, said that in some conversation with Esther Perel, he was kind of asking for feedback on that.

Liz Higgins (32:37):

Like what do parents do? And these things become, like, problematic, argumentative dynamics between parents. Well, I wanna do it this way and I wanna do it this way. And, and she kind of pulled back and said the most important thing for a healthy functioning family begins in that couple relationship to the parent. And so pulling back all that stuff and like really taking a temp check. Like is our relationship good? Yes. I mean, because it is so much of survival mode and especially postpartum, there's so many different things happening to a mom's body and yes, all those things. Yes. As compared to a partner that hasn't birthed the child or whatever, and then experienced the pregnancy. And so, um, I don't know... I just bring it up because it's like,

definitely a north star for me. It's the essence of what I do professionally. It's like your relational health supercedes, like, all the little things of... I think we have that tendency to wanna put our kids first, too, especially in those initially years. And of course that's there. Right? But you can't negate your partner relationship. It's just so important.

Meg Duke (33:46):

Well, not at the cost of completely damaging or neglecting your relationship. Because then you have these children who may be taken care of, but then they see parents who are resentful, or angry, or apathetic even, toward each other. And that's not what you want. And I, I love that you were talking about that with The Drive. And like again, kind of coming back to the, the perfectionism, you know? We talk about, like, Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs where we - and I, I saw so many people in the pandemic who were like, if you don't learn French by the time this pandemic's over, you've been wasting your pandemic. And it's like, we're not operating at the top of the pyramid. We're not operating in a space where we're learning new languages. And we're in survival mode, like genuinely in the pandemic, we're in survival mode. But you know, in 2019, when I was a new mom, I was still there. Before we knew what COVID was, before I knew what COVID was at least, I still... There were times when I just needed to be in survival mode.

Meg Duke (34:40):

Like I actually, my first one did not sleep well. And I was exhausted. And the idea of having to make teacher appreciation gifts, that's too high function. Like that's, that's not survival for me. That's not what's important. And like you were saying, like, I'm just trying to get these kids to eat and that should be okay. Did they eat? Yes? Then that's okay. We did mac and cheese. Was it not a five star gourmet vegan, whatever? Then fine, they had mac and cheese. Did they eat, are they alive? Yes. And I think that that's...

Liz Higgins (35:14):

I'm just picturing, I'm picturing you as a mom in that space. I'm picturing me as a mom in that space. And I'm recognizing too, like, dude, we were both working. And we're both professional, professional women and we have professional partners. And like, for those listening that are just living in these multiple realms of life, professional, achieving certain success, and really feeling in the energy and the zone of that whole thing... And then you're over here dealing with macaroni, and poop, and like, all these other things that are just the total opposite. I just wanna acknowledge that! That is such a, I mean, the word that comes up for me is like strange world to exist in. Because from one moment to the next you're just dealing with drastically different things. And so for me, I've had to turn into myself and be like, of course you feel crazy. Of course you have all this anxiety. Like, of course you need to go see your therapist. Of course, this isn't supposed to be easy. And I'm doing it a little differently than what I saw even other women in my family doing growing up. Like, it was a little bit different. And my mom worked, and she helped my dad with his business and stuff. But like, things were still different. Yeah. And I've had to kind of be in, be in awareness and acceptance of that.

Meg Duke (36:31):

I just wish that we could all get to a space where we like, even if you parent as the boomers parented, if you parent as like, you know, whatever it is, that's, what is your truth? That is... What is your reality? Yeah. That's okay. And I, I wish that we could get to a, again, are you parent, are your children breathing? Are they, are they, you know, growing and gaining weight? Of course we don't want you to encourage like, just give them Jolly Ranchers to eat. Like there's, you know, nutritional value to some food, certainly. But like, talk to your pediatrician. If you have that concern, talk to somebody that you know that you can trust, right? Don't drown out the noise all around you. I can't tell you how many times I've had people who were so well-meaning... Um, uh, here's a personal example.

Meg Duke (37:16):

So, when my son was in his first preschool or daycare, his daycare, like main primary teacher air quotes told me once, like, "well, if you know him like I know him, you would know, duh, duh, duh." And I was like, oh my gosh, this is insane. And then one time... and he, they, both, both of my kids had, or now one, has reflux. And so she basically told me then that my breast milk was too thin and all that stuff. And I'm like, she's not a lactation consultant. She's not an MD. She's not a nurse practitioner. She's not a physician's assistant. She's a daycare worker who has a plethora of experience in THAT field. And I, that's not to discount that, but to come and tell me that, blew my mind. And I remember like, my mom was, she got married at 20.

Meg Duke (38:02):

She had my brother at 21. She had me at 24. And I hope she doesn't mind me saying this... I'm dying to have her on my podcast one day. We could literally have a six segment section. But like, she was not a confident mother because she did listen. And she'll, she'll say this now. I mean, she's 60 now. Obviously she's a much different person than she was 40 years ago. But so, a comment like that to my mother would've devastated her. Would have, she probably would've stopped. Like, you know what I'm saying? Like that would've just shut her down completely. And I actually went in to talk to the daycare manager and I was like, I'm fine. You're not gonna convince me to not breastfeed my son because of some comment that you've made. Because you think you know my child better than I do.

Meg Duke (38:47):

But that's really dangerous language. And I think she thought she was helping me in some way. Or maybe she just really was trying to tell me how much I suck at life. I'm not sure I wanna... From a positive space, I think that she was trying to be helpful. But like I, because my mom told me growing up all of the things that she wishes that she had done differently, or the, the self-worth pieces were like, I knew what I was doing, but I listened to other people and you know, and we're all fine. So obviously she had to cut herself all the slack. But just emotionally for her having to go through that moreso than the choices that she made as a parent is being able to say, like, I'm not even accepting the words that just came up. Like, you know. Like, I hear the words she's saying, and I'm gonna, I'll take them into consideration. I'm gonna move forward.

Whatever. I'm not even gonna listen to some of the things that people say. Okay - I did go in my car and sob hysterically because I was so angry. That's like what? I cry outta fury.

Liz Higgins (39:42):

That's right, though, it's this, you have to stand in your truth. And that's not just a decision you make one day to, to do that. It's a constant practice of practicing.

Meg Duke (39:54):

100%.

Liz Higgins (39:54):

Yeah. Like day in and day out, I am practicing to be the kind of person, mom, parent, whatever, who stands in their own truth first. And then can receive the feedback, the data, the opinions from others and discern what I wanna do with that, you know? But it's truly a practice. And that's why it's, you know, people that maybe feel like, Ugh, gosh, you know, everything gets to me, and whatever. Like, okay, we all start somewhere. Absolutely. And it's a continuous practice. And if we're not doing the things we need to do and being in good relationships that help support us in holding onto our truth (whatever that might be), it's worth looking at.

Meg Duke (40:37):

Again, I come back to self-awareness and non-judgment. I've said it multiple times. I love that self-awareness and non-judgment - be intentional about it's YOUR life. Like, I am guilty myself of just going through the motions. And that's, I think when you, when you lose that intentional space, for which to work, that's when you catch yourself into these negative patterns. You build resentment. You let in that negativity or those other voices that don't need to be in your space. And being self-aware of being like, no, I'm not even gonna, I'm not even gonna acknowledge. I mean, I'm not gonna be a horrible human being, but I'm not even going to acknowledge that suggestion. Or, oh, I'll think on that. And then let me think on that. And before just being intentional about your day, being mindful is so important.

Liz Higgins (41:26):

And I love in the co-parenting dynamic, or just thinking about your immediate community, whatever that might be, your family, your support system, whatever, like in those relationships that really do matter to you. Sometimes it is the clear boundary of, you know, what that doesn't land for me. I'm gonna kind of pass that right on back to you and not take any. But other other times it's like, yes, I love your words self-awareness and nonjudgment. And I tell clients - and couples especially - to cultivate curiosity without judgment. Yes. That's the relational practice of yes. Love it. Yeah. Okay. So tell me more, like, where does that come from for you that fills the thing to do? Or what, you know yes. That's when you start to build a bridge rather than put up walls, and you can understand each other more deeply. So it's a really magical tool to kind of take forward immediately from this conversation and <laugh> yeah. It's great.

Meg Duke (42:23):

Great. You know, I, I operate my, my operation for therapy, generally, I try to do the best I can at solution focused breath therapy. And that's exactly right. That curiosity... I try to not have the judgment. This is much different than a conversation I would have with a client. Right. We're just chatting. I, I just ask questions. That's what I do. Right. And that's how I build that relationship with, with an individual client, or certainly if I were to do couples. And I think that that is such, I love that so much curiosity with that judgment. It's like, oh man, before you respond to something that your partner has said or suggested, take a breath, think about like, you know, not necessarily like, you know, but like take a breath and think about like, what is the motivation behind what they're saying? What are they trying to accomplish? What knowledge, what skillset, what, what is happening? And before it's just like, well, but I'm not doing right. And I think that goes outside of parenting too, but I love that. I love curiosity without judgment. Absolutely.

Liz Higgins (43:23):

And you know, when in doubt, ask the other person. 'Cause I think, especially in committed relationships, we get into this crunch where we start to assume, or we have this real hideous expectation that the other person should know us. And it's limiting. It's always better to just be like, you know, X, Y, Z, like, what do you think? Or can you, whatever. And if you feel stuck and you don't know what your partner needs and you're like, I have no idea what I'm supposed to do. You ask them yes, yes. Get the answer from their mouth. <laugh>

Meg Duke (44:00):

I can't tell you... I think I reflect back on my own individual situations where it's like, man, if I would've just, you know, like don't, don't let all the stinking thinking, right. You remember our little binder, right? Of psycho-education. Um, but like, and all of the, the thinking errors that we do. Trying to read minds, like you, you don't. Just because you've been with somebody for a decade or longer does not mean that you have to know what they're thinking at all times. And I don't know if it's that we try to go for that perfectionist thing where like, we just have to know everything all the time. I actually - quick tangent - read Whitney Cummings book, I'm Fine And Other Lies. And in one of her chapters, she talks about like, it's her goal in every conversation (where appropriate) she's not gonna dumb herself down.

Meg Duke (44:42):

And I... That's also another topic for another day. Like, don't do that. But like, if I don't know, I really try to say, I don't know. I, I try to... I don't need to know everything. And I think especially as therapists, we definitely feel the need to do that. Right? Like I need to help these people. So I need like, what do, what do I know? What do I know? And I think we do that certainly in relationships too, of like, well, we've been together for a decade, so I should. There's that word should. I should know what they mean. I should know what they're thinking. And it's like, no, it's okay to just ask. And honestly, I encourage my partner to do that as well. I'm like, if you think something's going on, just ask me. I'll tell you.

Meg Duke (45:17):

I have no problem telling you exactly what I think and feel. Or, and I've said this before, too, for myself, if I'm not saying it to you, it's because I know that I'm probably overreacting or reacting in a way that I don't want to be. I'm gonna, I'm chewing on it. Let me process. Um, because if I were to react right now, I don't think this is like, what I'm saying to myself right now is, is I don't think where I wanna be. So let me take some time to process that. So... 'Cause there have been times where he's done things and in my mind I'm like, oh, I'm gonna kill him. And then it's like, okay, I think you're overreacting <laugh>.

Liz Higgins (45:59):

Yeah, yeah, yeah. Own it!

Meg Duke (46:00):

And so he's like, well, when XYZ happened and you didn't say anything... And I was like, right. 'Cause I think I knew that I was gonna overreact. So I just didn't say anything. I don't think it was a hundred percent the right call for you, but operating in this, in the rainbow. Right? Like, it's not all... It doesn't have to be one or the other. It doesn't have to be fault or not. And I've, I've recently tried to encourage him. He'll be like, oh, that happened. That was my fault. I'm like, it's not your fault. It just happened. Like let's just stop assigning blame even. Yeah. Right, right. So I think that all of those things in combination too, can be again, coming into that mindful piece, coming into that, the intentional, like being okay to ask questions, being okay, to say exactly what it is that you need and what you feel, feeling comfortable. Building that space where each, each partner feels comfortable in being honest and truthful of what they need. Like, this is my truth. This is, is what I need.

Liz Higgins (46:55):

Yeah. I love it. And I just feel like bringing all these things full circle, you know? I've... We talk about mindfulness and curiosity without judgment, and doing healthy things, but like being healthy, being mindful - these things are not just some destination we reach and we've got it figured out. Like it is truly a daily practice. Daily practice, even relationships - they're a daily practice. We can check out, and we're no longer engaging and practicing healthy things in that space. Like, you live inside your relationship too. And so, like, just saying that it's, it's kind of a both end of yeah, it does suck sometimes. 'Cause you gotta keep up with the reality that each day is a new opportunity, but like the end is that. And when you choose to take on that practice and really work at it, you'll begin to thrive. And so many parts feel easier and just more organic and, and all those things. And there's so many benefits. Yeah.

Meg Duke (48:00):

I mean the practice makes progress, so right. And that's what we were talking about. Like when you talk about coping skill education, what are we working on today? Coping skills. I'm like, what are, what are coping skills? But like, yeah. You know, when you practice coping skills, when you practice communication skills, like when you're angry and ready to scream at each other is not the time that you practice those. You practice them when you are mindful and

intentional about them. When you're in a space to be receptive or to, to be able to process. And then by doing that, you've got these skills that you're using throughout the day a little more naturally, but also with intent. So yeah, I think it's, I love that though. I like the, again, the curiosity without judgment.

Liz Higgins (48:43):

Oh yeah, I'll put that one in the Show Notes. Yes. Something tells me we're gonna be doing a part two of all this <laugh>.

Meg Duke (48:49):

I would love to do that, for sure. I mean, how long did it take us to even come up with a Show Notes guideline for today? Which obviously like, we didn't wanna go by an outline, but we were like, oh, what do we wanna touch on? It took us so long because we were like, well we can do it with this. What about that?

Liz Higgins (49:04):

I know, I know. Right? There's so much goodness that we can come together and collaborate on, but I love this. And think you've said some really wonderful things that hopefully those listening really latch onto and feel hope around navigating this phase of parenthood.

Meg Duke (49:20):

I love that you've mentioned hope, because that was something I was talking about with somebody yesterday - my, one of my supervisees was that, is that lack of... That helplessness and hopelessness is when that comes and we just either give up, or we spiral, or whatever it is. And so, it is all... There is hope in your, in your relationship. There is hope in your parenting. There is, there are better days. There are less better days, but there are many more better days to come.

Liz Higgins (49:50):

Yes, yes, yes. Absolutely. Okay. So with that, I know people listening are probably like, where can I find out more about Meg? So tell us where people can find you.

Meg Duke (50:00):

Yes, absolutely. Well, I am @therapybymeg on Instagram. I am on megdukelcsw.com, of course, you'll find all of my contact information there. I'm on Facebook @ Meg Duke LCSW. And then I have my own podcast, obviously, Let's Discuss with Meg Duke. That's on Apple podcasts. And then my YouTube channel as well. And Liz, where can the family find you?

Liz Higgins (50:24):

I am, I suppose, on all of the similar platforms. So definitely millenniallifecounseling.com. Read about us, learn about what we're doing and check out the blog. The Millennial Life Podcast page is also on that site and on Apple podcasts as well. And you can find me on Instagram

@lizhiggins. So search me there or at Millennial Life Counseling. Yes. Usually hopping around on one of those spaces! And I, I love interacting with people on there. So shoot me DM. Yes. Let's talk. I love to hear, you know, what interests listeners and what people wanna hear more of. And absolutely. I feel this was very on point for our following. So I'm super excited to get this shared, so excited!

Meg Duke (51:07):

I know. It's so funny that you said that, too. I love, I love when people send me a DM. I literally love it so much. I know sometimes people say that and I couldn't be more serious. I would love to hear from you. <laugh> Um, 'cause I wanna know people. Look, I can sit here and talk all day. Clearly I can sit here and talk all day. I talked about circumcision at one point in this conversation. And so, like, I can be all over the place, but I would love to know more about what our, what our followers are interested in, what they think they would learn most from.

Liz Higgins (51:34):

Oh my gosh. Well, thank you so much for doing this with me. Crossover pleasure. Crossover... session one crossover. Yes. All right. All right. Talk soon!

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