

Balance365 Episode 87 Transcript

Annie Brees

Welcome to Balance365 Life Radio, a podcast that delivers honest conversations about food, fitness, weight and wellness. I'm your host, Annie Brees, along with Jennifer Campbell and Lauren Koski. We are personal trainers, nutritionist, and founders of Balance365. Together we coach thousands of women each day and are on a mission to help them feel healthy, happy and confident in their bodies on their own terms. Join us here every week as we discuss hot topics pertaining to our physical, mental and emotional well being with amazing guests. Enjoy.

Thanks for joining us again on Balance365 Life Radio. I'm your host, Annie Brees. And I have to be honest, as your podcast host, I don't like to rank our episodes because it sort of feels like you're asking me to pick a favorite kid. I think they're all great, right? But if I'm being truthful, today's episode ranks pretty high up there. Today's guest puts it, "There are a few people who can trigger us like our children can. There are few responsibilities that leave us feeling more insecure and more uncertain than parenting" and I don't know about you, but that really hits home with me.

For many of us parenting can trigger self doubt, open unhealed wounds and just feel exhausting. But coach, writer and community gather Heather Plett understands she's not only parented three kids while trying to heal her own self. But on today's episode, she shares her own experience about how you can begin to break old patterns, set better boundaries, and heal while parenting. I love this episode. And I hope you do too. Heather, welcome to Balance 365 Life Radio. How are you?

Heather Plett

I'm doing great. Thanks for having me.

Annie Brees

Thanks so much for joining us. I'm going to let Jen introduce how she found you. And then I would love to hear a little bit about your background because you

have a wonderful blog post that we want to discuss today. And Jen that kind of just fell into your lap in a discussion online. Right?

Jennifer Campbell

Yeah, it was really lucky. I talk about the trials of raising children often on my page, more in how it's affected me. Because I've been working a lot the last few years on my own healing. And parenting can be triggering to those wounds. Or I'm finding that anyways, and someone posted a blog post of yours in the comments of one of my posts. And she said that she is a friend of yours. Do you know who it is? I can't remember now.

Heather Plett

Not sure either, who it was.

Jennifer Campbell

So she said, "I think you'll love this." And I read it. And I did love it. And I messaged Annie and said, "We have to have her on the podcast."

Annie Brees

And so I immediately messaged you because I read it too. And I was like, "Oh yes," because in this blog post, it's Raising Kids While We Do Our Own Healing Work, you share this story about you went on vacation with your daughter, and about how some of the circumstances kind of brought up some old behaviors or some old thoughts or feelings for you and how the two of you work together to, like, acknowledge them, and then break the pattern, break the cycle. So would you mind telling us, like, what's what's your background? Like, how did you how did you learn this? Was this just trial and error?

Heather Plett

That's a good question. A lot of it is trial and error. So my background is in, when I was, I'm now self employed. But my original background was in leadership and communications. And so I've spent a lot of time in trying to understand how to communicate effectively and back in my professional and when I was doing that professionally, it was, you know, communicating on behalf of the government or nonprofit organization I worked with. But part of that was being in leadership

roles and having people who reported to me and I had to learn to understand how to communicate with each person differently. And understand how you know how some people had different emotional baggage, etc. And then at the same time raising children.

And at that time, not really having awareness of my own trauma or how my own trauma was showing up in my parenting. But then I think where it really started to come home for me was my former husband has, deals with some mental illness issues. And really beginning to notice when my kids became teenagers, how his trauma and pain was spilling over into the family and how I was watching my kids be impacted by what his, he had a lot of reactivity, for example. And when that was triggered, I would kind of witness my kids being triggered by it.

So that was where I started really paying attention, talking to a lot of people. And I also started seeing a therapist myself, and then started realizing, "Oh, wait, it's not just him, it's me too. There's stuff that when I'm being triggered that my kids are being impacted by it as well." And so that kind of began a journey of my own understanding. And now my primary work, I've become really focused on this idea of how to hold space for people. And that's the core of my work.

In fact, I teach an online eight month program on becoming a holding space practitioner. So it's really learning to be present for other people. And that includes our families, our kids, our, you know, our parents, etc. So that's become my passion and the central core of my work.

Annie Brees

I think that that's really beautiful work, Heather. And it's, and it's much needed, because I do agree with Jen that kids can trigger us. And family members in general can trigger us, unlike any other people in my life experience, I guess. Lauren, you're here, too, with us today. Do you agree? Do you feel like your kids are, like, they know your buttons to push sometimes? Unintentionally, maybe? Essentially?

Lauren Koski

Yes, hello, I'm here. I think it's also like, a lot of times, at least my kids, like, I see some of my own behaviors in them. And so that also kind of triggers me or

pushes my buttons. And I'm like, "Oh, that's me. That's a little me. It's driving me nuts."

Jennifer Campbell

Can I tell you guys a story?

Annie Brees

Of course.

Jennifer Campbell

Okay. This is when I realized that I needed to start doing this work. It was about five years ago, and I was at the mall with my kids shopping for back to school shoes. And my dad was with us. And I grew up with divorced parents, and I primarily lived with my mom. And we just we didn't have much money. And so shoes were kind of a thing for me growing up because I never had, like, the brand name shoes, and some of the kids would tease me.

And so I am taking my kids back to school shopping. I'm in a different financial position today than my mom was. And we go into like Footlocker or whatever. And there's a wall of kids shoes, and my kids can literally pick what they would like for back school shoes. And my oldest son was in such a bad mood. And he didn't want any of them. And so then I picked some and the guy brought them, try them on. And he was sitting on this bench with his arm crossed, and he just like kicked the box of shoes. And I was so triggered. When we left the store, I hauled him around the corner. And I started just drilling into him. And I was saying, "You don't know how lucky you are. I grew up and my mom couldn't afford to get me nice shoes like this," you know, and I was just went at it.

And all of a sudden, my dad came behind me just hand on my shoulder very heavy and said "Stop." And it was just like, I was just, like, in a moment. And then I just, you know, that action just brought me out of it. And I was like, "Whoa, what a rush." It was like me so triggered by obviously different wounds or shame triggers from my past and just was totally dumping it all on my kid. And he had nothing to do with it. Do you know what I mean? And then I realized, "Oh, therapy here I come."

Annie Brees

Heather, is that something you see often those situations like that where a child that I mean, I know you experienced it in this blog post, but a child does something, says something, behaves a certain way. And all the sudden we're like jolted back into a memory, a feeling, a familiar behavior.

What you said in your blog post I really loved is that you said "I've been doing a lot of healing. And I've been trying to change some of those well ingrained patterns." And I love this part, you said "I do this for myself. And I also do this for my daughters. I don't want them to assume that it when they become mothers, they have to sacrifice themselves for everyone else. And I don't want them to be instinctually run or rush to fix conflict whenever it surfaces."

And that really resonates with me, because when Jen was talking, it's like, she has this awareness that she's doing the thing that she used to experience or feel years ago, and she doesn't want to pass that on. She doesn't want to continue that. She wants to have more awareness. Right? I don't want to put words in your mouth, Jen. But-

Jennifer Campbell

I think what I thought was, what I realized was, I was, I sort of felt like I was handing off responsibility to my son to heal me. Do you know what I mean? To behave in the way I needed him to behave so that I could feel good about or not have to revisit that? Or Heather, maybe you can dissect me?

Heather Plett

Yeah, I mean, who among us hasn't heard her mother's voice come out of our mouths, you know, like, it's just inevitable that at some point, we're going to hear the very things we hated to hear from our mothers, we're going to hear ourselves say them to our kids, for one thing, and that's only one small part of it. But we do, there are these family patterns that show up, there are these and what I've really, you know, come to be aware, as some of that is trauma and shame.

And some of that is, you know, for example, and I can understand your story, Jen, when you were talking about, you know, being raised in poverty, I was raised similarly. And so some of my trauma is that too, like, I want my kids to appreciate what they have, and I want, you know, well, and they appreciate it in their own way, they don't have to appreciate it in my way like, but that's you know, but

there's this story that I have of, you know, lack and they don't live in that story. And they're being you know, they're growing up in a very different environment. And when they're not having the same reaction to the environment that I'm having, I sometimes get annoyed, because I want them to, you gotta, you have to understand this too, but they don't have any frame of reference for it.

And so but what we do is we pass these family patterns on, and our kids receive the family patterns. And usually a child's going to interpret something that comes at them like that, or reactivity as "I am wrong, or I am bad, or I have, you know, I have somehow set my mother off," a child is not understanding that this is coming to you from your mother, from your mother's mother, all the way down this family line, they're only seeing it from the perspective of "I am a bad person, and therefore my mother can't love me right now."

And so and I just read a quote just recently that when a child receives poor treatment, they don't hate the person treating them that way. They hate themselves. And that's what ends up showing up in our kids. And it showed up in us too. And so that's where we have to break some of these, you know, work to break these patterns so that our children feel as loved as we can make them feel loved. Without being the brunt of you know, receiving our anger, our triggers, our trauma, all of that stuff.

Annie Brees

Yeah, that pulls on your heartstrings. Because like you said, it's not about them, they don't, you know, they're just kind of living their lives and all of a sudden we throw this responsibility on them that they didn't even know was their job. And it's like, what?

Heather Plett

Yeah

Annie Brees

You know, what I would love to spend some time going through Heather is you have you share in this blog, post some thoughts on how to parent while you're still working on your own healing. And you know, that these come from your parenting experiences with teens and young adults.

So some of these might be, you know, age appropriate, or you might have to tailor them if you have a little bit, the three of us have, you know, kids 10 and under. I know your kids are a little bit older. But the first one that you mentioned is to let them in on the story of your wounds. Can you tell me what you mean by that? How much is too much to share or too little to share?

Heather Plett

There again, that's one of those things that you really have to determine what's age appropriate, how much is a child willing to understand and receive and that changes and evolves and I can even see it, like I have a 17 year old and then a 22 and a 23 year old, all three daughters.

And I communicate still differently with a 17 year old because there's still some stuff that she doesn't necessarily know how to receive yet at 17. And you know, that's still a fairly, teen years are fairly self absorbed, and you know, in their own stuff. And so to hear about mom's pain is maybe not quite time yet. At whereas the 22 year old and 23 year old, like we have quite an open relationship, and I share, you know, virtually everything with them in some way, you know, again, I'm still, I do still kind of guard them against some of it.

But for example, one of the experiences that I had when I was 22 is I was raped, and a man actually climbed through my bedroom window and sexually assaulted me. And that was one of those things that I knew was going to show up in the way that I behave towards, especially teenage girls, and wanting to protect them and wanting them to not face what I'd faced. And so, I, you know, instead of just being angry with them for being out too late with a boy, for example, because I might be in my fear of what might happen to them.

I let them know, look, this is one of my stories. I've had this you, know, sexual assault. And so I might be a little bit more sensitive around these things. And I want you to understand that that sensitivity is not coming out of me judging you for, you know, being out with a boy, it's it's more about my own pain than I'm still healing. So and that's been helpful, because then when they see me get reactive in that and I wouldn't say that particular area's necessarily the biggest issue for me, but when they see that showing up, they can check in with me "Mom, is this really, are you really, really reacting to what I'm doing right now, or are you reacting to your own pain in you from your experience when you were this age?"

So that's an example of letting them know and and this isn't, you know, when they were 10, I didn't talk about this experience with them yet, like it would took some time for them to be able to hear a story like that about their mom. But now that they're teenagers, and they're my oldest two are around the age that I was when it happened, I want them to have some understanding and then have some compassion for people who've been through that story as I was at that age and have compassion for me when I get triggered in those in those moments.

And like I said, I don't often get triggered with that anymore. Because I've done years and years of healing around it. But if that is one of your core stories that still has some power in you, helping your kids understand, "Look, mom might get triggered in these moments. So you know, here's how to be with me when I am triggered, maybe shine a mirror to me so that I see that I'm being triggered, so that I don't take it out on you."

Jennifer Campbell

How would you do that? I guess I'm struggling with how to do that with my kids. I have three boys. And they're six, seven and 10. And I do you know, Heather, can you think of any age appropriate language in those situations?

Heather Plett

Well, I would, I mean, I wouldn't give them the full, let's say that you had, I don't know what your experiences were. But if there was an experience like I've had, what I would have said at that age is maybe just "Mommy was hurt by a bad man at that age, you know, when I was younger. And I don't want to scare you. But this is something that happened to mommy. And sometimes it makes me upset. And sometimes I get, you know, I get angry because of it" or something like that.

So you don't need to tell them the whole story. But let them know that this, that when mommy gets emotional, it's not about you. It's about something that happened to me when I was younger. And what I would often also suggest is let your kids know that they're allowed to ask questions that they're ready for. So if you say something like "Mommy was hurt once by a bad man," and let them know, and "I don't, you know, I don't want to scare you. But if you ever want to ask questions about it, we can talk about it." Something like that.

So open the door for them to let you know when they're ready for more information, because kids are, you know, they're pretty perceptive, I know, especially my 17 year old, she'll let me know when she's ready for the next level of the conversation. And I kind of let her open those doors when she wants to. And when she's receptive, I give her a bit more information.

But don't push it on or to overwhelm them with too much. Because then also, the danger that we face, also, when we share these stories with our kids, is that sometimes when we share them, and we don't share them in a healthy way, then they feel like they have to take on the responsibility of comforting us and looking after us. And that's not what we're trying to do. Because that's putting far too much responsibility on a child.

Jennifer Campbell

That really aligns with, I saw a child psychologist a few years ago. And I've shared this on social media so it's not like new, brand new news to anybody. But my husband and I were separated for two years. And it was really hard on my oldest. And I was struggling with how to navigate it and the psychologist I saw said, to be honest with him in an age appropriate manner and let him ask questions, because it's actually not knowing or, because, you know, it was terrible.

It was terrible on my husband and me and lots of emotions and things. And of course your kids are going to react to just the tension, right? Or the environments that they're in? And yeah, same thing. He said, "Just be honest, because it's not knowing that's probably driving a lot of his anxiety and just assure him he's loved. And he is safe. And everyone is going to be fine. But here's what the situation is." Anyways, and so when I finally, my husband, I decided to do that then he just like settled right in, you know, he just, like, his anxiety just released and he was okay.

Heather Plett

Yeah, cuz the thing is, kids are going to make up stories to fill in the gaps we don't give them.

Jennifer Campbell

Yes.

Heather Plett

So if you are simply, you know, you're really emotional for a week or something because something's going on a kid's gonna make up a story and a very good chance that kids gonna make up a story about them having done something wrong. So then they'll start getting overly, you know, anxious about mommy's moods, because maybe mommy's moods is a reflection of me, and she doesn't love me anymore. And so, you know, if we give them a bit of information that gives them a tool to be able to, to see "Oh, okay, mommy's upset. But it's not about me. And I don't have to take responsibility for it."

Jennifer Campbell

Yeah. And also, I guess, in our situation to make sure he knew that it had nothing to do with him. That's the other thing that So yeah, I totally see that, that kids will look to themselves.

Annie Brees

I am 36 and I still make up stories. You know, a friend, a friend, a family member is in a bad mood, they're upset, and I am really good at making this about me, I've clearly upset them. You know, I said something to hurt them. They're annoyed with me, they're just over me. They don't want to spend time with me. I can't imagine what the stories some of these you know, eight, 9, 10 year olds are creating.

Heather Plett

Exactly. Because a child is pretty egocentric, and is going to always start with themselves. You know, that's just the way a child's developmental mind works, that they're always going to start with "It must be my fault. Or there must be something bad about me."

Annie Brees

Yeah, I can, I can see that in adults and children alike.

Hey friends, Annie here real quick, I wanted to sneak into this episode to tell you why it's important for you to love your body right now, even if you want to change it. And more importantly, how you can do that. You can learn the exact process

we use with our clients in our free workshop, the five step process to overcome overeating, getting off the diet roller coaster and restoring a healthy relationship with food that you can pass on to your kids. And you can get all of that for free. It is super simple. Just pause the show open up your browser and type in balance365workshop.com, or you can click the link in your show notes. All right, let's get back to this episode.

One of the other suggestions you have in how to parent while you're still working through your own healing is to let them know what you'll try to do to soothe your own nervous system in the moments when you're triggered so they can count on you to take responsibility for yourself and not fall apart entirely. Which I think is a great teaching tool to show your kids how you take care of yourself. On a very basic level what, what does that what does that conversation look like?

Heather Plett

Well, I'll share a little story about that, related to that. I, a couple of years ago, I was on a road trip with my daughters. And I backed into a post with the car. And I only had the car for a little while and I backed into post, I was so angry with myself and so triggered by it, like I was just a kid with my new car, you know, blah, blah, blah, all these reasons. And I just felt myself fuming. And I wanted to, like, let this anger out.

And then I turned and I see my three daughters watching. And I'm thinking and suddenly, in moment, I had a really strong memory of a, this is the kind of thing that would make my dad very angry. And if we ever had car trouble, and we had a lot of it growing up, because our cars are always breaking down. And so my dad would go off the handle. And that was when I was the most terrified of his anger was when, you know, something that had happened in the car broke down. And my dad was one that he would, he never abused us physically. But he would throw a tool at a tree, like hammers flying at trees and things like that. And those were the moments that really were anxiety inducing for me as a child.

And similarly, my former husband had some of that same that he would, you know, react in the moment. And suddenly I'm looking at my kids, I'm having this reaction in myself to what just happened. And I'm knowing that "Wait a second, I've got to do my work to soothe myself, because my kids are little versions of me when I was that age, you know, feeling terrified that the parent was going to out

of control right now." So I thought A, I have to soothe myself and B, I have to let them know that they're safe right now.

And so I did, I got back in the car said, you know, I'm kind of upset and I'm working to just soothe myself and be okay in this moment. It's bothered me, but I want you to know that we're okay, we're still going to have a fun road trip. And you know, carry on down the road. And sure enough, you know, I'd let it go, I kind of worked it through my system. And half an hour later, we were having a good laugh in the car again, and it's just a bump on the car. It's not the end of the world.

But that's the example of A, I'm not going to take my anger, you know, let my kids sit in a car with this kind of energy in the car the way that I did so many times in my life. And B, I want them to know what I'm doing so they don't, because one of my daughters especially, she will take a lot of responsibility for me if she sees me upset, and she get really anxious herself and needs to make me feel better. And so I needed to let her know, "It's not your job, Honey, I'm going to work through this and we're all going to be okay." And that was for me one of those, you know, awareness moments of how my stuff was going to impact them.

Annie Brees

Jen, you okay, over there?

Jennifer Campbell

Yeah, yeah, I just, I feel so lucky to be a mother in this time when we can do this work. Because, yeah, I mean, I can definitely relate with that temper stuff. And you're right, it takes you kind of right back. And you feel like that little anxious child. And I feel so lucky to live in a time when there's awareness. You know, I understand that my mom, for example, didn't have access to this kind of work. And I just feel very lucky that we do and that we can do it and that we don't have to pass forward what was passed to us.

Annie Brees

Heather, one of the things that came to mind when you were sharing that is just this modeling this behavior, whether it's your behaviors, the language you're using, to how you cope with these emotions as they come up. And I grew up in a

household where no one had any emotion ever. You know, I never saw my parents cry. I very rarely saw them yell at me or each other. And they were never frustrated, angry, like they just, you know, they were just pretty even keel.

So when I have emotion that's like angry, frustration, sad, disappointment. I'm like, "What do I do with this?" Like, and here I am in therapy as well. You know, in my mid 30s learning how to cope with those emotions as they come up, because I just didn't see it in my life. And so it was almost like, they were either to be avoided, or people just didn't experience them. And if I was experiencing them, then there, I was faulty. I was doing something wrong. I wasn't doing good enough. I wasn't enough, because these were negative emotions that I didn't want to feel.

Heather Plett

Well, that's that was gonna be my question then it for you is, you know, if I were coaching you, I would ask you, so what was, you know, what comes up when those emotions do happen? And what do you do to squash them? Because what, you know, in a situation like that, and I have some of that too, my mom was one of these that stuff had to be controlled, she had a real fear of have too much emotions. And so she just had this, you know, need to control the emotions and keep them manageable.

And, you know, then those of us have been raised with that kind of messaging there's going to be shame when emotions do come up, because how come I'm having emotions that they never had? Like, why am I not as good as they are, you know, in controlling my emotions?

So yeah, telling ourselves those shame stories and that's a big one. And I suspect that you've read read some of Brenay Brown's work around shame and and healing the shame and being vulnerable. And that's what I talked about that now and it's so beautiful with my kids age, they are now like, we have really honest conversations about it. Like I'll, you know, when I am when some shame kind of bubbles up in me, I'll sit, I'll let them know, "Oh, that feels like a shame moment. And I'm realizing that that's attached to some old story that I have or something".

And the other thing that I do with my kids is I give them permission, I mentioned this in that article, I give them permission to help me see some of those blind

spots and see some of that, you know, when it comes up, and that can feel really dangerous when your kid calls you out for something as one of the things that we regularly in this house will call out is passive aggressiveness cuz that's, it triggers me a lot because I have a lot of that in my family patterns.

But I let my kids name it when they see me being passive aggressive, and I name it in them too. And it's, at first it's pretty confronting to hear that from your kids. It's like, "I'm being passive aggressive, like, that's what my mother did. I don't do that." But then when you start to see it in yourself, and you hear from your kids and allow them to recognize it it does wonders for your relationship.

Annie Brees

Yeah, I could, I could see how that would be uncomfortable initially, for sure. Especially as the parent. Another tip you shared that also is uncomfortable for me is you recommend apologizing when you mess up. Which that is, that's really tough for me, because I think I just have this expectation that I'm the parent in the household, I'm the expert, I'm the mom, I should be really good at, naturally, really good at mothering. And when I mess up, it's just hard. It's just like, Oh, it's just to say I'm sorry to my children is difficult. I do it. But it's difficult. And it takes it's taken me some practice.

Heather Plett

Yeah, and that was another one. And I mentioned this earlier how some of my learning came from witnessing my former husband in relationship with my, especially when they became teenagers. And I would try to force him to apologize, because like you're, you know, I would see, because I was seeing the pain in the children from receiving what he had done out of his own triggering or done, you know, his own reactivity. And I knew where it was coming from, I had a sense of where it was coming from, but he wasn't seeing the pain that it was causing. And again, I had to look inward and realize I was doing some of the same things.

So I can't say that it was all him or all, you know, all on his side. But recognizing and witnessing how, especially when they were teenagers, if I would go to them and apologize and say, "Honey, I just realized suddenly that I totally reacted inappropriately and that was coming out of my own pain." To see them soften in

that moment and to you know, because their guardedness goes down, and they can actually be, they can return to a place of trust with you.

That's the most beautiful thing when you can build that trust by, you know, by acknowledging and letting them know, because it puts less pressure on them to be perfect. And that's the thing, like you're talking about how you have this pressure to be a perfect parent. Well, what might happen for our kids, if they don't adopt as much of that pressure when they become parents because they realize that you're imperfect? And that you know, they have a different story of what parenting is.

Annie Brees

Lauren, do you ever have to apologize to your kids?

Lauren Koski

Yeah, I do and it's hard for me to do. I'm trying to get better at doing it because I guess that was never a thing in my house, just similar to Annie, like, I'm the grown up, I'm the parent, I have the answers. And to kind of change that has been difficult, but I'm working on it. My kids are younger, they're five and two. So I'm just kind of taking this all in and learning.

Annie Brees

Watching Jen and I.

Jennifer Campbell

Yes.

Lauren Koski

You two can be on the front lines. And I will follow in your footsteps.

Jennifer Campbell

You can learn from our mistakes.

Annie Brees

Oh, Lauren. Don't do that. We tried that. And this is what happens. Another one that you have is that I really that I love is to teach them about boundaries by having your own and honoring theirs, and then teach them about consent in the same way. And the first time I heard about boundaries was, with kids, is that one of the women I follow on, well you two know her, Erin Brown on Instagram, she was talking about how her body wasn't just free game for her kid that sometimes she's touched out, and she just needs her own space.

And so she has created a boundary with her kid, her child, because this is what works for her that you know, they there's this respect here, like "Can I sit on your lap?" that she does doesn't just climb on her lap and expect that mommy's just gonna, like, accept it. And you know, that might work for some, that works for her, obviously. But it was this really eye opening moment that was like, "I can have boundaries with my kids?"

Like I thought I was just supposed to be at their beck and call and like be free game, open to them, you know, cater to them whatever they need at any given moment. And I'm guessing you would say that's not the case. Right, Heather?

Heather Plett

Yeah, and this is a typical long time, exactly what you're saying. It took me a long time to learn this because I wanted, you know, every mom wants to be a safe place for their kids. And so that means being always, you know, in our minds, that means being always available to their needs. Well, all of a sudden, you realize, like me being always available to their needs means that I'm tapped out, you know, 70% of the time, I'm just exhausted.

And yeah, and where you go to replenish those stores if you're always 24 seven available to meeting somebody else's needs. And so it took me a long time. And that was partly because before my marriage ended, there was a lack of emotional safety in the house. And I'm sad to say so I tried to create that space of emotional safety for them. So a lot of my learning came in the process of getting a divorce and going for therapy and and recognizing how much I had let my boundaries be totally permeable in my marriage and in my parenting.

So when I started to do things like you know, lock the door when I go for a bath, like, because that's some of my healing time is having a bath and just soaking in water. And it took me a long time to let myself lock the door because my kids

have to have access to me. Well, by this time my kids were teenagers already. I mean, they should be able to understand that a mom needs to have a bath alone sometimes. But yeah.

And once I started doing that, I realized, "Oh, wait a second, like, I'm actually modeling something really good for them." Because when I established my boundaries, then they get to do the same. And they get to say, "No, mom, I don't have the energy for this right now or no mom can meet. Can you not hug me right now because I'm feeling fragile?" Or, you know, "I don't want to be touched: or something like that.

So, yeah, I think I think what we're teaching them by having our own really permeable boundaries, is that's the way they're supposed to show up in the world too and do we want that for our kids? Like and that was one of my learnings is I started to see my own patterns, like my kids are older than yours and have had boyfriends and things and I started to see my patterns in relationship show up in my daughter with her boyfriend, and her lack of boundaries with him. And I thought, "Oh my gosh, that's the only pattern she's seen. That's what she thinks is a way to be in a relationship."

Jennifer Campbell

That's so great. I often think that when even when I'm setting boundaries with my boys, and I can feel this guilt, I remind myself that it's, the guilt is more like conditioning from our society that I should always be there for them. And I need to move forward setting this boundary, regardless of the guilt, because I am changing their definition of parenting, specifically motherhood.

So I always, you know, it's not easy to get up every day and change patterns, or change stories. But I'm always thinking to myself, what do I want to normalize for them? Right? So you know, when they grow up, if they all marry women, and they're having a more traditional household, I guess, like ours is, I don't want it to be strange, you know, for them to see their wife set boundaries, whether it's with the kids or with them, or to care for herself in the way she needs to, whether that's to leave the family and go for a workout, leave the family, lock the door and have a bath, whatever it is that she needs to care for herself.

Because Annie, Lauren and I have been running our communities for over four years now. And we hear this every day, "How do you get over the guilt of going to

the gym at night and leaving your husband to put the kids to bed by himself?" and things like that over and over. And so it's everywhere. And it's very common. And I think, I don't know, if our generation will ever truly get over that guilt.

Like I mean, I've been working on it for years, and I still feel it creeping up. But we can still take action regardless of that, you know, and just rationally understand that that's just part of our programming. But we can change this for the next generation.

Heather Plett

Because imagine what a boy growing up in an environment where women have boundaries and women, you know, require consent. Imagine what kind of boyfriend he might be someday, I just think about the capacity for them to be in different kinds of relationships than we allowed ourselves to be in. It just, to me, that feels really hopeful.

Annie Brees

I have kind of the opposite problem. My 10 year old has the best boundaries ever. I don't know. She didn't get that-

Jennifer Campbell

Let me in!

Annie Brees

Yeah, if she doesn't want a hug, she'll just decline the hug. There was one time we were out trick or treating and this gentleman had a game and like a bag game in his front yard. And he said you could play the game and earn some treats, or you can just take a treat if you wanted to. And she just took the treat.

And I was mortified that she told this gentleman that she didn't want to play this game that he had, like, set up and thought all these kids would like to play the game, the guy put up the game, like it would be nice, do the thing. You know, she's like, "No, I don't want to play the game." And it was in that moment that was like, you know what, she knows what she wants.

Like, if it's not what you would like, or what you want, that's okay, she can have her own thing, I can have my own thing. But it was just really eye opening to me

that I have clearly have this desire from wherever to be appeasing to others, to be liked by others, to not hurt others feelings. And she's just like doing her own thing. And I was like, you know what? I could learn a lesson from my 10 year old on boundaries and just say "No, thank you, this doesn't suit me."

Lauren Koski

My daughter is the same way.

Heather Plett

Yeah, I had that experience with my oldest daughter, when my my mom, after my dad died, my mom married, remarried, and the man that my mom married had, you know, didn't have a lot of respect for young women's boundaries and would insist on all the kids giving him a hug when we showed up. And and me too, like he, that was his expectation.

And I was much more raised in the you know, the generation of an older man wants to give you a hug, you just give them a hug, you know, and so but my oldest daughter did not like him. And she was probably around 10 at that time, too. And she would refuse to give them a hug. And she was determined, like he go to hug her. She ducked under his arms, and you know, and go to hug her grandmother because she was very attached to her grandmother.

And I would be horrified like, "Oh, you can't offend this man: and blah, blah, blah." And I'm like, hang on a second, like, by trying to tell her she has to hug this old man, what's the message I'm sending her? And is that the message I want her to have?

Jennifer Campbell

Right? It's like saying, "Hey," you know, telling a little girl and trying to teach her, "Hey, you should have boundaries." And then when we're actually in those situations, "except in this situation, except in this situation," you have to reinforce what you are teaching them with behavior.

Annie Brees

And that's the thing about boundaries, they are and they can be uncomfortable to set and maintain. At least for me they are, like to tell people no, to say no thank

you, to opt out, whatever it is, or to just honor my needs over someone else's, is not something that comes naturally to me. And it's like, when I have to enforce those boundaries, it's difficult.

Heather Plett

Yeah, and especially with and sometimes we have people in our lives who have whether it's personality disorders, or disordered thinking in some way or, you know, mental illness, etc, who are very reactive, and, and who are very reactive to the boundary being set, because they take it very personally. And so that's not to go into too much detail.

But that's some of the challenge I've had working with my daughters and setting boundaries with their dad, because he has unhealed trauma and will be very reactive and take things very personally if they set a boundary. So it can be really challenging when you're setting a boundary and the other person is is reactive to that boundary because it triggers their own pain, their fear of abandonment or whatever.

And so I think that's especially tender in those areas when you're in relationship with somebody who has, you know, who hasn't done their healing and will have that kind of reaction. And that's where the learning is in. Like we have conversation after conversation about this in my household about how do you how do you hold your boundaries when the other person is offended by those boundaries?

Annie Brees

Yeah, tough to do. Takes some take some practice and time for sure. Though, you have I think we've covered a handful the other like actual actionable items that you share in that blog post Heather, which we will link to in our show notes. But what I want to end with, and I'm laughing because I know that I do this, and we've kind of already touched on it.

But the last suggestion you have to raising kids while we heal is to not take everything personally, which is a good life rule in general, but especially with our kids. How do you do that? How do you, like, when you're in a moment, you're feeling triggered, how do you remind yourself to not take it personally?

Heather Plett

One of the ways that I do that is by having really good friends and having people who I can vent with when this happens. And so I say to every mother, make sure that you've got other mothers in your circle like you are doing with each other, it sounds like that you can, you know, then when that happens, and you are triggered, you want to take it personally, you can call up a friend and say, "Oh my god, I can't believe what my kids did blah, blah, blah, blah, blah." And they can talk you down off the ledge and say "It's really not personal, your child's just going through a developmental phase" or something like that.

My sister and I have that, for example. We're always texting each other but, and my kids are older, a little older than hers so so she's had the witness of me going through it. But so sometimes, and she felt like she has now has a 13 year old daughter who's going through, you know, teen years and, attitude and things like that. And I can remind her, "You know what, that's a developmental phase. And next year, it's going to be a little different, because she's just starting high school now and things are going to adjust."

But so having having friendships, having forums online, where you can talk about it with other moms, all of these things are helpful, because then we realize, "Oh, wait a second, this isn't just me, it's happening to, it's a universal thing that moms go through and kids go through and, you know, and I, yeah, it doesn't have to all be my own stuff and my own pain."

Annie Brees

Which is why I love this topic. Because I think as we said in the beginning, you know, there's few people that can trigger us like our kids. And oftentimes that can be a really isolating feeling, like, that you're just not a good mom, or you're not a good parent or you're doing something wrong, because you're struggling with frustration, or anger or resentment or sadness when XYZ happens.

And when we talk about it, like Jen said, you know, feeling lucky to be in a time where we have resources like you, podcasts like this, communities like ours, where you can talk about that without judgment and critique and be like, "Yeah, actually, I'm going through that too, where I've experienced that, too" can be you really helpful.

Heather Plett

Yeah, exactly. And I quite frankly, I'm, I'm almost 20 years older than you and so I was parenting in the early years before the internet before, I mean, I didn't even have a cell phone in the first eight years of my parenting.

So, yeah, I think in some ways that the advantages that are now available in terms of the resources and the ability to communicate with people is vastly improved in that regard. And I know there's a downside to because then you can also compare yourself to other parents way easier.

Jennifer Campbell

Right, there's the two sides of the coin.

Heather Plett

And that's the other pressure too, like, there's, you know, so many parents and books out there that can keep shame on us, instead of actually support us, because then it's like, "Oh, my gosh, I'm not doing this right and this right." So you have to kind of take it with a grain of salt and know which resources to reach for and have some friends who will let you talk about shame.

Like, that's the one of the biggest things like if you have friends that are all just really armored and having to pretend that they're perfect parents, and you know, and have that sense of, that's not going to help like you need the kind of parents that are that are going to let you just unload and say like, like I say, with my sister, and I mean, we can have those moments when we can text each other, like, "I've never come closer to hitting my child." And in this very moment, you know, like, just admitting that those things come up.

Jennifer Campbell

They happen. I have moved around quite a bit and finding new friends is very important for me. And it can be super lonely, because most people have their armor on when you meet them. And I've gotten better at it over the years. But I just find that taking the first step to being vulnerable is really the gateway for me to create meaningful friendships wherever we live.

And it's also a good filter for people are not going to be a meaningful person in my life. Because if they're uncomfortable with my vulnerability, then they'll filter themselves out. But I've managed to make some amazing connections in the last

five years since we moved. And so for anyone listening, and you know, that's another thing we hear running these communities is that women struggle with friendships, they really, really do. And I think sometimes, in my experience, at least, it just takes that first step of being vulnerable about what you're going through that can really help with those connections.

Heather Plett

Yeah, and I've been quite honest about this, too, in some earlier blog posts that my early parenting years were honestly the loneliest period of my life. Like to become a parent, and suddenly, you can't hang out with your friends and some of your friends are childless. So they're still hanging out together. And you're, you know, and I had a full time job outside of the home at the time. And my husband was working shift work.

So often I was alone parenting in the evenings, it was intensely lonely, I didn't have a clue what I was doing, and didn't have anywhere to turn. And so it can be really, really lonely. And it's hard to find the places to reach out. And so, you know, I just, I'd say that just to acknowledge it, if you're feeling lonely, it's normal, it's a path to go through and to say there's hope, because, like you said, I appreciate what you said about, you know, your own vulnerability's a bit of a test of a friendship, like if they can handle this, they're the right kind of people, even if you get rejected now, and then because you will, because some people are not prepared for it. It's still worth continuing to try.

Annie Brees

Heather, I think I know your answer to this. But I imagine, like you, we have some listeners with some older children. And they might be feeling like, "Oh, this would have been great if I had started practicing some of these concepts years ago." Is it ever too late to start doing this healing work with yourself and your kids?

Heather Plett

No, never, I can tell you that some of the stuff I've done just in the last, you know, especially the last four years, and that's all been after my kids have been teenagers, I've gone deeper than ever before with them and, and deeper conversations, and it has been transformative for us all. And so there were lots of things, I made a lot of mistakes in the early years. And a lot of it was I was trying

really hard to hold our family together and trying to support my former husband through a mental illness.

And I know I can tell you a long list of mistakes I made in those early days with my kids. And, you know, I won't say that it doesn't matter, because there are things that they may still have to seek seek therapy for someday because of it. But when I think of the conversations we now can have and where I can admit I can talk to them about, "Here's what I was going through at the time," for example, and just to, again, be really vulnerable, one of the things that I went through with my former husband is that he, in our marriage, there were two times that he attempted suicide. And one of those was when I was pregnant with my first child. And one of those one wasn't when I already had all three kids.

So I was parenting all three kids with a husband in the psych ward. Well, it was the most incredibly difficult period of my life. And I was juggling the needs of everyone in my family. And you know, and putting mine last because that was the way you had just show up in this situation like that. And I know that those are times when my kids carried a lot of that pain and will still be unpacking some of that pain.

And I know that I was making mistakes, it wasn't just that they were dealing with their dad, you know, being in a psych ward, it was some of the stuff I was doing out of my own pain at the time, too. So, but the fact that we can talk about it now and we've created an environment where those things are okay to talk about, that's still worth everything. So don't ever think it's too late.

I have a close friend whose daughters in her 30s. And they just went for therapy together recently to unpack some of these things that her daughter, she didn't know her daughter was carrying from childhood. And she said it was amazing, like it's changed their relationship. So I don't think it's ever too late.

Jennifer Campbell

I found that and I've also talked about this on social media. So it's no secret, but I had a very fractured relationship with my father growing up and him and I have just kind of worked on healing that as I've been an adult. And I shared that he, when things come up, he apologizes to me, and he just apologizes. And he says "Things like that must have been awful for you."

And I think a lot of, even as an adult, that's just what you're looking for. It's just the acknowledgement and then as I've gotten to know my dad as an adult, and he's shared and been vulnerable with me about his upbringing, that's been healing for me to learn about who he is where he comes from, what his experiences were, which created his wounds. Do you know what I mean? And it's like, really wonderful when two people can come to the table and do that work.

Heather Plett

Yeah. Oh, I think every one of us and my parents are both gone now. But I think every one of us would be changed by a parent, you know, even in their 80s or whatever, doing some emotional work and coming and telling us about it. You know, would it ever be too late for us to hear that from our parents? No. So then it's also never too late for us to do it for our kids.

Annie Brees

I love that. I think that's really hopeful and optimistic way to wrap this up. Heather, if people want to read more about your work or read more of your blog posts, where can they find you?

Heather Plett

Everything's at HeatherPlett.com, and I'm on social media, Heather Plett, everywhere. Facebook, Twitter, I don't spend much time on Twitter, but Instagram and Facebook primarily.

Annie Brees

We don't either. We're just trying to navigate a few platforms at a time. Well, thank you so much for your time, Heather. Really beautiful conversation. I think it's going to be really helpful to a lot of our listeners, and I can't thank you enough for taking your time this morning to talk with us.

Heather Plett

All right, thank you. It's been a pleasure.

Annie Brees

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