

Dr. Emily Anhalt: Emotional fitness & success beyond medicat...

Sat, 1/29 11:30AM 1:05:07

SUMMARY KEYWORDS

adhd, people, feel, problem, diagnosis, life, zebra, medication, pandemic, therapy, understand, happening, brain, emotional, diagnosed, realize, symptoms, focus, talk, ways

SPEAKERS

Dr. Emily Anhalt, Katy Weber



Katy Weber 00:00

So Emily, I guess my first question is kind of When were you diagnosed with ADHD and what was happening in your life that led to thinking it was ADHD.



Dr. Emily Anhalt 00:10

So I was actually diagnosed with ADHD when I was seven. I was young, I went to a little private school where everyone was very quiet and well behaved. And I was neither of those things. And I spent so much of my time in the office. And, you know, I wasn't an academic problem. For me, it was really about not wanting to sit still for eight hours in a day that didn't feel like what my body wanted, or what my mind wanted. And so I think probably the school reached out to my parents to let them know that it was an issue. And so my parents took me to a psychiatrist who diagnosed me and put me on meds immediately. So I was starting Ritalin at seven. And I remember distinctly not liking it, I didn't like how it made me feel it made me lose my appetite. And I was already a small kid, so I wasn't eating. And that was a problem, and I wasn't sleeping well. And it made me feel jittery and uncomfortable. And so I actually used to just throw the pills in the toilet, and not tell my parents that I was not taking them. But what I realized, at some point, I think, a couple years into this process was that I better figure out how to still manage what they were trying to medicate, or else I would have to take the meds. And so I started coming up with little workarounds, and tips and tricks for myself, to try to behave the way I could tell. I was supposed to behave so that I didn't have to take the meds. And I think that was one of the first things that sparked my interest in the idea that, although I'm not anti medication in any way, I do think it is often used as a first line of defense, when there are really quite a lot better options that we can introduce to kids and adults alike with ADHD to try before they turn to meds for support.



Katy Weber 01:53

Yeah, absolutely. I mean, that's a topic we talk about a lot, which is the sort of lack of support

Yeah, absolutely. I mean, that's a topic we talk about a lot, which is the sort of lack of support that comes with the diagnosis, right, like, I mean, I remember recently seeing a TED talk, that was a physician talking about ADHD and women and what it looks like and why it's under diagnosed. And I was so excited. And it was, you know, she was talking about it. And then and then at the end of the TED talk, she was like, okay, so what do we do about this, and she said, medication, and that was it. And again, like, I'm not, I am, you know, we I, this is a topic that comes up a lot, I'm certainly not anti medication, I've been on a cocktail of antidepressants for most of my life. So it's like, I'm not anti medication, but it does feel like you know, to pathologize ADHD in this way, where it's like, you have this illness, and the medication is the cure, I think is such, it's just, it's just a really reductive way of looking at our brains and kind of what this is. And, you know, it's been interesting to look back because I was diagnosed at the age of 45, it's been really interesting to look back and to see kind of how I kind of holistically came up with certain lifestyle hacks that worked for me, in terms of treating What I didn't realize was ADHD, and how, like, there's a whole host of ways you come at this. And a lot of things that work fantastically, you know, for those of us like myself, I don't fall into the anti medication category, but I do fall into the medication just didn't do anything. For me, I'm still finding what works for me. And so that option just has yet to work for me. And so I but I think about like morning exercise and, and, you know, caffeine, or various other ways that I have, like, helped entreated it so. So I'm yeah, I'm curious when you kind of went through school, and then got to your postgraduate work, and you wanted to do your dissertation on this very topic, right?

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Dr. Emily Anhalt 03:51

Yeah, absolutely. So I did my doctoral dissertation on adult ADHD, and success without the use of medication. And the goal was to try to shift the way people think of ADHD from being a disorder in every case, to just being a different way of moving through the world, just a different way that your mind works. Not to say that that doesn't mean it's ever problematic. I think any spectrum we're on if we're too extreme on it can be a problem. But I wanted to show that I actually had come to believe that my ADHD was a superpower that it really contributed to a lot of my success, even though in other times, it took away from my success. I didn't feel that it was only a problem. And so I interviewed adults with ADHD who felt that the ADHD had actually contributed to where they had landed in the world, and who were not currently taking medication. And it was really profound experience. I felt so validated just hearing people having had the same experiences as me. Essentially, if I were to boil the findings of the research down to one idea, it's the concept that the stigmas that people face for learning differently, are often more harmful to them than the symptoms themselves. And that people who are given or take for themselves, the ability to adapt their work and learning environment to their needs, instead of feeling like they always have to adapt themselves to the environment, they are often able to achieve a lot of success. And in fact, some success that someone with ADHD would not be able to achieve, because they're able to really capitalize on the things that makes their brain so interesting and unique. So that was just amazing to see. And what came out the other side of this was this kind of three pronged system that I've developed to support adults with ADHD who want to shift their relationship to their ADHD. And I can walk you through that if that'd be helpful. Yeah, absolutely. Yeah. So the way that I think about it is there's sort of these three levels that we have to confront or ADHD is, the first one is facing and processing the psychological really trauma of having been told our whole lives that we don't think or work the way we should. But just the effect of that alone, I think is a big contributor to why people with ADHD struggle, that you have internalized this idea that there's something wrong with you, and that you're the problem and that you're broken, and that your brain is wrong. And so I think

having a space to really work through that. And remember that that's a lot of other people's ideas about you, not necessarily the truth. And so a great way to do that is through therapy, for example, finding your community talking to people who get it being on podcasts like this one, that can go a really long way. The second level is confronting the negative aspects of ADHD and mitigating the problems that causes so little tips and tricks that I've learned are, for example, you know, if I put something down, and my attention is diverted away from that thing, it's like it never existed to me, I'm going to completely forget that it existed. And that is a problem. It's gotten me in trouble. I've lost keys, I've lost jewelry, I've lost sunglasses, you know, all kinds of things. And so I've trained myself never to put something down in a place where I couldn't leave it, I've just cut that off at the source. You know, I make lists, I set alarms, I have talked to the people in my life about how to push back if I am not paying attention, or if I forgotten something important. So that's the second level is, you know, accepting and mitigating the negative things. And then the third level is leveraging the positive things. So for me, I really think it's because of my ADHD that I can focus on 10 things at once, that I can hyper focus and get a ton done in a very little amount of time, that I can switch focus between things really easily, I think these are actually products of my ADHD. So I've really done a lot of work to set myself up for success of making use of those things, you know, I, I moved toward a job where you know, this person who's successful in this job is going to have to change their focus many times a day, I have recruited support in doing the things that aren't going to make use of those symptoms, that kind of thing. So I think when a person can look into all three of those levels, what they'll often find is that on the other side of it, they are not actually struggling as much from their ADHD as they had originally thought that they would.



Katy Weber 08:19

I know, right, I mean, that's what I think I sort of come to that a lot with the with these episodes of these conversations, which is like so much of the quote unquote treatment of our ADHD is the self awareness and the ability to advocate. And again, like just that sort of radical transformation of our self talk, right and, and how we view ourselves and how we view what we used to view as deficiencies, how we view those strengths and how we can like realize, you know, I always talk about like, I never understood, I never paid any attention to what I brought to the table in my life, I only ever paid attention to things I couldn't do, because that was something that I you know, those are the things that are more troubling. So naturally, we pay more attention to them. And so yeah, this diagnosis has just such so radically changed the way I view myself and in a way that I can then now advocate and, and, and, like you said, leverage and mitigate and all the great words you used. And, you know, it's been interesting to like, like you said, with going, just going back to like education and how we are taught from such a young age that so many of us are taught, you know, the way that we're doing things is the wrong way, even though it works perfectly well for us. You know, at the end of the day, we're told at a very young age, you're doing it wrong. And so it's been interesting to interview women who as girls had some kind of diagnosed learning disability if it was like dysgraphia or or dyslexia often, who were received accommodations at a young age on some level, within public education. I feel like kind of very different outcome from those of us who had nothing you know who just sort of really felt like we were the problem, we were doing something wrong, and really kind of developed our sense of self through that lens, as opposed to women who realized, who realized that who were had that availability as children that like they were given accommodations. And so they realize, okay, so now I can achieve the thing with the help I need, you know, let's figure out what I need. So I was just say, like, how that how that radically, you know, contributes to our sense of self as adults.

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Dr. Emily Anhalt 10:26

I couldn't agree with that more, it makes me think of one of the shared experiences amongst pretty much all of the people I interviewed, was this realization that when you're young, there's kind of an obliviousness tied to having ADHD, that, you know, all of us shared this feeling of remembering people reacting to us negatively, and feeling how terrible that felt, but not understanding why, like no one at that time was able to say, hey, the reason why kids are reacting this way to you is because you're talking out of turn, or because you are more energetic than they feel that they can be, you know, there wasn't an explanation. And so all that I felt was that people didn't like me, and I didn't understand why. And so that really gets woven into your sense of self over time. And I can imagine the kids who were set who were told, hey, the reason you're struggling is XYZ, we're going to help you with it. Maybe there's a way of sort of keeping that separate from your who you are as a person. And it's more like, Oh, this is just a thing that I need extra help with. Right?



Katy Weber 11:32

Yeah. Yeah. And I mean, yeah, that idea that like who you are, fundamentally, is wrong and negative and needs to change. And that's what I loved about the analogy you use with the zebra in your TED Talk, which is a couple years old, right? It's 2016. Right? Yeah. Which I will put a link to in my show notes. But yeah, tell me about the the metaphor of the zebra.

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Dr. Emily Anhalt 11:54

Sure. So the talk was called. Oh my gosh,



Katy Weber 12:01

it's called The trouble with normal, my ADHD, the zebra.

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Dr. Emily Anhalt 12:06

For me, right. So the reason I called my ADHD, zebra was a few reasons. But essentially, it comes down to the idea that it's neither all good or all bad in my life, the way Zebra is both black and white. And also that a Zebra is an unusual animal. You know, there's this whole metaphor about, like, when you hear hoofbeats think horses, not zebras, but actually, sometimes it is zebras, and that's how I feel about people with ADHD is it's might not be the most usual way of moving through the world. But it's a really beautiful and profound and interesting way to take in stimuli. And to think I mean, I think the reason I can think really creatively is because of my ADHD, because my mind jumps to unusual places. I, the board game that I'm best at is taboo. I don't know if you're familiar with that game, it's, you know, a game where you have to describe something in an unusual way to get people to guess it. And I think I'm really good at it because my brain jumps to 50 very unusual places, when I see a word that I can then use to describe it. So I you know, and then the other metaphor with Zebra is the idea that there is evolutionary support for why ADHD exists, I believe, like, just like, zebras

have stripes for a reason. I think people have ADHD for a reason. I think that, you know, a long time ago, it was useful to be distracted by something happen on happening on the peripheral, because you could alert your, you know, your community to it. And that still happens to me, sometimes I'll, I'll see, like a little movement at the corner of my eye and I'll, I'll be like, what is that and it'll be a spider. It'll be something that no one else will have noticed. You know, and then I think it also a lot of the most interesting people who created something that never existed before had ADHD. Because they're thinking in a unique way.



Katy Weber 13:59

That's funny, they're reminded me of how i i tend to notice like a fly in the room before anyone else does. And I'm super bothered by it. But I also feel like I also never noticed the Hope Chest at the end of my bed and I have bruises to show like I always will walk into that. It's so funny how like, We're such, you know, we're such walking. What's the word? I'm looking for conviction? Yes, contradictions.



Dr. Emily Anhalt 14:23

Yes. I agree.



Katy Weber 20:59

Okay, so now tell me let's talk about therapy and CoA because I love your approach and kind of want to find out how you got into this from how you got into this idea of emotional fitness. And you know, obviously, with this podcast, I have come to such incredible realizations about verbal processing, right? And how, how important that is to our particular brains when it comes to empathizing and understanding situations and understanding ourselves. I'm a huge proponent of therapy. I've been in therapy for years, it was my therapist who actually gently suggested to me that I look into ADHD a long time ago. And I was like, I don't know what you're talking about. I'm not hyper. But she was the one who thankfully made a lot of the connections for me that you don't typically make with with ADHD and women, and got me to finally get my diagnosis. But so I'm a huge proponent. And I think, you know, but you kind of take this different approach to to talk therapy with emotional fitness. So what what are you tell me a bit about what that is, and how that differs from traditional talk therapy or traditional group therapy?



Dr. Emily Anhalt 22:14

Sure, so CoA is essentially a gym for mental health. And my goal when I dove headfirst into CoA, was to reframe the narrative of mental health care from being this really reactive thing that we only do when we're unwell to being a more proactive thing that we do to maintain wellness, I wanted to help people think about working on their mental health, more like going to the gym, and less like going to the doctor. And we do that through a few different things. One of them is therapy matchmaking, we help people find really great therapists. And that's traditional therapy, that is just therapy, as you would imagine it talking to someone who can help reflect you back to yourself, and see patterns and empathize with you and help you

process through things. But the other big thing that COVID does is these emotional fitness classes. emotional fitness is essentially an ongoing proactive approach to working on your mental health. It's like doing emotional push ups, working on yourself a little bit, increasing your strength, so that you can actually prevent a lot of issues that you might have needed help with down the line, just like physical fitness prevents a lot of physical health issues. So in these classes, which are all created and taught by licensed therapists, it's not group therapy, it's really about training our emotional health, to be better equipped to handle the inevitable difficulties that life throws at us. Like I think a lot of the mental health struggles we have in our culture, our result of being told her whole life that we shouldn't feel how we feel, and that we should push things down and that we should forge ahead and that we should never look backwards, we should only look forwards and that we should be happy all the time. And that if we're not happy all the time, something's wrong with us. I think that attitude has really caused people to deeply struggle with what are actually very human emotions. And so in these classes, you learn how to turn toward your humanity, how to feel your feelings, and honor who you are and explore and understand yourself better. And the classes are based on research that I did a number of years ago, where I interviewed 100 Psychologists and 100 entrepreneurs about what makes someone emotionally healthy. I asked how would you know if someone is emotionally healthy? What does that feel like? What does that look like? And out of this research came what I call the seven traits of emotional fitness. These are the seven things that emotionally healthy people are working on all the time. So just like a physically healthy person probably sleeps well eats healthy exercises, meditates that kind of thing. And emotionally healthy person is working on self awareness, empathy, curiosity, mindfulness, playfulness, resilience, and communication. And so in our classes, we teach people how to work on these seven things, and they get to practice them live and with peers with other people who get it and Who also care about working on themselves. And it's just been really amazing to see how ready people are to integrate emotional health care into their everyday lives the way that we have done with something like running or yoga or other physical health practices.



Katy Weber 25:14

Yeah, you know, that's another thing. Yeah, we have talked about that, in my family with my kids, I have a 10 year old and a 14 year old. And, you know, we talk I talk a lot with them about therapy and kind of D stigmatizing it, both of them are in therapy, not because I feel like they're broken or that they're, you know, in some critical state that there's something wrong with them. But basically, that same, like I love how you put it, you know, as terms of the gym, where we always talk about it, like, you know, keeping your car it tuned up, to dig up under the hood, that this is like, you shouldn't have to wait until you're broken and at critical mass to seek help. So we've started them both at this early age, but I will admit, like even when I was seeking a therapist, for my 10 year old, I sort of felt like, on the spot a bit like what's, you know, what's wrong with him? What are we going to talk about, and I sort of felt like I had to come up with, you know, traumas for him or anxiety, you know, I had to like, escalate his social anxiety or something to make it seem like it was quote, unquote, worth it for him to be seeing that therapist between myself and that therapist, not even for him, you know what I mean?



Dr. Emily Anhalt 26:18

Oh, for sure. That's the message that's given to us is that you shouldn't get support until you're falling apart. And that's, that's like waiting until you have heart disease to start doing cardio. Right? We've got to do that work in advance.



Katy Weber 26:32

So now coming, you know, two years now into this pandemic, I must be fascinating for you to watch this kind of everything that is happening socially from this, in terms of mental health. You know, it's, I mean, I feel like it's been a real boon for online telehealth, telehealth and teletherapy. I feel like there's been a real mental health revolution in terms of people seeking help. And that was like, we finally got the carte blanche to really start looking into our mental health and say, and admitting like, I am not okay. And nobody feels like they're okay, right now. But we're also like two years into this. So I always had that question a lot when it comes to ADHD. And what is happening with so many of us there has, you know, there has been this real uptick in diagnoses of not only ADHD, but anxiety and depression and kind of what is it? Do you feel like there's just something else happening here, you know, we talk about like brain fog. And we talk about like, a lot of these traumas symptoms that are experienced. And the question I feel like I get the most from other women, and even myself is like, is this ADHD? Or is something else going on?



Dr. Emily Anhalt 27:49

Yeah, what a thoughtful observation. I mean, so I think even pre pandemic, ADHD diagnoses were skyrocketing. And I think it has a lot to do with devices, having phones having constant stimulation, because my personal belief about what causes ADHD, is that people with ADHD have lower levels of dopamine production. Dopamine is the chemical in the brain that makes us feel like we are satisfied and that things are how they're supposed to be, and that we have what we need. And I think people with ADHD make less of it. And so they're seeking external stimulation that will raise those dopamine levels up. So that's why people with ADHD can often listen to music or watch TV while they're working. Because that stimulation makes them just feel normal, like whatever when else feels, and then they can focus in on whatever they need to do. So these days, because we have social media and internet in our pocket, and we're constantly having all of these little pings of external stimulation. I think that there are a lot of people out there who have gotten used to an addicted to that, who now have trouble focusing without all of that stimulation. And so a lot of people feel what people with ADHD feel. And the reason why I think it's helpful to look at it that way is it validates this idea that it's a spectrum we're on, it's not like you either have ADHD or you are totally normal. It's your brain works in a particular way based on what you need in order to focus on what you want to do. And you need to have accommodations for that kind of focus. So that's something I had seen even pre pandemic. But the pandemic I think, has been really complicated because it's completely disrupted all of our habits and routines, and I think habits and routines or a person with ADHD is best friend. It's what helps us do what we need to do. And I know for me, sitting at home alone and working all day isn't as stimulating as being in an office with people having conversations. So it's harder for me to focus on my work because I don't have that same, you know, environment that I had worked really hard to cultivate, that would help me do my best work. So I think that's a big part of it. And then the other thing is, I think anything people were struggling with before the pandemic they're struggling with even more now. So if you were having trouble focusing on boring tasks before, it's going to be way worse now, because you don't have the same joys and, and, you know, routine that you did before that kind of thing. So

I really empathize. And I think I'm coming to accept that this might be the new normal for a while, and it might be worth doing the work to figure out what do we need in this kind of environment to show up the way we want to,



Katy Weber 30:28

I know, it's been so interesting to see the ways in which so many women now are kind of coming to the diagnosis, and some of that backlash that's happening, too, which is like, Oh, everybody can't have ADHD, it's got to be something else. Or, you know, well, you know, ADHD doesn't just happen when you're, you know, suddenly in your 40s, you know, so you have to kind of look back at your whole life through this lens. And it's not like, it wasn't there. It's just, you know, nobody saw the size. And this is now we're sort of now understanding what it looked like throughout our lives. So it wasn't, you know, the pandemic definitely was what triggered my diagnosis in terms of the fact that yet, like you said, all of my structures and systems went out the window, and I had a frickin meltdown. But it was also, you know, I think it's also important when you're looking for if you think you have ADHD, because you're looking at all these memes, and you're looking at all these tick tock videos, and you're like, Can I really relate to these things? I think a huge part of getting that diagnosis is also looking back through your whole, you know, what has been going on through your whole life. And so, you know, for me, it was very cathartic looking back at middle school and being like, oh, so ADHD is why I either got a pluses or F's and nothing in between. Okay, that makes sense, you know, and really kind of looking back through this lens and realizing, yes, it was there all along, didn't just pop up because of a pandemic. But at the same time, I think it is also interest, like, I do think it's important for us to talk about what is and isn't ADHD in a time when everybody is, is really feeling like they might have it or struggling or, you know, exhibiting a lot of the same symptoms.



Dr. Emily Anhalt 32:10

Right? It's complicated one, and it's up for debate. I know that it always drove me crazy when people said, There is no such thing as ADHD, because I'm like, Oh, well, I know that there is because I've lived it my whole life. And I've met enough people who understand. So I definitely believe that it is a thing. But my philosophy around all psychological struggles is that it's very rarely zero or one, it's very rarely that you either have it or you don't, it's that we're all along all of these spectrums. And for some people, if you're far enough along on that spectrum, it's going to, you know, be a different factor in your life than it would be for someone who is not as far along. I do look back on my childhood and think, Well, clearly, this was, this was a thing that I that I grappled with. But I think that there's some compassion to be had for this new realization of how hard it is to focus in a world that's competing for your focus from every angle in every moment, in ways that weren't always true before. So, I don't know. I'm curious how you think about it, how you feel about, you know, certainly I've seen on the TIC tock videos, and I've seen things that are like, you know, are you tired in the evenings while you have ADHD? Right, like, Well, no. That's not quite it.



Katy Weber 33:27

Yeah. I mean, it's, it's been fascinating to me, obviously, since my diagnosis to sort of, to, you know, to make those connections in terms of self doubt, right. Like, I think, for me, what came

with my diagnosis was the constant questioning as to whether I actually had ADHD or if it was something else, right, because you hear that a lot, which is like, well, make sure it's not just depression, or just anxiety and then sort of like, well, you know, depression or anxiety don't just come out of nowhere. Like, I think a lot of my depression, anxiety was coming from the fact that I was undiagnosed for 45 years. And so it's been interesting to realize how much of that doubt around the diagnosis itself comes with the fact that you live a life with a lot of self doubt, because you are told that the who you are and what you are from such an early age is wrong or isn't working, and you're constantly trying to change yourself and fix yourself. And so, you know, to make those connections between like, why we, you know, are really susceptible to a lot of, you know, radical revolte resolutions, right? We'd love like, oh, every diet known to man, you know, you're like Tomorrow's gonna be different. I'm going to change you know, all of those ways in which we are always trying to escape ourselves. There is a part of me that genuinely wonders is ADHD that next escape, you know, like, am I am I grasping on to this concept? That, you know, oh, ADHD, you know, have the diagnosis is going to solve all my problems, versus really kind of understanding how the knowledge of how my brain works and what was working and what wasn't. And like I said before, like all the interesting kind of holistic ways in which I had dealt with it over the years from, you know, yoga and meditation and CBT. And like all of these different ways, that like, when I read the ways that you treat ADHD, I'm like, oh, yeah, I came up with that already. or No, I didn't think about that, you know, I just lost my train of thought. But basically, this idea that, you know, it's, it's fascinating to me to realize how much of life with ADHD comes with this like baggage of always questioning? Is it ADHD? Or is it not? Is it something else? am I faking it? You know, what? And then And then, so then I'm kind of like, Look, if you're constantly feeling that way, if you're feeling like you deeply connect with these videos, and you are looking through your whole life, and you are feeling like, Oh, my goodness, this is this could be potentially, you know, a revelation in my life that this is that this, it's that it's ADHD, and I'm not a failure, and I'm not, you know, inadequate, and I'm not lazy, like, if you are feeling like this is, you know, seen by ADHD in a way you've never had before in your life. And that's a good chance. It's a good sign that you that you have it. So I was that's my, that's what I kind of came up with at the end of the day is like, my constant doubt and constant questioning is this even ADHD is a pretty good sign that it is ADHD.

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Dr. Emily Anhalt 36:39

Yeah, I think that's super fair. And I think that, you know, it's the way I think about psychological symptoms, like anxiety, and depression is, you know, I think mainstream society sees those things as the problem. They're like, Oh, you're depressed, we need to make you not depressed, let's give you antidepressant medication, or let's give you exercises to change your thoughts. But I actually see those things as symptoms that are pointing to a problem. I don't think the anxiety and the depression are actually the problem themselves, I think they are trying to alert you to a problem, the same way that a fever is trying to alert you to a problem within the body. But if left unchecked, the fever can be dangerous in and of itself. But if all you do is silence the fever, you're not actually getting to the problem. That's how I feel about most psychological things. And I think if we try to silence our symptoms, before we understand them, we're not doing ourselves a service. And there's a similar thing with ADHD, I think, Oh, I have ADHD, okay, I will just take medication so that I don't have it anymore. I think that's a problem. I think ADHD is actually the symptoms are saying, hey, I need something different in this moment, I need to work different, I need a different environment, I need to be connected with differently, or, you know, I needed a different routine or investment. And I think if instead we

listen to what it needs from us, and you know, do our best to support ourselves in a more deep kind of way, we're doing ourselves a much better service than if we just try to silence this part of who we are,



Katy Weber 38:06

right? I feel like sometimes you need the medication to get to that awareness part, too, right. Like, I know, for instance, when I had my babies, you know, I went on SSRIs. And I'm grateful for that, even though allow looking back. In retrospect, I don't think I necessarily had postpartum depression or postpartum anxiety, I think I genuinely was just sensory overload, lack of sleep, all of these things that happened with a new mother, but I do appreciate the fact that the medication kind of got me to do the thing, you know, and so it's interesting, you know, because I have this whole range of people who women I talked to on this podcast, some of them are like, medication is the best thing that has ever happened to me. And then my personal experience was like, I don't, it didn't really do it, you know, the, the negative side effects didn't feel like they felt like they outweighed the what was doing for me. And so I ended up kind of trying a couple ones and just sort of feeling like, well, you know, I don't even know what I'm looking for. And I feel like I you know, have sort of got a nice routine going. And then, you know, some people who are just like, Nope, I don't want to do it. I'm terrified. I think, you know, you hear the word stimulant and you worry that you're going to be it's going to be cocaine and you know, you're like, one thing I don't need us to be less frantic. Or to be more frantic. You know, like, I think the word stimulant is a bit of a misnomer. So to sort of see everybody on that spectrum of treatment, it's it's been fascinating to think, but, uh, you know, I guess my original point was like, I do appreciate the fact that the antidepressant at least got me to a point where I could I wasn't in a state of overwhelm anymore and so I could address the issues and I feel like there are a lot of women who are in that state, especially like, who you know, might be in, you know, in a real state of stress and overwhelm when they get other diagnosis.



Dr. Emily Anhalt 40:03

And again, like none of this is to say we shouldn't do. You know, we shouldn't turn to medication if we need it. Same with like, if you have a really bad fever, sometimes you need to take Tylenol to bring down your fever. But if that's all you do, and you never examine why you're having those feelings, that's what I think the problem is, I think people who take SSRIs, but never do any kind of therapy to understand why they were feeling those things and never do any kind of exploration for what needs to be different. I think that's where the problem comes in. Right. And, you know, with ADHD, I think, if medication works for you, awesome, but you should also have community and you should also examine your work style, and you should also talk about how it has felt to be told that you don't learn correctly and, you know, those things are important to do alongside the medication, I believe,



Katy Weber 40:48

right? Yeah, absolutely. You know, one thing, my husband and I talk about a lot, because I'm so newly diagnosed, neither of my kids are officially diagnosed yet I treat them as though they have ADHD. We talk about it a lot. We talk about neuro divergence. And, you know, one of the

early reservations my husband had about getting a diagnosis for the kids was he was, you know, he felt like the stigma would keep them from, you know, would keep them from thinking they were smart, made it basically right. And I was like, No, you don't understand, like, it was the lack of diagnosis that made me feel like I was terrible at school. And I gave up on myself and I stopped going, you know, like, my experience with education was abysmal, for a lot of reasons. And so I'm curious, having had a diagnosis at such an early age and going into graduate work and getting a PhD? How did your awareness of the ADHD help or hinder you in terms of your relationship with academia? That's kind of a big question. I guess I just meant like, did you ever feel like it held you back? Like, oh, I can't do that, because I have ADHD?

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Dr. Emily Anhalt 51:10

No, I feel similarly as you which was, the more I understood about myself, the better. And the more I felt validated by other people who had similar experiences, the better. I just think it's possible to start to have having ADHD be such a big part of your identity that you don't make room for other things, you know, like, who I am in the world is because of more than just my ADHD. And I think sometimes it's easy to say, Oh, well, that's just ADHD, when maybe there's more to it. But I think as a whole, knowing that there were moments that I would need accommodations and things that I would need to do differently really set me up for success. I think when I was very young, like seven is very young to understand what that means. And I didn't understand what it meant. I don't know that it was explained to me, the way I would have needed to hear it to start, you know, making use of it at that age. But I remember at I think like age 12. After looking into what ADHD means more, I started doing things like I would time, how long I can focus on a boring task, before my mind starts to wander, I did these trials. And I realized that it was about 10 minutes, I can focus on a boring task for 10 minutes before my mind just absolutely goes elsewhere. And so what I would start doing is, I would never expect myself to focus on boring things for more than 10 minutes without some kind of little boost. Maybe that boost was a quick walk or checking Facebook at the time, or having a snack, or looking at something fun and funny video, whatever it was, and then I would go back to the boring task. And so just knowing like, Oh, this is how your brain works, you can accommodate it made me feel really empowered and, and made me feel like I could be proud of myself when I was able to do a complicated or tough thing that I hadn't been able to do before I had that understanding.



Katy Weber 52:58

That's I love that I know, I love to tell my kids about that the 10 Minute Rule, or at least you know, do an experiment, I feel like you know, there are ways you can kind of do these anthropological experiments on yourself. And that's how like the Pomodoro timer came about and all of those things that like so many of us swear by. And yeah, it's also been interesting to me to realize how much a stigma there is around successful people and ADHD, right with this idea that like you could you can't possibly have ADHD because you did well in school or you can't possibly have ADHD because you are a successful human in whatever you do, you know,

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Dr. Emily Anhalt 53:37

all the famous people who have it, right? I know the best people have it.



Katy Weber 53:42

And right and I'm like, that just says so much more about the person speaking and what they think you know, how they view ADHD than it says about you. So So what is it I mean, I You do so much and you run this business and and have done public speaking and but like, you know, what, what would you say you love the most about your brain?



Dr. Emily Anhalt 54:01

I what I love about my brain, first of all, is that it works differently, like uniqueness and eccentricity is what makes life interesting. And it's been such an adventure to get to know what that means for me, in terms of how I feel my ADHD is a superpower, I I am sometimes kind of surprised even at my own ability to get into these zones of hyper focus. And this is something I've heard from a lot of people with ADHD that when the conditions are right, when everything perfectly aligns, I can get five hours of work done in one hour. And then you know, I almost come out of this fugue state and I'm like, Whoa, who did all that work? You know, so that's one thing and then my ability to just switch my focus and that means more than just switching from task to task. It also looks like for example, I can go from being you know, down and sad to being really happy and excited quickly if my circumstances change because my mind can kind of make leaps and jumps. I think that I'm good at making puns, for example, because my brain will jump around in different places really quickly and bring unique things together. And I think also I am going to go to great lengths to make sure that a situation is never boring because that's what I need to do to enjoy it. And I think that benefits everyone who's in that situation sometimes. Maybe it's also frustrating, but, you know, I've, I've come to appreciate these things about myself for sure. And I'm very lucky to have people around me who understand when it is a problem and who celebrate me when it's a superpower.



Katy Weber 55:36

I love that. Are you still in touch with the teacher you talked about in your ADHD TED talk?



Dr. Emily Anhalt 55:41

Yes, you know, I sent her the talk when it came out and I went to visit her and it was very sweet. I think she was very touched. I think any teacher who's been teaching for a long time probably has many students like me whose lives they've changed and maybe they don't even realize it so I'm sure it's nice to be validated in that




Katy Weber 56:00

absolutely Oh, that's so sweet I love that? Okay, and then, you know one of the questions I like to ask everybody is if you could rename ADHD into something a little less confusing and problematic as an acronym or something else what would you call it?

 Dr. Emily Anhalt 59:21

I heard something once that I love for this which is maybe instead of renaming ADHD I'd throw out ADHD and I would say that everyone else has p p d parallel processing disorder, when the problem is not us is that everyone else can only focus on one thing at once. And we are able to parallel process many things and so actually, everyone else could perhaps use a boost to expand their minds as far as

 Katy Weber 59:51

I love that I that's great because you know, I we definitely talked about the what a low number the diagnosis rates are right now. Right? And there's a part of me that feels like it's got to be way higher. I mean, because you sort of you have these moments where you think in a certain way, or like you said, like, you know, being able to juggle things and having, you know, I had a conversation in one of the episodes where we were talking about how, like, you have multiple songs happening in your head at all time, and like, plays a soundtrack. And people were blown away that that year and you know, that idea of like you, you mean, everybody doesn't always have a song in their head, you're like, no, apparently not. But this idea that like, I feel like there's so many more of us, when you start to look at it as the spectrum of neuro divergence. And so, yeah, that term neurotypical almost like becomes sort of a sad statement right? We

 Dr. Emily Anhalt 1:00:43

like are so narrow

 Katy Weber 1:00:48

but I like that way. I like the way of flipping the flipping the diagnosis that's great. Okay, so now we talked a little bit about Koa, which is short for coalesce Is there anything else you wanted to cover about that? It's just like, how do we how can people find out more about you and koa and sign up for that and get more of you?


 Dr. Emily Anhalt 1:03:37

Yeah, absolutely. We would love to have community. We do these emotional fitness classes and therapy matchmaking. The matchmaking happens in California New York right now that'll expand soon the classes are for anyone anywhere. And you can find it all at our website which is join COA J OINCO a.com. And there you can sign up for all kinds of different classes, we do free classes and then our most expensive classes are about \$30 Each so we hope that we'll see everyone there and that we can join in on our emotional fitness journeys together.

 Katy Weber 1:04:10

Awesome. I love that and yeah, like I said I love with the kind of that's that feels like such a creative and not surprising way to kind of tweak and look at talk therapy and verbal processing in this way of just like here you know if we just looked at it as learning up our emotional fitness

in this way or just like hey, you know if we just looked at it as keeping up our emotional fitness like you would your your body right. It's such a great way of not only thinking about it, but also kind of remembering to do it and remembering to make it a habit every day that disconnect with right with habit forming.

 Dr. Emily Anhalt 1:04:48

Yeah, well we hope that we'll see you there and it's just such a pleasure to speak with you and to to see the ADHD community I think really shows up for each other and and you know, there's something special About just hearing your story being told by someone else and saying oh wow okay I'm not the only one