

Episode_9_Melinda.mp3

James Fisher: [00:00:02] Please be advised we will be discussing subjects that may not be suitable for all audiences and will include subjects that some will find challenging traumatic or triggering.

Keaton Leikam: [00:00:15] Welcome to you don't fight alone a podcast. Sharing the stories of those of us successfully living with mental illness and how we got there.

Melinda: [00:00:31] I was in the kitchen.

Melinda: [00:00:33] I was it was mid afternoon I believe I was preparing a bottle of formula for my son and I remember looking over at a set of kitchen knives in the block and I'm looking at it.

Melinda: [00:01:02] And I actually remember thinking to myself which seems insane but I looked at that large chef's knife and thought I could just end it.

Melinda: [00:01:20] My name is Melinda and my diagnosis is postpartum depression so as a standard part of postpartum care about six weeks after you have a child you go for a visit with your O.B. Joanne and that because this is something that's relatively common. There's actually a questionnaire and you usually do have to mention something about your particular struggles that you're feeling. If if you are feeling depressed in any way and they go through a series of questions and it's one of those things where. Because when you're mired in it you're thinking Well doesn't everyone this feel this way after they had a child. You feel like it. Well yes I'm sleep deprived and I'm you know having difficulties with remembering things and I'm doing some stressful so yeah. Doesn't everybody want to just occasionally give up and run away and perhaps think that they're worthless. Isn't that normal. Apparently throws her markers for dealing with postpartum depression. So that is when I would say would be my. Initial diagnosis I would say because even after that you do think there's a certain sort of perfunctory.

Melinda: [00:02:54] Part of it since it is part of the postpartum care.

Melinda: [00:02:58] It's kind of the flip side you're thinking well they have to ask you these questions and then you get this form and so of course to I'm thinking well you know if it'll get better it'll get better because especially with postpartum you're thinking well if this is what I'm dealing with and it has to get better right. Because by its nature it's temporary but there's some things you can't just 100 percent wait out for them to improve. And that's kind of what I realized it wasn't a matter where at that point I started seeking treatment right away. I that the doctor said this might be what you're dealing with just based on my experience. But I did not seek treatment for a few more months. So that's why I say initial diagnosis. I might have missed phrased. I didn't it didn't change. It was more in my acceptance that that was what I was dealing with. That changed. So when you are going through that postpartum period which again you're sleep deprived you're in some cases not all you're doing something new and frightening.

Melinda: [00:04:15] You're caring for small helpless being so you have this sense of responsibility but also you're you're feeling like you can't do anything right.

Melinda: [00:04:27] And so you're thinking well of course you're experiencing all these stressors naturally you're going to have some issues in handling it. But I'll get better with handling it. I'll learn I'll grow. It will be fine. But even though your sleep does improve even though you start to get a little bit more of the hang of it that doesn't automatically mean that suddenly you're dealing with everything better. And that was my experience.

Melinda: [00:04:57] I felt like I was my external circumstances were improving but my internal circumstances were actually worsening.

Melinda: [00:05:19] I had never had suicidal ideations or anything prior. I had never. Thought to myself that that that's something I'd never experienced and it scared me because I didn't. I knew that that wasn't my rational mind talking that that somehow something else was at play. And so it was at that point that I decided I would get in touch with the therapist and be more proactive about my mental health at that point because it became quite clear to me just with that thought that I was not operating in my right mind. I was not myself. I will say I only went to a couple of therapy appointments as a result of that because I was because of the hurdles in seeking treatment at a time when your schedules in flux when your body's in flux when a lot of things were in flux some personal in my situation. But I think every single person I've talked to or being dealing with postpartum issues has described the additional challenges that that can pose. Part of my in terms of clinical treatment that I received yes I did not go on any medication. That's partly complicated by the fact that you can only take certain things when breastfeeding. So that's another hurdle that can come up in regards to postpartum care. But for me a lot of it was being honest about my mental emotional and physical needs in that you when you have a baby your.

Melinda: [00:07:17] Your focus is what you're trying to keep the baby alive. Right. Which I think you have to remember you've got to keep yourself alive too. It's the whole you put on your oxygen mask first analogy and it's very easy to forget.

Melinda: [00:07:33] And I think sometimes when dealing with depression it's even easier to forget because it's like well I don't matter like at least I can do this at least at least that's the one thing I can do. But you are kind of neglecting yourself. And so I did make a point of it to make sure I was reaching out to friends. I'm a very social person by nature. I realized I needed to be connecting with people outside my house. There is a bit of a cabin fever aspect of it too that I think me and any of my friends who've been through PPD have described where you feel you know those walls kind of closed in on you it doesn't matter how big your house is it doesn't matter how many people you have helping you there's just that feeling that your walls are around you and they're closing.

Melinda: [00:08:51] I had to open my walls.

Melinda: [00:08:53] I had to re tell friends I was struggling. I know I did go to a couple of therapy sessions which were helpful but sometimes even just the act of admitting that I need help. I'm not dealing with this while I'm struggling. That alone was helpful. And this might be fairly specific but I hope it's helpful to someone for me. Breastfeeding was actually a big component of it. It think it threw off my hormone balance. I noticed a marked difference once I stopped because I did end up getting a job. I went back to work.

Melinda: [00:09:42] My ability to breastfeed was limited and the whole time. Anyways I had to supplement with formula. I couldn't just do it the natural way and so much of the societal programming right now is just about. If you can't do this the right way the natural way then you're a failure. Everything is geared toward the if you don't do X. If you don't do y if you don't do Z you're a failure.

Melinda: [00:10:10] No wonder so many people go through postpartum depression because the entire the entire mommy industry is geared around that lake with almost any industry. I think there's all this programming that you are not inherently good enough.

Melinda: [00:10:29] If you are even slightly struggling with the idea the fears that most parents have that I will I measure up will I be a good parent. Will I be able to take care of my child and

you're getting all this programming and you're dealing with hormone imbalances. It's just a really great recipe for ending up really screwed up in your head.

Melinda: [00:11:05] For someone like me who is trying to essentially project manage an infant it went about as well as you think it would. So.

Melinda: [00:11:17] I and am part of that thing was I could use my brain at work to do the to do those things that my brain was wanting to do. I could plan and execute in our schedules and I could project manage my projects so that freed me up in a few ways from the expectations I had of myself to.

Melinda: [00:11:44] Be doing everything right with my sign and mostly focus on what was right for me with my son and the thing is I actually haven't talked about him much because he was doing just fine. He was healthy. He was happy he was hitting all of his developmental milestones. He was. He was progressing along great. He didn't want to sleep but that that's a baby. That's what they do not sleep so.

Melinda: [00:12:21] So once I kind of freed myself a little bit of perhaps that expectation I had of myself. I mean expectations of him thinking OK well I've tried this. That didn't work. So I've got to try something new and if that doesn't work then I try something new. And the thing is the children too you can try something and it works.

Melinda: [00:12:44] Until it doesn't.

Melinda: [00:12:56] I made a conscious decision I wasn't going to continue breastfeeding because for me it was a very stressful and defeating process.

Melinda: [00:13:07] And when it really it was a matter of freeing myself from expectations that actually weren't really based in reality but were based upon opinion that were that were based perhaps my erroneous ideas of what motherhood should be.

Melinda: [00:13:27] And instead I focused on well what's best for my son and what's best for myself what's best for our family. Yes I'm struggling with depression right now. It is tough and I need to reach out and get help. Things kind of started to come together and I did feel it's a cliché but like the fog lifted hands and suddenly I was feeling like myself again and more sleep deprived version of myself. But still I felt like me. I felt like I didn't feel that way a failure any more. I felt like well I might screw some things up here and there by my son's doing wow and I need to focus on that.

Melinda: [00:14:28] You get a lot of messaging about what should be right but sometimes it's about being honest with yourself and honest about what your child is putting out there.

Melinda: [00:14:39] They they can't talk when they're very tiny. Most of us when dealing with postpartum depression are dealing with preverbal children which can be part of it who you're trying to figure out what do you need. What do you want. Constantly. And so you and sometimes that I don't know is part of what contributes to it because you're doing everything to figure out what is happening with your baby and why can't I fix it.

Melinda: [00:15:09] So part of it is recognizing there is nothing necessarily to fix. It's just paying attention. Doing your best and sometimes recognizing that you you're not gonna get it right. Honestly most of the time you're dealing you're dealing with a little human and so you pay attention to the things that you can you feed them clothe them change their diapers make sure that they've got

a comfy place to sleep etc. In terms of specifically what I realized with my son he was not a Cutler.

Melinda: [00:15:50] He liked being held but he didn't like being held for long periods of time.

Melinda: [00:15:55] A lot of modern parenting if you're familiar with attachment parenting is very centered around the idea of skin to skin contact.

Melinda: [00:16:07] Baby wearing you know and I got a sling. I was thinking OK I'm going to I'm going to make sure that he feels connected to me. The thing is my son was very squirmy. He wanted to move. He wanted to be free. He did not particularly enjoy being swaddled.

Melinda: [00:16:29] He if it was a matter of being held on my chest or rolling around on the floor he preferred the latter and he rolled over after three and a half months because he just wanted to be rolling on the floor. So part of it was recognizing I. There's things that I'm trying to do but I've got to pay attention to this little guy here who's telling me through his actions. I would just like to roll around on the floor a bit. I just I want to go and explore and do. And that's kind of the interesting thing is about learning your child's personality because some kids love to be swaddled and held constantly and and that was not my son.

Melinda: [00:17:15] He also never slept a lot. Some when you look up what is average sleeping time for a newborn which I did because I was worried they say 10 to 20 hours.

Melinda: [00:17:30] That's like a cable service window of time.

Melinda: [00:17:34] In terms of what you should expect and I recognize that nobody knows anything.

Melinda: [00:17:42] When I read that so focused on this almost Silicon Valley disruptive style of trying to idealize the perfect way in which to do things. We get focused on performance improvement and and I think that directly contributes to so much of the. The mental anguish that a lot of and I will say parents but I think particularly.

Melinda: [00:18:27] Mothers experience because it's this dual expectation of you're going to do everything right and you have this this right and this that right. But it should be natural for you sure OK.

Melinda: [00:18:40] That works. Much of the information that so you would find from parenting blogs mommy blogs and things in that genre it's not about.

Melinda: [00:18:55] If you didn't have insecurities about it they wouldn't make any money. Think about the motive.

Melinda: [00:19:01] Is this person truly trying to edify me encourage me help me with things that I may have questions about.

Melinda: [00:19:10] Or is this trying to target things that I'm not sure about insecure about and as a result. Sell me something.

Melinda: [00:19:22] Per.

Melinda: [00:19:23] Perhaps get me into a way of thinking that would make me more prone to let's say sign up for a bunch of classes. I think that there are things that can be helpful to people

absolutely I took a couple of parenting classes at the hospital that were extremely helpful and they came from a nonjudgmental encouraging place and I think I think looking for resources in that because there's no stopping you. Once you decide OK well I want to learn what I can. You're you're going to look by. I think I think the thing is looking for resources that are edifying to you and recognizing when it's just a matter of people trying to keep judgement onto each other in order to feel more superior. And for God's sake stay off any Facebook discussion regarding anything parenting related. It's a more mass of insecurity and judgment and people who are trying to feel better about their choices so they will deride other people's choices. I think if you if you are trying to be a good parent you will likely be a good parent because you are making the attempt you are thinking about it.

Melinda: [00:20:39] Most bad parenting comes from neglect and comes from not caring about what you do with your child it doesn't have to do with okay. Am I breastfeeding or formula or my baby wearing or free range parenting or whatever it's about. Are you trying to really do the best thing for yourself and your kid. Recognizing that that is different for everybody. There is no formula that's going to work for everyone and it took me a long time to really absorb that that there there's not one thing that's going to work for everybody. So yes there's a lot of bullshit out there in terms of what you should do what you shouldn't do. But I think a lot of it is designed to make you not trust your gut. If you really tap into that and rely on people who you know and you know who you know care about you reach out to the people who you know are in your corner and on your side because sometimes you can't trust your gut fully when you're dealing with depression when you're dealing with that fog. So talk to the people who love you and don't pay attention to the noise of people who don't have anything invested in you or your child. Stay off the Internet. Because it is a nightmare hell scape of people's opinions that don't matter. You have to learn how to filter the noise. I think I think that's one of the things that you really learn. I think it's something everybody kind of needs to learn. But when you're especially when you're in a very vulnerable place you don't recognize how vulnerable you are. And sometimes it's just just cutting off some of the information that's just not helpful. If I were to tell Melinda six and a half years ago I would say relax. It'll be OK. Your son's gonna be fine and you're gonna be fine too. You don't have to get everything 100 percent right for you to be a good mother. You don't. This is not a test in school. This is not some sort of thing where you have to get a certain score and you pass and that's where you're okay. You don't have to get the seal of approval from anyone really except your child in a sense.

Melinda: [00:23:44] The thing is is that with babies if you pay attention to them they tell you how you're doing. But even that you you have to recognize their small little beings there.

Melinda: [00:23:58] They're trying to figure out things to give you give both of you a bit of grace.

Melinda: [00:24:04] You can't troubleshoot a child like a computer issue. You can't say oh well the code's broken here. That's not the way children work. And you know who's non-verbal. They can't tell you what's wrong. They don't know what's wrong. Half the time and you can do everything you can beat em change em try to put them to bed rock them take them outside take them for a drive you can do all kinds of things and sometimes it works and sometimes it doesn't. Sometimes it works yesterday won't work today because they are people and sometimes it's recognizing that they're a little people they're going to do their own thing there and in turn you have to respond to them like they're people saying well you're having a bad day because sometimes we all have bad days and you can feed yourself and you can take a shower and you can do all those things. Listen to the people who are telling you it will be all right. Because I did have those people in my life. I was very fortunate but my brain didn't want to hear them. My brain wanted to listen to things that would validate that depression beast that would say yeah you're right you're not good enough you're not you're failing you you're not going to be a good parent you don't know how to do this you should just really just give up maybe just leave that that might be the best. And I think sometimes when

you're in that low place you kind of inadvertently seek out those things that validate that negative impression of yourself.

Melinda: [00:25:59] Don't listen to that. It's not going to lead you anywhere good. If you're seeing something that's saying that you're worthless that you're not measuring up that you're failing that. Recognize. That. And I'm saying this to my past self recognize that.

Melinda: [00:26:21] As the the the horrible enemy of yours that you don't want to listen to it's not telling you the truth.

Melinda: [00:26:31] It's just agreeing with the worst parts of you. Don't listen to those who agree with the worst parts of you. Listen to the people who love you who are telling you the things that you really do need to hear.

Melinda: [00:26:45] Even if you think they're wrong they're not right.

Melinda: [00:26:50] You kind of wonder. So yeah I would. I would tell myself in the past to consider who really cares for me. If even if it wasn't myself at the time and listen to those who really did.

Melinda: [00:27:34] I think that there's a lot in terms of societal expectations of women that get kind of crystallized in this one particular moment where you're very vulnerable. You don't have the mental stamina at that point to fight against everything that kind of conspiring against you messaging wise that you get all the time. I think especially as a woman in our culture you're getting constant messages that you don't measure up whether it's from you parenting blogs whether it's from beauty magazines whether it's fashion or what. And these are just superficial examples I could think of probably about 50 more if you gave me a chance.

Melinda: [00:28:19] But suddenly you don't have the resilience to fight that anymore. And I think that's where a lot of it comes from to be honest.

Melinda: [00:28:28] I think it's you are you're constantly having to kind of be vigilant and saying no you know what I can do these things I am capable I am worthy I am strong.

Melinda: [00:28:38] And when you're in a mind where you're feeling vulnerable and weak and tired and doing something very scary you do not have the capability many times to be fighting about messaging that you're constantly getting that you're not good enough you're not worth enough you're not beautiful enough you're not you're not you're not desirable enough. All of these rules that you're supposed to fulfill and suddenly you can't fulfill them. You can't. There's so much joy to be found in the moments where things are good but we get so caught up in things that could go

James Fisher: [00:29:28] For more information please visit youdon'tfightalone.org.

James Fisher: [00:29:34] The you don't fight alone podcast is a production of you don't fight alone Inc. Produced and engineered by James Fisher and Keeton Leikam.

James Fisher: [00:29:42] The information presented by you don't fight alone is not intended as medical advice. If you have mental health questions please talk to a mental health professional.