

## Episode\_17\_Ben.mp3

[00:00:02] **James Fisher** 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.

[00:00:17] **Keaton Leikam** 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 here.

[00:00:34] **Ben** So right around. May 16th and a half birthday I had. The final falling out with my exceptionally abusive mother and I. At the time was.

[00:00:52] **Ben** Working two different jobs from myself. There was a paper boy and I was a. Dishwasher and that was because my mom called my money. And I had made an agreement with her that. She would. Relinquish the vehicle for the weekend so I can go to a school dance. And do just the evening. Not even the weekend because I paid for the insurance and I put the gas in it.

[00:01:18] **Ben** And then she could have my entire paycheck from that week. And normally I was able to spirit a little bit of money away but this time I was willing to hand it over carte blanche. And everything was fine. Leading up to the night of. The dance and I got ready for the dance shower changed. Headed downstairs to grab the car keys was expected to pick up my date for. Fall Formal something similar to that. And the keys weren't where they were supposed to be. And I hollered up to my mom. And. She had gotten belligerently drunk and decided I couldn't go. And I got. Pretty upset.

[00:02:02] **Ben** And packed up my stuff and I walked out of the house. And I slept in a car for a couple of days. And then. I. Ended up staying with some friends of mine for a while. And it was a really long drawn out process for me. In terms of.

[00:02:26] **Ben** Life and emotions. My mom is. Insane saying. That's not a clinical term but. Anybody that smacks their child with a wine bottle because they refuse to say the rosary.

[00:02:45] **Ben** Is probably not the best parent. So I had to undergo a lot of testimony in the court. And psychological testing because my mom. Lied out the wazoo and made up every excuse and everything saying that I was this and I was that. I got to do. Counselling again even though I was already seeing a therapist. And. After a while. When you're in foster care. And you get one parent that's actively tried to kill you on multiple occasions and then another parent that just has a new family and doesn't really mind to.

[00:03:27] **Ben** Put up for you too much. I mean he'll send a card on Christmas but you know as. In you're in a new family in foster care and you know that they want you to be there.

[00:03:40] **Ben** For as long as you need to be there. But not. Forever. Because.

[00:03:46] **Ben** They're just helping you out. It's far and few between that you're going to get picked up out of foster care. Especially if you're sick. If you're 16 and you just came out of an abusive household. And so one night after a particular bad court case where. The judge decided that. My mom was in the right and I needed to go home. And they were going to send a squad car to my foster home to pick me up. And. Take me back to my mother's. I cut my wrists. A cut from my elbows to my wrists down the vein. I got all my my

foster parents. And they realized when the Court realized I did not want to go back. I would rather die. And go back and be tortured by. This woman who viewed. My mental illness my obsessive compulsive disorder my dyslexia not my dyslexia my hope Alexia.

[00:04:50] **Ben** And what was most likely at that time bipolar disorder type 2 but undiagnosed. She viewed that all as possession by the. My name is Ben and I am a type two bipolar and I am a purely cognitive or primarily cognitive obsessive compulsive disorder sufferer. Was diagnosed with Type 2 bipolar disorder about three years ago and I have been. Purely obsessional or pure o obsessive compulsive four. Plus twenty three years. I got diagnosed at a very early age. I actually had issues in school with reading in the opposite of dyslexia. I was hyper like sick and I had issues with. Reading whatever I could including.

[00:05:43] **Ben** Teachers. Papers I shouldn't. Passwords for computers and it got me into a little bit of trouble. And the numbers that I would read in the words of a great group of people I had. And I ended up going to see a therapist around the age of six or seven. And I got diagnosed as purely obsessional obsessive compulsive among which anxiety is mental sheer. Being diagnosed at an exceptionally early age was difficult in the sense that I. Was detached from my peers and my classmates immediately.

[00:06:24] **Ben** With my form of peer. Oh I have existential anxiety. I don't have anxiety about harming others or things happening on a daily basis I have X and central anxiety about asteroids and in the future. Currently we're getting ready to build the Mars and the moon landing missions and whatnot and I just have anxiety about people that will colonize that. I have kids and they'll land on the moon and my daughter Olivia wants to dance on the moon particularly she wants to be one of the first astronauts to dance on the moon. And I just get this overwhelming dread and even as a child I would think about you're young you think I want to go to space I want to go on adventures and then you get these intrusive thoughts of there's no oxygen in space there's no retreat from space there's nothing in space but a vacuum of nothingness and these. Watching Jurassic Park Star Wars anything that are detrimental to being young the overwhelming sad scenarios of this doomsday plot wouldn't so much affect me but the little things that would happen along the way to the people in it were what I would notice and their connections to each other and the existential almost awe that we all kind of carry with us of what we want to be who we want to be how we perceive the world how we love the world how we hate the world. It was like suddenly I could understand and see our connections to it and no one else could. And this greatly isolated me from my friends from the people I cared about. And it took. Probably six or seven more years into middle school or high school before I realized that I could articulate with the world. In my own way as long as I took my time and didn't overwhelm the people with all of the thoughts that were rushing through my head on a constant basis because the anxiety never goes away you. You translate it into either something productive or it destroys you. And you can think about it as a driving force or the destructive force. And so I learned to take that anxiety of and that compulsion to think and read and that analytical mind. And I devised ways to be creative. I built robots learned to make things I tried to enjoy the threads that I started to see between people. This friend had an interest in this. This friend had an interest in this. They may not know each other well they should meet. They're going to benefit from that. And it became. Over almost excuse excuse me half a decade or more it became this understanding that. I compulsively needed to understand the world and I needed to deal with the world and I wasn't always going to be able to do that on my own so I needed to seek out the proper ways of identifying when it was too much. When I was being overwhelmed when I was caught up in a cycle of my own repetitive thoughts that were intruding and with pure Oh you you have

you don't have the overt compulsions of touching doorknobs or washing your hands repetitively it's cover compulsions. So it's more from myself on really bad days. I count all the light poles while I'm driving and I have to multiply them or if I see a number on a sign that I've read because I compulsively read with my epilepsy as well I begin to multiply that number by Nine or Seven or another random number I've seen and I can't help but do that because of the cognitive portion of that Purell. And it really wears me down. To the point where you feel like you've run a marathon against your will and it's your own brain telling you to do it and you have to identify when it comes on in white. If you can why it's come on and then how. If I can't necessarily put a stop to this anxiety attack to this compulsive thought how can I work through it. And arguably the biggest thing for me was learning about the age of 16 was as simple as it was as a therapist finally told me as you are not your compulsive thoughts you are not the things that are pushing their way into your mind. They are just that they are intrusive compulsive thoughts and you can acknowledge them and then move on with them. And that was eye opening to me. It was the understanding that I can take. This thought that I need to and I still do have the thoughts that I need to lock my door multiple times or check it but it's more of. Is is is our bank account OK. It's the existential threat that comes in there. And so I tried to use it to weaponize my life in the sense of productivity. I want to if I'm having anxiety about our bank account being withdrawn or us having our identities stolen which is. I go through extreme lengths already to protect my I.D. but with my wife and I and I've worked to communicate with her very openly and I say I am I'm having a nightmare that somebody has taken our credit card number or debit card number and bought a house in the Keys or something crazy like that. And it usually starts with that simple intrusive thought. You know if I can address it it runs away and it takes me with it. And it.

[00:12:23] **Ben** Holds me hostage the entire time. I. Want I. Cut my wrists. And I tried to take my life.

[00:12:44] **Ben** I found out how wrong I was. Because I had friends. And I had people that thought of me as family coming out of the woodwork. I had my best friend from high school. His parents. Intervened and said that they would rather face criminal charges than let me go back there and they straight up spirited me out of the hospital. They were for all legal purposes without my foster parents knowledge. They spirited me out of there and took me to another city and I was out of that city. I was out of my my hometown away from my mom illegally for four days while we had to fight a court injunction. Excuse me three days one of which I was in the hospital and thankfully they were able to release me back to my foster parents without my mom being there. But it was terrifying. It was. The darkest moment in my life and it is not something I think of. Probably. But it is something that I do think of and I try to share it with others. Because it reminds me. Again I know I keep saying it but that communication helps. I.

[00:14:09] **Ben** Was ashamed at of the abuse I was suffering at the hands of my mom.

[00:14:31] **Ben** After the suicide attempt I had.

[00:14:37] **Ben** A bit of a struggle. It wasn't an overnight click in my head that mattered to people and that I should stick around.

[00:14:47] **Ben** I had a kid that was two years younger than me. And his name's Kenny. It's good kid. Um can you if you're listening.

[00:14:58] **Ben** I still think about your brother. I'll be doing well. You skateboard with you. But he found out that I tried to commit suicide. And I came over to my house.

[00:15:09] **Ben** He just cracked. And he didn't understand. He didn't know. P..

[00:15:19] **Ben** He had known me for years and he had no idea that the abuse I was suffering.

[00:15:26] **Ben** And.

[00:15:29] **Ben** It kind of dawned on me that there is probably a lot of other kids who. Don't have a platform or a voice. Who don't. Have somebody to stick up for them or reach out and help them out whether they're in a situation now still with their original parents or they're even if they're in foster care and they don't have somebody looking out for them.

[00:15:55] **Ben** I realize that. Can you looked up to me and he was.

[00:16:01] **Ben** As weird as it sounds like my ward in the neighborhood he was like my buddy he was two years younger than me and I looked out for him.

[00:16:10] **Ben** And he had the realization that I could go away at any moment. And he didn't know what to do with that. So he ran to my house and cried and we. He broke down because he didn't know what to do. In this light bulb kind of clicked on in my head. And this is like I said it wasn't immediately. This is a couple months afterwards. This is after the court stuff it kind of died down. And I hadn't shared very openly that I had tried to take my life. It kind of got out on its own a little bit but.

[00:16:48] **Ben** I realize that.

[00:16:52] **Ben** If I talk about this and I tell anybody who will listen.

[00:16:57] **Ben** Whether that's a stranger on the bus or my doctor or my wife or all you listeners.

[00:17:08] **Ben** The information that. I suffered.

[00:17:14] **Ben** And was too ashamed to talk about it. And I suffered from. Intrusive thoughts of no maybe. Maybe I am evil because it's being hammered into your head as a kid by a parent. And then I realized as I got out of it.

[00:17:34] **Ben** If I tell people that. That's not okay.

[00:17:39] **Ben** That happened to me. Maybe somebody else will listen and say maybe I shouldn't smack my kid around. Maybe if my kid says that he has anxiety about jumping off the diving board I won't ridicule him at home to just jump in the pool and stop being a wimp. Maybe I'll walk him through it and say what's bothering you about it.

[00:17:59] **Ben** Maybe I can take my trial. And help to teach others to just ask. To just open that door. The worst thing that anybody's ever gonna say to you is no.

[00:18:15] **Ben** I had asked Kenny. Are you OK.

[00:18:20] **Ben** Because he came to me worried about me and I didn't realize for him how much I affected him. And when I said Are you OK. I learned that his home life wasn't great. It wasn't the worst but he was having anxiety about his parents having issues. And he didn't know. What he was going to do without the safety of coming to me and just riding their bikes around the neighborhood. But at the same time he didn't know it was OK to come to me and say Man my parents are fighting and it's it's really got me down and I don't know what to do.

[00:19:03] **Ben** And it wasn't.

[00:19:05] **Ben** It wasn't a perfect light switch. It wasn't like I turned into. But the world's greatest person overnight. But I realized that I needed to shut up a lot more and listen. And then when I needed to. I needed to ask just the simple question of.

[00:19:25] **Ben** Are you okay.

[00:19:27] **Ben** Because so many times. I carry the anxiety of other people with me. If. But if somebody I know has an issue in their life I can't help but not compulsively think about it. And the best thing that I can do with that compulsive thought intruding my mind at every moment of every single day is that I can try to translate it into good. So if I have a friend who dislikes their job and they want they're talking about how much it makes them uncomfortable and they want out of it. Well that bothers me. I think about that constantly and I think. You know how my little brothers really really dislike the work at the factory. He he's just gotten injured twice. He doesn't want to be there it's a hard environment. You know he was really enjoying being at the bike at the bike factory and now he's over at a glass factory and it's just a different environment. Oh that can keep me up at night if I don't if I don't put a stop to it. And so how I can put a stop to it is I can take it and be productive and I can say OK give me your resumé. I want to touch up your resumé for you. I can't go get you a job but I can review your resume. I can touch it up. I'm sitting at home. I'm disabled. I can help. I can I can ask the questions because of the things that have happened to me that people don't want to ask.

[00:21:01] **Ben** If everything in my life the anxiety the depression any of the abuse I suffered as a kid if any of it ever means anything. Hopefully it means that for a moment I'm able to make somebody feel better about their mental health about the even if it's a temporary depression. Hell I bombed this grade in school I bombed this test. My parents are going to be upset are they really are they gonna be so upset that they'll never speak to you again. Are they are they willing are they willing to disown the life they brought into the world because you got a B instead of an A and that was a conversation I had with my friend senior year of high school he got a B instead of an A and he was worried that his parents were going to physically disown him like drop legal paperwork and I had to be like you're going to college you're going to a better college than ninety nine percent of our classmates that's you have extracurriculars I was on the robotics team with you I was in advanced classes with you of everybody in our school that didn't screw around for the last four years it's you this bee will not make your parents disown you if anything knowing your parents they'll be like Yeah of course you're gonna get a B but we get caught up in our own heads and the perceptions we have of other people and what they're going to think of these actions and oh my goodness it's it's going to be too much and sometimes all it takes is that initial phrase is. Are you OK or sometimes.

[00:22:39] **Ben** I'm not OK.

[00:22:47] **Ben** Knowing what I know now having pure oh and the bipolar.

[00:22:54] **Ben** I would if I had a time machine and I went back in time and I avoided all paradoxes and somehow interacted with myself. I would have to suggest that.

[00:23:06] **Ben** I need to enjoy it. I need. The anxiety.

[00:23:16] **Ben** When you when you have pure oh the anxiety is always there. It's like you're it's like your skin. You just wear it. But you what you do with it is up to you. And for me I chose to take tattoo is and put them all over my skin. I like I choose to put art on my skin and with my anxiety. I want to do the same thing. And I should be able to.

[00:23:42] **Ben** Understand that as a kid I wish I did. I wish I could go back in time and say when you're in that moment and your anxiety is telling you that you need to flee and run. And this is not a good thing. That's just the adventure of youth. That's you're supposed to ding dong ditch with your friends. You're supposed to kiss a girl under a streetlight. You know you're supposed to have. Failures that you learn from later in life. And if you obsess and have anxiety over every single situation and stuff that you take along the way. You're not present for any of them. You don't appreciate them. You don't understand them because you're so far withdrawn into your own mind of the scenario and the persona of the people that are there instead of interacting with them. You just ignore it all and focus on your anxiety and instead just enjoy it. Just. Just acknowledge the anxiety exists. Acknowledge it's there. It's like when you're gonna swing off that giant rope swing and you feel that knot in the pit of your stomach and you're like I don't like heights but I want to swim in that beautiful cool lake down there and all I gotta do is swing down but I don't like heights. I don't gotta do it. I don't want to do it. And you feel that knot in your stomach. That's not gonna be gone in a second. But now it's gonna be gone. The minute you let go of that rope and you splash into that cool water because it. It's just a moment. It's just a moment. And if you walk away from that moment that anxiety is just going to keep repeating on itself. It's just going to keep building the anxiety of doing it. Do I look bad to people. Do I look bad because now I didn't jump into the lake. Should I feel bad because I didn't have the audacity to do it. Should I. Do I need. Do I need to go home and toughen up. Do I need to work on jumping off of things. What what needs to happen instead. Just acknowledge that that Excite is there. It is in your stomach. It is there to tell you that this is happening but it doesn't have to prevent you from it happening. You have to enjoy those moments. If if little me ever ever somehow gets a hold of. This tape fallen through a time loop back to young me somewhere in the 90s. This is all you gotta do man. Just relax just. It sounds counterintuitive but just relax.

[00:26:17] **Ben** It. It's what has to happen.

[00:26:30] **Ben** We have to talk to each other. We have to communicate.

[00:26:33] **Ben** And you can't be afraid of having that pride. You can't be afraid of. What people might think of you. Because I can guarantee you. Thousand. Times.

[00:26:47] **Ben** Over. Every person in my life. Has thought at one time or another. I have a problem. You can be as patient as you want. With somebody who is sick. Or ill. Or upset. Or anxious. But sometimes you really do need to give specifics. And that doesn't mean. Running away from them. But that means. Giving them as little as five minutes to literally call from an anxiety attack where you give them a hug.

[00:27:23] **Ben Or.** Taking the time to listen.

[00:27:35] **James Fisher** For more information and to donate please visit [youdontfightalone.org](http://youdontfightalone.org). You Don't Fight Alone is sponsored in part by mentally chill an improv team talking about mental illness and how it's so hard but no one likes to bother anyone about it. Be prepared to be bothered. Find them on Facebook dot com slash mentally chill improv Instagram at mentally chill improv and at Voodoo comedy beginning this September.

[00:28:03] **James Fisher** 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. 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.