

A sunburst graphic with numerous thin, light gray lines radiating from a central point behind the text.

Healthy Moms Podcast

BY **Wellness Mama**[®]
simple answers for healthier families

Episode 141: How to Accept Yourself, Foster
Community and Be Unlimited with Dr. Mark
Atkinson

Child: Welcome to my Mommy's podcast.

This podcast is brought to you by Vivos. This is something we recently invested in for our entire family and we are absolutely loving it and here is why. So, data shows that the nutrition we receive in utero determines our palate development and how narrow or open our airway and jaw structure are. So a narrow mouth, jaw and airway increase the chances of needing braces, of getting sleep apnea, breathing difficulties and much more. But it was pretty much assumed that your jaw structure was set in stone once you were born or for sure after the first couple of years of life. But Vivos has found that not only is this not true, but they created a non-invasive, non-surgical, easy way of widening the maxilla, the jaw and the airway. So for our kids, this means that they get to avoid the braces that my husband and I both had and for my husband, this means his sleep apnea has disappeared and he stopped snoring, which is a bonus for me. I'll be writing more about this soon but you can check them out, in the meantime, at wellnessmama.com/go/vivos

This podcast is brought to you by Phat Fudge. If you've never tried it, this is essentially coffee meats fudge meets energy bomb and it's delicious. Invented by my friend Mary Shenouda, this on-the-go food is nutrient-dense and delicious. I often travel with a few of these in my suitcase for a quick breakfast or meal if there aren't good food options whenever I'm traveling. Wellness Mama listeners can get a discount 20% off with the code "wellnessmama" at wellnessmama.com/go/phat-fudge

Katie: Hello and welcome to "The Healthy Moms Podcast." I'm Katie from wellnessmama.com and I'm here today with Dr. Mark Artkinson, who is an internationally-renowned integrative medicine physician. He is also a Human Potential teacher and author of "True Happiness" as well as several other books. He has created a five-week online personal development training called Be Unlimited with founder and CEO of Bulletproof, Dave Asprey, and we'll talk about that. But at the heart of the training is learning how to work with our mind state, our biology, and our habits in ways that increase our wellbeing, our energy, our calm and our confidence, and decrease stress, tiredness, overwhelm and unhealthy behavior, something we can all benefit from. And I know you're gonna love this episode. So Dr. Mark, thank you for being here and welcome.

Mark: Yes. Thank you so much for inviting me, and just providing this opportunity to talk about a subject that is relevant to everyone.

Katie: Yeah, absolutely. I got this chance to meet you last year in October actually at the Bulletproof Conference and really loved your story and loved your message. And I'd love to start with your story. Can you walk us through how you became an integrated medicine doctor and started teaching personal development?

Mark: Yes, certainly. If I'm really honest, I feel almost in a way that path has chosen me. And sometimes I feel life pulls you through the labyrinth of personal and professional experiences to bring you to where you are. And, in retrospect, we make up the stories as to why we did what we did, but there's been a part of me, even as a young trainee medical student who was really deeply fascinated with human nature, with meditation, with nutrition, just deeply curious about everything. And I always knew even as a student that eventually I would practice in a more holistic way. I'm just hardwired to ask the question, "Why is this so?"

So, if someone shows up with the experience of anxiety or depression, or they're presenting with skin problems, gut problems, my natural orientation is to ask the question, "Why? And what needs to happen?" to not just resolve these symptoms, but actually empower this human being to take great care of their health in

the future. So that doesn't come back, but also take great care of their health and their wellbeing, so they can go to a whole another level because illness, health challenges are ultimately a wakeup call and normally point to some aspect of our life, the way we live, the environment we surround ourselves in that's having some negative impact.

Another big influence for me was, again, when I was a medical student, I spent some time in the Peruvian Amazon and spent about three weeks with a Shaman there. And I experienced what would traditionally be called a mystical experience as a result of some work we did together. And it really profoundly shifted my world view, my experience of myself. I came to experience just this deep understanding that we are embedded in a profoundly important aspect of the cosmos, or the whole, and that really the deeper levels of health are about restoring our thought connection to the whole. And that was a mind-blowing experience for me, and I returned to medical school to finish up my medical training with really the context of medicine irreparably expanded.

And so, when I emerged as a medical doctor, I just knew that I would eventually go on to setup and integrative medicine practice. And as I went deeper into my own health, and I had a lot of challenges in my early adult life from anxiety and depression and addictions, as, I, in the early stages reluctantly started to face the reality of them and learn how to work more skillfully with my biology and psychology, and got the help I needed, I found that I was so much better able to help my patients. And so, a lot of the way I work with people, and a lot of the way that I teach is really borne out to my own experience of just trying to figure out this thing called life, trying to figure out this thing called health, and ultimately coming to appreciate that to be truly healthy we need to be healthy in body, mind, spirit and relationships.

Katie: Yeah, absolutely. And I think, for me, my background being in nutrition, I tend to focus on the clinical side, and to even...and I have noticed in my own life, if something is wrong I tend to like immediately go to like, "Hmm, I wonder if I'm deficient in something, or I wonder if I need..." and that's just my background and it's only been in the last few years that I've really started to understand and have to delve into for myself that mind-body connection. Because I think, especially for certain personality types, it's easy to kind of be like, "Oh, the mental part doesn't matter that much. I can power through anything. I'm fine." But can you share both through your own story and through your work how you've seen like how impactful that mind-body connection is for health and all aspects?

Mark: It's foundational and it's essential. One way of understanding is the body and the mind, it's two sides of the same coin. They are profoundly influencing each other all the time. So what goes on your psychology from your beliefs and your mindsets, to the type of thoughts you are experiencing, to the emotions that are streaming through your body, they have a physical impact on the functioning of your biology. We know this because when you are able to rest in the state of gratitude, or appreciation, or love, or care, we know there is a significant shift in our heart rate, our heart rate variability, our brain waves, and the body gets flooded with endorphins and chemicals that move us towards a higher level of health and wellbeing.

And the converse is also true as well. And, you know, over the years one of the contributions that I've really...I've done my best to offer to anyone who will listen is to help psychologists, psychotherapists, counselors understand that when someone presents to them with anxiety or any kind of mental health challenge, please, please, please look at the biology first, because so much of the way we feel, the clarity of our thinking, the mood we experience, realities we have are profoundly influenced by the health of our biology. And most of us know that. It's like if our blood sugar is low, what happens to us? If our hormones are

out of balance, if our gut health is out of balance, if we experience infections, or allergies, if there's any biologically-rooted illness, then it affects the way we feel. So really, what we've come to understand is that we have to treat our biology, our psychology at the same time, whilst also paying attention to our environment, because really the way we are at any given moment is a function of the interaction between all three.

And so what tends to happen is that health professionals come into one of those domains as their specialty. So for a doctor or a nutritionist, or an osteopath, they come in at the biological domain. If you're a counselor, a psychotherapist, you come in at the psychology side, if you're an environmental specialist, you come in that side, and really having appreciation of all of those levels, or at least working as part of a team of professionals who have that knowledge of those domains is really essential.

And so, I tend to find is that some people tend to over-focus on nutrition and put too much emphasis on nutrition and say, "Everything's down to nutritional problems," and underplay the emotional side, the spiritual side, the relation, and psychological side. And others are on the other side, which is they put everything down to psychology, into any repressed emotions, but they don't pay attention to hormones, gut health and nutrition. And really, it's ultimately about saying, it's like, "What is true for me?" And so, the deepest well of a health professional from the paradigm that I teach is to adopt the stance of being a health detective.

And so, for anyone listening to this that has any kind of health challenge, it's like your job, along with your support team, is to become a health detectives, it's like, "What is that's creating this experience and these symptoms?" And working with people who have an appreciation of the mind-body connection, who may be open to the profound importance of a spiritual or larger-meaning orientation who gets environment has an influence. That combination is really potent, and then it becomes exciting because it's not just about kind of getting rid of symptoms, it's actually about cultivating a way of being, and a lifestyle in which you enjoy a high level of wellbeing, and then you start to show consistently as the better version of ourselves. Because when we're tired, and we're overwhelmed and we're hungry, we don't show up that well, and we all know that.

And so as you start to take control of these different elements, it makes a big impact on the way we show up, and then the kind of human being that we are, because the way we show up matters and profoundly influences, as we know, the people around us.

Katie: I love that, and I love that you called it your support team, meaning like the practitioners and doctors that you work with, because I think that's something that maybe is hard for a lot of people. We're kind of raised in this idea that doctors are the ultimate authority and that what they say is definitely always true, and certainly they have a ton of knowledge and that's very often the case, but that was a big mental shift that I had to make was realizing that like just on a practical level, I'm hiring these doctors to help me, and if they're not willing to look at, like you said it, all of these aspects then maybe it's time to find a practitioner who can. I love that you call them a support team. That's awesome.

Mark: Yeah, and I was going to say, you know, we all need to feel seen and supported. And finding the right fit, the kind of people who have a similar world view and are able to be present and seeing, connect with you, and be a champion for you is really important, and everyone deserves that. So I always say, it's like, "Listen, if your doctor is not great, find someone else." That can be challenging sometimes, but it's like all of us, any of us, all of us in the personal development field, we have mentors, we have colleagues who get us and support us and challenge us, and we strive to build a community of people who get our world view, and don't necessarily

agree with it. We don't have to agree with each other, but certainly be respectful enough and mature enough to allow people to have their perspective, but we need to feel supported because life is challenging and we are designed to be in community. Take someone out of community who feels alone and isolated, and you have a recipe for distress, which over time leads to illness. So keeping connected is really the foundations of a good healthcare.

Katie: Yeah. I think that's such an important point. Do you have any tips offhand for increasing community in the modern world? Because I feel like that's something that suffered a whole lot in the last few generations, and we've recently moved to a place just for the sake of our kids having community and us having community. But, I mean, for people who don't want to move, do you have any suggestions for how people can cultivate good community in their lives?

Mark: Yeah. I think the first thing is to get really clear about what matters most to you. And that's really about you and your family getting clear about your values. I know, for us, I have two children and I'm married, and our values are health, love and connection, fun, growth and learning. And so when you're really clear about that, then you kind of orientate and you put the energy and time into those activities and others who pursue those activities. And so, you know, when you're clear that health is important, and love and connection is important, then you seek out other people who also have those kind of life values. And so, say, health is important then, you know, you go to a local health talk given by a holistic health center, and guess what? You start connecting with people who are into health. You take up meditation, go to mindfulness or yoga, you start hanging out with the same kind of people.

We're very holistically orientated, so, you know, so certainly in the past, you know, my children went to nature-based kindergartens, and you meet parents and families who embody and aspire to similar kind of values. But these days, you know, pursuing that online is really an important part of it. I'm part of a community of people who are committed to spiritual practice and living in maybe much wiser and more loving ways. But that's just what we're called to. And so we connect on a weekly basis, and it's all via Zoom or Skype, and we've never actually physically met each other, and yet we feel intimate, seen, held by each other, and certainly we look forward to.

So whilst for many of us sometimes it would be natural to kind of retract into our world and so and so forth, there are other people out there, and sometimes just holding the intention and saying to life, "Life, connect me to others who sincerely hold these values as well." And then you just set that clarity of intention, you live your values as best you can, and then sometimes those people find you, or life just re-configures itself to bring you together.

Katie: Yeah. I definitely had that happen as well. And I think you mentioned about being seen and being heard and feeling that. And I think another thing that you and I talked about the night I met you, and I'd love to delve into here, is a big struggle for women is self-acceptance and body-acceptance. I feel like much of the whole health and fitness industries, unfortunately, has a tendency to play on the insecurities that women have and their dislike of certain parts of their bodies, and you've written about this. And even as a woman, I can admit that I don't know that there have ever been times in my life where I felt completely accepting of my body, even though it's done amazing things, like grow six humans, and climb an Alp, and run races. So let's talk about body acceptance and insecurity and how can we foster a more healthy relationship with our bodies?

Mark: Yeah, I agree. And I'm so pleased you're talking about this because this is the one area that I believe we

can have the greatest impact. And there's a couple of basic foundational principles. The first thing is we are not the voice in our head. So you know how we have this mental commentary pretty much running all the time. And that mental commentary, you'll notice if you pay attention to it, is normally judging some aspect of reality. It's either judging ourselves, it's judging other people. Basically, when we perceive life through the head, it judges what it sees.

Now, the first thing everyone needs to know is that you are not the voice in the head. You're not the mental commentary. It's just programmed conditioned thoughts moving through your awareness. It's not who you are. Who you are is the aware presence of that. And so the first thing is most people have an inner critic. And there's a very simple practice that I would love everyone who hears this to try out. Every time you notice the inner critic coming up, in the moment of noticing it, smile on the inside and silently say to it, and you will literally have a physically-felt location only around the head, say to it, silently, "I see you. I accept you." And just say it once. And you're gonna discover something remarkable. When you bring acceptance to the part of you that does not accept you, it relaxes. Its power goes away.

It turns out the inner critic was created in childhood to actually keep us safe. Its inner criticism was borne out of a desire to keep you small and safe. So what served us in childhood now becomes a source of distress and suffering limitation in adulthood. And so when we consistently and repeatedly bring acceptance to the inner critic, it softens, it relaxes, and over time it actually auto-upgrades into healthy discernment, which is that it actually now will notice when you're out of integrity and tell you but without shaming and without harsh criticism.

Now, if anyone was listening to this and thinking, "I don't get how that happens. Or how could that possibly happen?" Here's the invitation for you to try it. Now, I've worked with a lot of people with very strong inner critics. A lot of people are very anxious, low self-esteem, spend a lot of time rooted in shame. They apply this and do it consistently even for one day, and many of them will come back and say, "Oh, my gosh. I feel free." Because they've had this inner critic on their shoulders, this little gremlin who's constantly at them. And when you practice loving acceptance of that part of you, its power goes away. And the bigger picture here is, the next level is, whatever arises within your experience, you start welcoming that.

So if you have anxiety come up and fear come up, notice it coming up, notice where the tension is in your body, and silently say to it, "I see you. I accept you." It's like whoever comes through the front door of your home as a guest, you welcome. And so, we go from constantly fighting our inner experience and reality, and we start learning how to unconditionally welcome it all. And in that unconditional welcoming, you will notice a relaxation and the sense of freedom. So that is really the foundational practice of welcoming to work with the inner critic. We can talk about that, and then I can really want to talk about how to bring up body acceptance as well.

Katie: Yeah. I'd love to delve into both of those more in whichever way you feel is the best one to start with. Go for it.

Mark: Great. Okay. So what I would love to offer as a practice for everyone listening to this to do, and it's a very simple process for experiencing unconditional body acceptance. Now, when I share these instructions, there's gonna be a part of you almost certainly, that's going to resist doing this. And in the moment of that resistance coming up, smile, and do it anyway. Because the ego, which is really about keeping us the same and defended, will attempt to distract you from doing this. And yet this process just takes 5 or 10 minutes, and for

nearly everyone who does this, it can be profoundly lifechanging.

Here's what you do. This is how to experience body acceptance. You stand in front of a full-length mirror, and with no one else around you, take your clothes off. And you look in your eyes in the mirror in front of you. And almost certainly what's going to happen is immediately you're going to notice tension inside of your body. Here's what you do. You place your focus on that tension, and you say to it, silently, "I see you. I accept you." And then the next thing is you've got to a sense where that trapped energy, which is just tension, wants to go to. It will want to move up or down your body. Just trust the process, there should be no effort or trying, and what you're going to discover is something astonishing. That energy, that tension that wants to move, and so allow it to move either go up or down. Get a sense of where the energy wants to exit. Sometimes it's out of the mouth, eyes, ears, top of the head, down the feet. Allow it to move out completely.

And now look at yourself again, and this time say the words, "I love you." And look in your eyes, notice where the tension is now, say, it may have gone to the chest or to your throat. Repeat the process. No effort or trying, "I see. I accept you." Get a sense where the energy wants to exit and flow out. Allow it to move out fully. And that allowing process may take 30 seconds, a minute or two. If it gets stuck, just gently massage the area. And once it's moved out of you, you're gonna notice you're feeling so much more relaxed. And you will know when you've fully released all of the blockages to loving self-acceptance. When you look at yourself in the mirror, say, "I love you and I accept you." And you will feel this alive expansiveness in your body without resistance. If it's still in your resistance there, smile. "I see you. I accept you." Soften it and release.

And this practice of releasing will actually release the blockage to unconditional self-acceptance. Now, this one level is a major shift for the majority of the human race who do know accept themselves. But be open to the possibility. This will just take 5 to 10 minutes. And it may take longer, but for the majority people it just takes 5 to 10 minutes. And you will know when the work is done because you're going to be able to look at yourself in the mirror, and say, "I love you. I accept you," and feel it in your body. And you're gonna feel like you have let go of this heavy weight. You'll experience this expansive sense of freedom and presence. And then what you'll find is that, as you then put your clothes back on and go about your day, you're gonna feel just light and possibly you're gonna experience a lot more joy and love in your heart. And then what we do is, if any remnants of self-criticism comes in, what you'll be able to so much more easy to do is notice it the moment the inner critic comes up, again, "I see you. I accept you." It will dissolve.

And then what starts to happen is you have now created new foundations for being in the world, grounded and compassionate self-acceptance. And guess what? When you're at peace with yourself, and accepting of yourself, you're gonna be a lot more accepting and allowing of other people as well, because when we live with acceptance, we naturally bring acceptance to others, and acceptance is the gateway to love and connection.

Katie: Yeah. That's so profound. And, definitely, I'm going to try it too and I'll report back to the podcast how it goes.

Mark: Oh, that'd be great. Thank you. Yeah.

Katie: You've written about something that you call "The Shadow." Is that kind of similar to the inner critic? And can you kind of explain like what it is and why we need to interact with it?

Mark: Yeah, definitely. So, in childhood we came to understand that certain parts of ourselves were not acceptable to others or to ourselves. So we hid part of ourselves away. So, for example, the rule in the family may be to never be exuberant or joyful. It's like the rule was you've got to be quiet, you've got to be conservative, you've got to be studious, you have to be...it's like if you are a certain way then we'll accept you, and you go after those kind of boundaries, then you get into trouble. And so what happens is we kind of package ourselves up in childhood to kind of get ourselves through childhood. And in adulthood, if we are gonna make the transition into becoming a psychologically healthy and mature adult because many of us arrive into adulthood biologically adults, but psychologically still adolescents, and we know we know who we are because how many times when we flip out or go into drama, or become reactive, we emotionally regress to being an adolescent or a young child. The next time you are in blame or resentment or throwing a temper tantrum, in the moment of seeing that, smile to yourself and just say, "How old am I right now?" Right, you've emotionally regressed, and we do it all the time. Any time we're engaging in blame or resentment, we've emotionally regressed.

So working with the shadow is learning to welcome back all of those exiled parts of ourselves. Now, what's incredible about life is, life will bring you the people who embody those parts. So if there are specific people or types of people in your life who trigger and activate you, if you naturally go to judge very strongly, they are pointing back to you the aspect of you that you need to turn towards and welcome. So say, for example, I was with someone who was really exuberant and very loud and gregarious, and I am in there in my kind of arrogance, going, "They should not be that way. They should be, well, kind of like me."

And if I'm overreacting to that and I'm getting tensed, they are the messenger from life designed to point out to me the exuberant part of me that I need to welcome. And so, here is an amazing practice. So, say, for this exuberance and I was denying that, and at one stage I did deny that. This beautiful practice, what you do is you just acknowledge, "Okay. This is a shadow part that's come up." You just silently say to yourself, "I am exuberance and freedom." And then an amazing thing happens. When you add freedom into whatever the quality is that needs to be welcomed back, it almost unlocks the door to that part of you coming back. It's incredible.

And we have opposed the shadow. So sometimes, you know, we overvalue certain people and qualities, "Wow, it's like, you know, that person is just so eloquent." And so we deny our eloquence. "I am eloquence and freedom." And then you feel a shift inside of you. And it's like, if you can imagine, it's like discovering one day you live in this vast beautiful mansion, and that mansion is yours. And yet you've only been living on the first floor of it. You've never been to floor two and three and peeked inside the other rooms. And so, as we start to work with a shadow, basically we start to open all the doors of our being or the mansion, and we welcome what is there.

You know, some people their shadow comes out when they're drunk, right. So these are the kind of quiet, reserved people and then they have alcohol, or they take drugs and medications, and like this other aspect of them pops out, takes over for an hour or two, and then afterwards they feel ashamed about it, and they go, "What was that? That wasn't me." Well, it was part of you, and your job is to turn towards it and welcome it back home. And so, working with the shadow is really the key to what we call self-actualizing, which means developing into a healthy, integrated functional human being who is self-accepting, who is becoming self-aware, who is waking up to a desire to basically start showing up as a wise and more loving human being.

And so there comes a time in all of our development where the old way being in the world does not serve us,

does not serve our loved ones, and we have to upgrade it. And that is what the self-actualization process is all about, and working skillfully with a shadow is an integral part of that.

Katie: Yeah, and how much probably less conflict we'll have in the world if we can all show up from that point and from that mindset.

Mark: So, here's the thing. This is the thing, right, it's like we're not doing this for ourselves. We are, but we're doing it for the whole. It's like a very profound shift happens. When we go from the attitude of, "What can I get from life? To, Life, what would you have me do? Who would you have me become?" When we shift from egocentric to life-centric, a profound thing happens. We discover one level that our life is not our life. It belongs to life. It's just that we are the custodians of this body and mind. And our invitation and job is to learn how to skillfully work with and look after this body and mind, and place it in service of life.

And so what starts to happen is, as we learn how to take care of this body and mind of ours, and that's just foundational things, it's good nutrition, it's healthy lifestyles, it's good self-care, is learning how to train our attention so we can focus on the things we need to focus. It means learning how to welcome and work with our emotions and our stress. It means knowing when to how to work skillfully with belief systems and let go of belief systems that don't serve us. It means learning how to set healthy boundaries, physical, sexual, emotional, psychological, spiritual boundaries. It means learning how to become empathic, to truly, deeply listen, and to see others not through the head, which always divides, but to see others with the eyes of the heart that see into our shared humanity.

And as we learn these foundational skills, and the reality is, we all need to do this. As we start to do this, we just start showing up consistently and imperfectly, because we don't want the perfections to get hold of this, consistently as a healthier, more conscious awakening human being. And then guess what? We will discover that our gift is to the present moment in front of us. For all of us are custodians of the slice of the present moment that's in front of us. We are there to serve that. So when we go into our heads about, "What I'm I supposed to do with my life? And what's my greater life purpose?" At the deepest level, it's about simply being present to, and serving of, the moment that's in front of us with our full attention. And so one of the greatest challenges for all of us is that we start off living within this mind-made prison called the ego itself. And we know if we're living inside of it, because we will feel separate from life.

If your day-to-day experience is feeling separate, and experiencing the world through the filter of "me and not me" and compulsory judging that, you just need to know you're living within the mind-made prison, a psychic firewall created in childhood to keep you safe that no longer serves you. And that who you are is to be discovered when you come out of your head back into reality. And the gateway practice that I teach for that, that I'd love to offer here, Katie, is called centering practice. Now, the great thing with this is you can use it throughout the day. I'm not gonna tell anyone to go away and put aside half an hour, an hour to meditate. This is, you know, it's like your everyday life is your practice. It is your teacher, and centering practice you can do all the time.

So here's the invitation. This is an incredible thing to do, and I would love everyone listening to this to try it at least a couple of times. And the golden rule is when you do these practices there should be no effort or trying. You do it with a smile on the inside. So that just helps to soften the perfectionist that many of us have. And here's what you do.

If it's safe for you to do this, you're not driving, just close your eyes, and without effort or trying just breathe down into your lower belly, allowing the lower belly to become soft whilst counting silently down from five. So you go five, four, three, two, one. Arriving in your belly, if it helps, just place your hand there, and then without going back up to your head, gently open your eyes, but keep your focus in your lower belly. And if you've dropped down into your center, in the lower belly, you're going to discover something really quite remarkable. Your mind would have gone still, you will feel grounded and centered in your body, and so much more in the present moment. And this is the experience of what I call aware presence. You feel awake, alert, centered, engaged and perfectly primed to respond to the needs of the moment.

When we feel overwhelmed by life, we feel stuck, we feel agitated, and the moment in seeing that from this day forward, what I invite you to do, is in the moment of noticing that, to smile and practice centering. Come back down into reality again, and then proceed from there. And the name of the game is this, if you ever want to feel close and connected to another human being, it is impossible to do that if you're perceiving them from the head, because the only thing you're intimate with when you perceive from the head is your own thoughts about them. You drop down to your belly, become centered, and then from there, practice looking at them. And what you're gonna notice is that you feel so much more connected to them, and they will feel felt and seen by you.

And so this very foundational skill is just simply learning how to develop a level of mastery over your attention and your state of consciousness. Very few people, apart from those who meditate a long time know how to do this. So the centering practice is something you can apply straight away, and then you discover, "Oh, my gosh. I spent all of my life living up in my head, feeling alone and isolated which is a perceptual artifact, feeling disconnected from others and very judgmental of them and others, whereas, all along, by actually just dropping into my center, I come into reality and I can see clearly. I feel connected. I feel empowered. I feel better able to respond to life's challenges this way."

And then the deal is this, when you need to use your head to think, plan, analyze, by all means, go back up to your head, have a good old think, but then when you're finished, please come back down again into your home base, which is the centering practice.

Katie: Yeah, that's great and such a simple thing that any of us can really add pretty much, like you said, any time in the day.

This podcast is brought to you by Vivos. This is something we recently invested in for our entire family and we are absolutely loving it and here is why. So, data shows that the nutrition we receive in utero determines our palate development and how narrow or open our airway and jaw structure are. So a narrow mouth, jaw and airway increase the chances of needing braces, of getting sleep apnea, breathing difficulties and much more. But it was pretty much assumed that your jaw structure was set in stone once you were born or for sure after the first couple of years of life. But Vivos has found that not only is this not true, but they created a non-invasive, non-surgical, easy way of widening the maxilla, the jaw and the airway. So for our kids, this means that they get to avoid the braces that my husband and I both had and for my husband, this means his sleep apnea has disappeared and he stopped snoring, which is a bonus for me. I'll be writing more about this soon but you can check them out, in the meantime, at wellnessmama.com/go/vivos

This podcast is brought to you by Phat Fudge. If you've never tried it, this is essentially coffee meats fudge meets energy bomb and it's delicious. Invented by my friend Mary Shenouda, this on-the-go food is nutrient-dense and delicious. I often travel with a few of these in my suitcase for a quick breakfast or meal if there aren't good food options whenever I'm traveling. Wellness Mama listeners can get a discount 20% off with the code "wellnessmama" at wellnessmama.com/go/phat-fudge

Katie: I'm curious, we talked a little bit about this when we met at Bulletproof, but I'd love if you could go a little deeper on it here during the interview, is you mentioned so many of these things originate during childhood. And a lot of the people listening, the majority are parents. So I'm curious what you're doing with your own children, and any tips you have for parents to help kids to maybe avoid some of those pitfalls that happen in childhood, or to help them work through them in a healthy way.

Mark: Yeah, definitely. Well, the first thing to say is, so my daughter is 12, my son is 6, and at one level, me and my wife are still trying to figure it out. But we're both really very committed parents and what we're starting to realize is the number one way we impact our children is by the way we are with them. And that is a direct reflection of our level of consciousness, and our mood and mind state. So the first thing is by us taking responsibility for dealing with our stress and emotions, by us prioritizing good self-care, and, you know, we meditate and various other things, that has the biggest impact on them, because what we have realized as well is like when we're stressed and tense, guess what? They're stressed and tense. When we're in our hearts and loving and present and accepting, they relax, and then their best self comes out.

So the number one thing is, of course, taking care of ourselves first and role-modeling that. But the second thing is we found it really helpful to build in family rituals. And we're kind of really big on this, and we're excited by what we've discovered with this, which is having daily simple rituals and practices and weekly practice that connect us as a family. So we spent time to go as a family to figure out what our family values are, and we talk about them on a weekly basis. You know, we do gratitude practice before we have our food at dinnertime. We just take a moment to give thanks for the food that's in front of us, and we have taught our children to really feel the gratitude. So it's not a cognitive exercise, to really feel it. Before they go to bed, we do a very brief kind of meditation and prayerful practice as well.

And the biggest thing for us as being to have quality time with our children, and most of that is about when we're with them, we're really with them. And so in my early days of being a father, I was a very distracted father. And physically then, but emotionally, spiritually simply not there. And so, what I tend to do is, this is a really good practice for anyone, it's like before you see your children in the morning, take a moment to center yourself in your lower belly. And then when they come through the door or you go downstairs and see them, look them in the eyes one by one, and then give them your greetings, like, "Good morning, sweetheart," or whatever, whatever is natural and true for you, but really look at them from presence, and it just can be like for a micro moment, and in that moment they will feel that you have seen them, and they'll feel that connection.

So those micro moments, I practice quite a lot. The other thing is, you know, as busy parents we've got a thousand and one things to do, so one thing we're found really helpful is to really look at our routines and strip away unnecessary complexity and stress. It's like, "How can we build spaciousness into our daily lives and our weekly routine so we can just hang out together, we can just be together?" You know, so we have playtime and one-on-one time together, and just fun time all of us doing different things, but raise the quality

of attention in that moment that matters most. And the other thing is we've got better at asking questions of our children.

So I think, you know, in the early days, you know, maybe because I teach a lot, you know, I'd be doing the usual thing of, you know, teaching and lecturing my children and about health and stuff, and of course, they just put up a barrier to that. And so these days I'm taking attitude of much more of just simply being curious about who they are, and waking up with the attitude of who are they today. Who is my wife today? Who am I today? And never taking for granted that I know who they are, that they are the same human beings they were yesterday.

So being curious. kind of asking questions about the day, like I take my daughter to dance class, and my most precious time with her is when I'm in the car with her. I just love listening to her and hearing about her day, what's going on with her friends. And just so I guess we're at the place now where they can share themselves with us, we're present enough most of the time, not all the time, but most of the time to hear them. And when we're busy and distracted, we'll say to them, "Listen, you know, I can't hear right now, but I really want to and we'll come back to it later on," and then the key is, of course, to do that.

So, you know, I think it's, doing this, Katie, it's kind of imperfect, but we're kind of doing our best like many parents, but I think the big thing is good self-care, clear about family values, shared family rituals, and quality of presence when we're with our children.

Katie: Yeah. Such great tips. And I wanna make sure we leave time to talk about your new course, which is called Be Unlimited, because I feel like it probably embodies a lot of the things that you've mentioned. But with the time that we have left, can you explain what that is and kind of take us through the five principles of the Be Unlimited program?

Mark: Yeah, of course. So I work very closely with Dave Asprey, who will be familiar to some of the listeners. And Dave is the CEO of Bulletproof, and we met a couple of years ago on Vancouver Island where I used to live. And we really have a shared commitment to improving the quality of lives of millions of people on quite a scale. And one of the aspirations for us was to create a very practical experiential program that could be made available to thousands of people, that would teach them some of the very simple practices and principles, the kind of stuff I've been sharing here already, in ways that people can apply to their lives, and experience very positive shifts in their wellbeing and their sense of inner freedom and vitality in a short period of time.

And so we created this five-week program we call Be Unlimited, Your Bridge to Personal Freedom and Self-Mastery. And it has been such a joy to record. And it basically takes you step-by-step through the kind of things we've started to explore here. And at the heart of it is about waking up to ourselves as aware presence. We're not ego. We have an ego, and most of us experience life through the ego, but it's not who we are. So the first module and the first step is about how to wake up to aware presence. So I'll teach you for a specific practices to do that, and it's really simple and straightforward. The challenges, of course, how we remain stable in that connection to aware presence. And that's where the subsequent weeks come in.

So then we go into powering up. So it's one thing to be able to shift in this internal state of consciousness on demand, we learn that in week one. But then we need a lot of energy. So a lot of people struggle with energy issues, you know, they're kind of tired, and you know what we're like when we're tired. When we're tired we get easily distracted and we tend to kind of revert to our default habits of watching too much TV, eating sugar,

you're not exercising, and that kind of stuff. So we have a whole week, they work on with Dave on teaching people how to really manage their energy more skillfully, how to generate a lot more energy.

And really, there's three main sources of energy. There's biological energy which comes from our food, nutrition and our mitochondria, so we take a good look at that. The psychological energy, which is about engaging in practices and things that are meaningful to you, that excite you and enthuse you. And then there's spiritual life force energy which is, as we learn to live more from the heart and from integrity and live in harmony with the way things are, with life itself and open up to that, and maybe start loosening our private agenda and our propensity to control, but actually relax a bit more into the flow of life, whilst taking care of our body, what we find is that we tap into this deeper, more nourishing wellspring of energy and aliveness. So we explore that in week two.

And then week three is about cleaning up. And this is the most challenging but liberating part of the training program. I teach you how to systematically start cleaning up your environment. That means getting rid of all the chemical stuff. It also means de-cluttering as well if that's something that's relevant to you. I teach you how to start cleaning up your biology, which means cleaning up your diet, your lifestyle, and then the most challenging piece, but the most liberating bit, how to clean up your psychology. You see, many of us go throughout life holding down, repressing what we experience. And that experience remains within us like a beach ball we're holding under water, and loads of us have hundreds of these beach balls we're holding under water. And guess what? That's really hard work. It takes a lot of our energy. So I've created a process for systematically welcoming and working with these beach balls. And the releasing practice I showed earlier on is at the heart of that.

There, into week four, which is about growing up. So you know how many of us have a whole bunch of habits that are outdated, do not serve us, bring out the worst of us. So I'm going to teach you a process for upgrading those habits. So, basically, we'll be more...become healthier, more functional, psychologically mature human beings, and with that we grow in awareness, and then we're actually of greater service to others.

And then the final week is about showing up. And it's waking up to the possibility, "Is it possible that life is a custom-designed curriculum for our learning growth, awakening and enjoyment?" And when we start to relate to life in this way, we start to wake up more to reality, we connect with our authentic power and our gifts, and we start to orientate more to not, "What can I get from life?" but, "What can I offer life?"

And so, it's that five weeks is held within a community of people who going through the same thing. I escort you through it personally. There's videos, there's resources, there's practices. And what we really hope is, by the time you emerge from that five weeks, that you feel empowered, you experience a much higher level of serenity and wellbeing. Whatever challenge you're facing, or will be facing in the future, you'll have resources to deal with it so much more effectively. And also, hopefully, along the way you're connecting with other like-minded people that you can continue to develop along with as well, So that's the nutshell of Be Unlimited. And you can go to beunlimitedtraining.com to find out more.

Katie: Yeah, absolutely. We'll have links in the show notes as well with wellnessmama.fm. And I believe there's a special offer we'd put together for listeners. They can find that in the show notes as well. But I always like to end with everything we've talked about, and if someone really resonated with any of these points and feel like this is work they need to do, what would be your first baby step? Or where you would encourage everyone listening to just start to make steps in this direction?

Mark: Yeah. I'll say the first thing is to understand that beneath and beyond, the constant mind chatter and the voice in your head is an ocean of calm and wellbeing that you can start to access by coming out of your head into the present moment through the gateway of the lower belly using centering practice. And the more you do that, the more you disengage in helpful thoughts and stories and dramas and narratives and keep coming back to reality, the more empowered and better able you'll be able to deal with whatever is in front of you.

Katie: I love it. Dr. Mark, thank you so much for being here. This has been a really fun episode and I know it's going to help a lot of people. I appreciate your time so much.

Mark: You're welcome.

Katie: And thanks to all of you for listening, and I will see you next time on the "The Healthy Moms Podcast."

If you're enjoying these interviews, would you please take two minutes to leave a rating or review on iTunes for me? Doing this helps more people to find the podcast, which means even more moms and families could benefit from the information. I really appreciate your time, and thanks as always for listening.