



Episode 471: Dr. Jen Forristal on Umbrella
Parenting and Raising Children
With Strong Coping Skills

Child: Welcome to my Mommy's podcast.

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Katie: Hello, and welcome to "The Wellness Mama Podcast". I'm Katie, from wellnessmama.com and wellnesse.com. That's wellness within an E on the end. And this episode is on a really cool new concept called umbrella parenting for raising children with strong coping skills. I'm here with Dr. Jen Forristal, who is a naturopathic doctor and the founder of the Umbrella Project, which is a well-being curriculum that is currently running in hundreds of schools internationally. And it's designed to help empower children and their families to have the tools for emotional well-being, which is especially important right now. I've heard from a lot of you whose children are struggling just as many adults are with the effects of the last couple of years.

And Dr. Jen has worked extensively with schools, researchers, organizations to develop these mental wellness strategies. And we really go deep on some practical ones today. She gives some really, really, really helpful parenting tips and ways that we can work with our kids at different ages, phrase things at different ages to help them with the phase of psychological development that they are in, while also maintaining open lines of communication and building tools for coping, strength and resilience throughout their lifetime. I learned a lot, made a lot of notes at wellnessmama.fm. You guys can check those out. And without further ado, let's join Dr. Jen. Jen, welcome. Thanks for being here.

Dr. Jen: Thank you so much for having me, Katie. This is exciting.

Katie: Oh, I'm excited to chat with you. And from the research I've done on you, even more excited. I think to start broad and kind of narrow down, I have so many questions for you. But to start broad, just kind of can you define what the Umbrella Project is?

Dr. Jen: Yeah, I would love to. So, I guess early on in my practice, I started working with families and kids quite a bit and realized that there wasn't a really easy way to talk to kids and families about stress and coping skills at all really. I had a lot of eyes glazing over in my private practice, as you kind of delve into those topics. So, I realized we needed a really centralized way to explain how all these pieces fit together. And that's where the Umbrella Project and the umbrella effect was really born.

So, the umbrella effect is the effect of having an umbrella of coping skills to help you deal with life's challenges. And when we look at all of the coping skills, that's really what they do. They kind of weave together things like gratitude, and empathy, and cognitive flexibility, and growth mindset, and purpose, all the different coping skills, provided another little piece of an umbrella, is what I like to call it, that help you feel empowered in the face of life's rainy days. So, you know, when stress comes along our path, we're not at the mercy of that. We can really tap into these different coping skills. So it became a metaphor that really launched a curriculum for schools. So we have hundreds of schools that run a curriculum that teaches this concept to kids and then all of the different coping skills that we can rely on. It's become a way of parenting. I call it umbrella parenting because I think we need to redefine a little bit the fact that it's okay to protect your kids from challenges. Umbrella parenting is really about knowing when to step in with your umbrella of protection and when to let your kids struggle a little bit so eventually they build their own umbrella. So it's become a whole movement around building your umbrella of coping skills.

Katie: And, okay, so from there, I'd love to know more about, like, it seems like parenting is at least perceived as more difficult these days, whether I'm guessing it might actually be because there are a lot more factors to navigate. But I do think, like, my experience with parenting seems different and maybe more difficult than how my grandmother, for instance, talked about parenting. So, is that actually the case? And if so, why is parenting more difficult these days?

Dr. Jen: You know, I think there's a lot of factors that roll into that. But one of the biggest ones, and I know you've talked about this with some of your great guests that you've had in the past, but I think the role that technology is playing in our kids' lives right now is making it so that we are parenting into a space that we didn't really experience in the same way that our kids are experiencing it. So, you know, the role of having a smartphone very early and connecting with your peers through that device is very complex in its nature and the way that we develop, our brains develop. So I think, as parents, first and foremost, we really don't fully understand the dynamics of the relationships that our kids have and the role that technology really plays in that. And then, secondly, I just think the world is changing more and more and more quickly, exponentially quickly. And one of the skills as parents that I think we really need to be teaching our kids is adaptability and how to really quickly pivot in the face of things changing, right? And I think when we were raised, it was more, like, you know, you're gonna become a doctor, and there's a clear path in front of you. And, as a parent, I know how to coach you along that path. And there's kind of checkpoints along the way. And it was, I think, a

little easier. Now, when we're trying to teach our kids to be adaptable, I know a lot of adults and a lot of parents who don't have that skill themselves and haven't had to really build it through challenge. So, it's hard to transfer skills you don't have.

Katie: So walk us through some of these coping skills that make up the umbrella. What are some of the others? I love that. I have a feeling we're gonna be very synergistic on some of these core skills, but what are some of the others?

Dr. Jen: Yeah, so one of the ones that come up or really came up, obviously, during this pandemic is cognitive flexibility, the ability to flex and adapt and, you know, do something different in the face of different circumstances. So that's one. There's quite a few, growth mindset, you know, the ability to see yourself as not a static being but somebody who's always growing and changing. There's empathy and, you know, our ability to put ourselves in someone else's shoes. There's a sense of purpose. I find that to be really a big one that helps to guide us. You know, there's so many different ones, gratitude, helping us see what we have instead of what we don't have. There's just so many different skills.

We actually have an assessment tool for parents and kids that you can walk through all the different skills and get a score for yourself of, you know, what are your strongest Umbrella Skills and what are the ones that you could work more deeply on. For me, autonomy, that's another one. You know, the ability to have a really clear say in the direction of our lives, that's one that I really feel like growing up I didn't get a chance to build. I had a mom who loved to remove adversity from our path. I think that was something... She always... Her favorite expression was, "I wish I could do the Vulcan mind-meld on you." I don't know if you know what that is. It's from "Star Trek," but it's basically where you transfer all of your knowledge into someone else's brain so they don't have to have those experiences, they just get the wisdom. And I think, well, that was wonderful. On one side, it prevented me from feeling really confident in my own direction and decision-making without a lot of other opinions. But we're all kind of unique based on our experiences. And if you've never really looked at your own coping skills and thought about what was strong or weak, it's amazing what actually comes up. And it was really hard to lean into that for me. That decision-making, I had to purposely force myself outside my comfort zone so many times to try to build that skill. But...

Katie: I'm curious what some of the things were that were helpful for that because I resonate with that. My parents were also similar in that regard. And I think, as a parent, that's the thing we all have to figure out how to navigate because we, of course, want to...the instinct is to protect our children from pain or hardship or anything, but also realizing, like, I could look back easily and say, "Oh, well, I am who I am because of, in part, these difficult things that I went through. I still don't want my kids to have to go through difficult things." So, what did that process look like for you, and what are some ways as parents we can foster a healthy relationship there?

Dr. Jen: Yeah, I mean, I think the first one is just knowing your child's skills and really understanding what all the Umbrella Skills are and then having a look at your child and determining where they might need a little bit

of an extra push or a challenge because what ends up happening if you imagine your umbrella with some holes in it, we tend to huddle under the parts that are strong, right? So the grittier get grittier, and the empathetic get more empathetic. And we tend to rely really heavily... My sister is incredibly autonomous. And she just realized so strongly on that skill, but in the absence of some of the other ones, our protection is incomplete. You really do need all of them.

So, I think the first step is really having a good individualized look at yourself or your child, recognizing what skills might be missing, and then parenting specifically into those skills. So I always... One of the things that I think most parents do that really is difficult for them and their children is trying to do everything. I mean, you could be doing a gratitude journal in the morning and then a play day for empathy, and then you could be asking them to do all this stuff autonomously. And then you could be, you know... There's a million, million things you can do for well-being. But if you don't focus on the holes, eventually they start to come back and influence your ability to cope.

So, I always tell parents to pick one thing. You know, look at your child's umbrella of coping skills and... And we have a parenting course and an assessment tool that you can actually do this and get some scores for yourself and your child. And then just pick one thing to work on, one individual skill, until you see that start to come through in your child, and then you can switch because I think the overachieving parent is almost equally as damaging for kids as, you know, neglecting these things. And when you try to do it all, it tends to just backfire as a parent.

So really just diving down and picking that one thing that your child really needs. I have a 13-year-old and a 10-year-old and a 1-year-old. And you know right now, for my 13-year-old, it's definitely self-compassion. That's another one of the Umbrella Skills I think as kids cross into their teens, one of the lowest skills by far is self-compassion. And they tend to be very hard on themselves. It's like adding insult to injury every time something goes wrong. So, for me, that's the skill I'm working on with my daughter, and that might just be a simple reminder or a simple question asking her, you know, "What would you tell your best friend in this situation?" and, you know, having them reflect on how they would treat someone else and then trying to give themselves that same kindness, but there's all sorts of different ways within the Umbrella Project that we talk about building each skill. So...

Katie: And that's a helpful thing, and that's something I've done in therapy actually, is the therapist will walk you through, like, finding a childhood thing and then what would you tell yourself at that age or, like, how would you look at it from the outside or, like, view that situation differently. But bringing it up about teenagers makes me wonder...I would guess there are some skills or they'd become more relevant at certain ages. I know every child is so different, obviously, but are there on average some that tend to be more important at different age groups?

Dr. Jen: For sure, yeah. Not every skill... And, I mean, I have a lot of parents who come to see me with toddlers. And, you know, there's some skills that just aren't built in the younger ages. But I would say

mindfulness is a big one for younger kids. And, you know, I actually had listened to you say something in one of your podcasts about kids having a lot of natural skills. And one of the roles of parenting is just getting out of the way and letting those skills actually blossom, right? And I think mindfulness is one of those skills where kids exist very much in the moment. And we tend to be the ones taking them constantly out of the moment and trying to get them to think ahead. So, mindfulness is a great skill for young kids.

And self-compassion comes up a ton in the teen years as there's a healthy lifestyle. I think that as our kids start to get some of their own freedom, they no longer wanna listen to what we tell them they should be doing and putting in their bodies. And so, focusing on keeping those healthy lifestyle pieces, that's another great one for adolescence. Trying to maintain mindfulness in adolescence, so I think that's another big one if we can just keep our teens a little bit more in the moment and a little bit less thinking about what's coming or what has happened. That also tends to really influence their happiness and well-being.

Katie: Yeah, and I love that you said that because I've always had the feeling that kids come out of the box with so many amazing skills and that often we train out some of the really important ones. So on, like, the education side, I see that often with, like, creativity or being willing to ask hard questions and ask why a lot. Like, that's super important and something I prioritize in employees and in entrepreneurs, and yet so much of our existing model trains those things out of them. And even just things like the ability to play and, like you said, to be present in the moment. We can actually learn so many lessons from young children when it comes to those things. But at least the existing systems tend to make those things more difficult to maintain. So I love that you're bringing awareness to that.

I think the autonomy in the teenage years is also a big one. And I'd love to, like, talk a little bit more specifically about ways that we as parents can help foster that in a healthy way because I now I have a couple of teenagers. And that's something I think about often is that the goal is for them to be autonomous adults. And I've always kind of pictured that, you know, by 13 or 14, they're mostly there. They're still living in my house. They still have a safety net, but they're psychologically supposed to separate from the family at some point. They are supposed to be autonomous. And so how can I give them the space to do that and also the skills to do that in a safe and responsible way? So any specific tips for that age? Because I know a lot of people listening also have teenagers.

Dr. Jen: Yeah, oh, gosh, there's so, so much about that. One of my favorite expressions that we use in my house all the time is self-regulate or be regulated. And I think self-regulation in teens is what they all want, right? They wanna be able to make their own choices and their own decisions. And so I really do think of myself as a broad safety net, where, like, within the parameters of what I can, I'll please self-regulate, I don't wanna tell you what to eat or where to go or when to do your homework. I don't wanna be involved in that. But I am there, and I will step in and regulate if needed, right? I will be your prefrontal cortex when you are going to make bad decisions, right? That's my role, is to just be observing and stepping in when I need to. And I tell my kids that. And I think they like that, right? They wanna self-regulate. There's a goal there, and they

know that I'm there just as a safety net. So even just that expression alone really gives a lot of information to teenagers, right? It tells them, "I want you to do this on your own. I don't want to tell you what to do. I'm only there, you know, to help you out if I see you're gonna make poor decisions that are gonna have a really lasting impact on your well-being."

Katie: Yeah, that's such a valuable way to say it.

Dr. Jen: Yeah, I don't know if you've seen much about what's been happening with the pandemic and what's been happening with autonomy and that piece with teenagers because, really, that is such an important stage they're supposed to be drifting and pulling away from parents, but because of having to really isolate with parents quite a bit in the last year or two, there's been a huge toll on teen mental health, specifically in that grade 7 to 10 range where that's really what they're supposed to be doing, and now they're stuck with us. In fact, my daughter has said, "I wish she would stop planning family things. Don't you know, like, we have enough family time. I need to do something without you." I was like, "Okay, I get it. Like, that makes perfect sense to me. I know I love you. And also, yes, please go do something without me." So, I think recognizing that autonomy is a big piece of that developmental age and that something has happened in the last year or two to teens' autonomy and that now most of them are very anxious about going back out into the world. Unlike young kids or some of the older kids that we see, specifically that teen demographic is not necessarily running back out open-armed into the world. They're now very anxious about what it's gonna look like to reengage. So I think autonomy is a great skill to start to focus on for our teens, for sure.

Katie: A phrase I like to use at my house is I reverse the spider man saying, so instead of, "With great power comes great responsibility," I tell them "With great responsibility comes great power." Like, I want you to be autonomous. And if you show me that you're responsible, I have no reason to get in the way of that, and you have then great freedom and power. I think the other kind of flip side of this too is not taking it personally when teenagers start separating, which is, of course, easier said than done because, you know, we made them, and we grew them, and we've taken care of them since they were babies. And I always, like, logically knew that. And now I'm getting to experience the emotional side of, like, "Okay, my 15-year-old thinks that everything I say is wrong and is supposed to be separating and doesn't wanna spend tons of time with the family and his friends are very important to him right now. And that has nothing to do with me being a bad mom. That has everything to do with the psychology of him being a teenager. And so how do I best support him in that?" versus, like, internalizing, like, "Oh, well, he doesn't like me anymore. And I think that, like, it's an important reframe for parents and those teenagers because it is a little tough, I feel, like, personally, when they start separating like that.

Dr. Jen: Oh, my gosh, it's so hard. I remember...because my daughter's 13, I remember last year listening to a podcast, and the podcast host was saying that you can't avoid the teen separation. You know, you can't avoid that piece. And I was thinking to myself, "I don't know. I think my daughter's pretty, pretty good. I think we're gonna maintain this good relationship." And then a year later, of course, I'm in the throes of, you know, that piece too. So, really, I love what you said about recognizing that it's normal and not taking it personally, I think. And even having that explicit conversation with your kids, like, "It's okay to want your own time and

space. It's okay that you don't wanna hang out with me right now," takes a lot of the guilt out of that for them and allows them a little freedom to just be who they are and not feel like they need to be taking care of your well-being too. So, yeah, I think that's a great tip.

Katie: And then on the flip side of that is any tips for keeping communication open in a healthy way during that time? Because I know my parents were great about saying, like, you know, "You can talk to us about anything. And if there's ever anything hard, like, we are here to listen. And, you know, you'll never get in trouble for being open and honest." And, frankly, as a teenager, I believed that exactly zero. Like, I was, like, "I'm not gonna talk to you when I do something you told me I'm not supposed to do. Like, there's no way." So I mean, the autonomy piece makes a lot of sense. And I think respecting that probably goes a long way toward keeping communication open, but also any tips for helping them actually feel and believe that they have a safety net when they need it?

Dr. Jen: Yeah, well, I think, like, two things come to mind with that. One is that as parents, and most parents are actually kind of poor at this, is that actions need to match words. So if you say, "It's okay, you can come to me, and you're not gonna get in trouble," you do need to make sure that you follow through on that, right? And you can maybe do that by helping them reflect on how they might resolve the problem or whatever they've done instead of giving them a consequence. You might ask them what they think, you know, I said, "I wasn't gonna get you in trouble for this. And I'm not, but I do think what you did is wrong or hurt someone or put you at risk. And what do you think a good way to make up for this is or to...?" You know, that's a great way to get them involved but also have your actions match your words when it comes to that.

And then the other thing that I started with my kids when they were quite young actually is I told them, "I will always be your fact check." I remember a couple of times growing up when I didn't know what was real and what wasn't. You know, you hear a lot on the playground. And sometimes it gets you into trouble when you don't know what's true and what's not true. So I told them, "Anything you hear, you can always come and tell me, and I will tell you if it's true or not." And a funny story about that. So, with one of my kids... I won't mention who in case they ever listen to this podcast which one. I said, "Okay, I'll be your fact check, and you get to ask me anything." And one of my children said, "Okay, I heard about this thing called sex." And I was like, "Okay, what did you hear?" And they said, "I heard it could last anywhere from two minutes to a couple of hours." I was like, "That is the first thing you want me to fact check?" I was like, "True." Like, okay, well, you know what, at least I know what kind of information needs filtering back, but I feel like, from those experiences, I now have a very open dialogue with my kids where they really do bring a lot of sometimes shocking-for-me topics back that they're hearing about or that their friends are talking about. And it really has served to keep the dialogue open and safe, I think, for them when I'm not there to provide advice. I'm just their backup fact check so that they can, you know, know what's accurate and what's not.

Katie: I love that tip. I'm making notes. That's a great one. And then, yeah, they can trust you and know that you can help them research something. That's amazing. You also have something called a well-being pop-up. Can you explain what that is and how it works?

Dr. Jen: Yeah. So, this is something actually we've been reflecting on at the Umbrella Project that we're putting in place for schools because I think school's really an education. It's easy for well-being to become kind of in the background. And as much as schools know that without all of your coping skills, good luck doing any of the other subjects. I mean, they're literally like your core muscles that stabilize you when you're going to do anything else. Still, it always takes a backburner. So, we've started to develop conferences for schools, and we call them pop-ups. And they're just one-day conferences that schools can run to really focus on wellbeing and to tell students, especially coming back this September, after the last year and a half, that their well-being is front of mind and priority. So we're pretty excited about bringing this to schools.

This September, we're focusing on the grade 7 to 10 cohort because it's just so in need right now. Those kids are really struggling. And I actually would say if you have a grade 7 to 10 or even, you know, around that age student at home, check in with them and see how they're doing because they're also at an age of a child that's not always gonna talk to you about what's going on, right? So, you reaching out and asking them like, "How are you feeling?" You know, I remember a patient of mine saying that she thought her daughter was doing great and said, "Oh, my gosh, thank goodness we're through that lockdown, and I'm so glad you did so well." And she said, "I cried myself to sleep every night for the last couple of months." And so just, you know, really checking in with them is important. And then we're just really excited to be able to provide that for education. I know education's one of your passions too. So, you know, starting to help schools really show students that this is the most important thing for them that their health and mental health and well-being is front, front of mind.

Katie: I love that. I'm gonna make sure all these things are linked in the show notes so people can find them. I think having tangible tools, especially as you mentioned right now, while we're still navigating totally new circumstances and the way all ages of children are gonna cope with that, it's so important.

Dr. Jen: Good advice there.

Katie: We were really fortunate in that we already homeschooled, and we were in a very tight-knit community. So our daily lives didn't change at all other than, when activities shut down, I just hired the teachers directly. So now they come to our house to do gymnastics and all the different stuff. So, actually, for us, it was a really positive experience.

Dr. Jen: Awesome. That was another piece of research that came out during the pandemic actually, was the influence of losing extracurricular activities on academics for students because what they found is that all of the skills, like, having a sense of purpose and growth mindset, all the things that you'd get from extracurriculars, those coping skills transfer to academics. And when students don't have something outside of school that they're passionate about, their academics suffer significantly, too. I thought that was so interesting. And, yeah, I mean, I'm a research kind of geek. I love all the different pieces of research. But I

thought that one was particularly interesting for impacts that, you know, losing extracurriculars or even having them has on your child's academics.

Katie: Yeah, and, hopefully, that will all continue to get better and better as time goes on.

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And as we talked about, look, before we move on from the teenage years, I mentioned, in therapy, that's the thing that often comes up, is, like, they'll have you process something earlier in life and then ask what you would say to yourself at that age. So I'm curious, what would you tell your teenage self?

Dr. Jen: Oh, I think, like, one of the biggest things I think that I wish I knew back then is that it's important to be kinder to yourself. I think a big piece of why teens are even so hard on each other is because they're so hard on themselves, right, and tends to become just a hierarchy of who feels better than who, and teens tend to do that by putting others below them instead of trying to elevate themselves. I think a little bit of self-kindness would have gone such a long way for me as a teenager, for sure. So I think that's one of the things that really stands out to me that I wish I knew when I was younger.

And then that everyone struggles. I remember I had a lot of, you know, internal family struggles going on when I was growing up. And after I became an adult, I realized that a lot of my other friends did too. And we just didn't really talk about it, right? We kind of kept that a secret within each of our families. And I wish I knew then that they were struggling in the same way that I was or recognize that that wasn't something I was

doing alone, and that sense of common humanity is such a well-being protector and one that we talk about all the time with the Umbrella Project and just the idea that life rains for everyone and that, you know, that rain is even important for developing coping skills. I mean, coping skills are skills, right? They need practice, and you need that adversity to really develop any of the skills to be very strong, but I wish I knew more that other people were struggling too back then.

Katie: And, like, in so many areas of life, when you're able to talk about it, it often removes some of the struggle. And I love that you used the analogy of rain because I think that's a perfect way to think of this is often, at least speaking personally, like, we have an emotion like sadness. And then we attach a connotation to it, like sadness is bad. But, like, I think I've gotten notes from you. Like, these things are all inevitable. We will inevitably have rainy days. We will inevitably go through things that are difficult by some metric, but we have the choice of interpreting them as bad or painful. Yeah, we have the ability to frame our own experience within that and in the context of this conversation to help our kids learn that from a very early age. And so rather than... I feel like that's one thing I've learned the last few years, is any emotion we resist actually tends to grow. So, trying to, like, help my kids learn to feel an emotion and not resist it or judge it as bad necessarily, but be able to feel it, process it, learn from it, and when it's time, also let go of it.

I feel like that question brings me to the earlier childhood time because I feel like younger kids tend to have bigger emotional spikes or at least more likely just their output is more...there's more volume to their output. Probably older kids still have the intensity of experience but have learned to kind of shut down the response of it. So, what are some ways that we can help kids navigate not shutting down their emotions, not defining, for instance, feeling anger as a bad thing or feeling sadness as a bad thing but also processing it in a way that is, you know, like, socially acceptable in target?

Dr. Jen: Yeah. You know, one conversation that I... I love conversations with kids. I feel like our lives are a dialogue, and a lot comes from conversation, even maybe not in the moment but when you reflect back later. So, one conversation I love to have with kids and I recommend every parent has is just asking them, like, "What makes you angry? What makes you jealous? What makes you sad?" Go through, you know, different times, different feelings, and then share some things that make you feel like that, too. I remember a great conversation I had with my daughter about, you know, "Do you ever feel jealous? What makes you feel like that?" And then her asking me the same question and us sharing some things that make us feel that way. Because when they can see that you're with them at their level, right, that jealousy is not a bad emotion, it's a normal emotion, and that it's what you do with it, right? But first and foremost, in young kids, it needs to be okay to feel all the feelings.

And, you know, while we might say it's okay to feel sad or angry, sometimes there's other ones like jealous or, right, we tend to say that's not okay, right? You shouldn't be jealous. Look how much you have or whatever the thing is, and instead of just really having a conversation about, "That's when I feel that way." And that's it, right? It doesn't have to be a lesson, nothing. It doesn't have to be a moral, just we're all in this together. We all feel everything. So I like that for a start with kids. And then one of the other questions that I really like with kids is just asking them regularly, "What does it mean?" Like, you know, if they're upset, if they bring home a

bad mark from school, for example, or if they don't do well on something, or if a friend's unkind to them, ask them, "What does it mean to you when that happens? What do you think it means when a friend is unkind to you?" And then you can start to hear their narrative, right? Because we don't need to jump in and fix or change feelings or experiences.

But it is really important as parents that we hear what our kids' narrative is becoming because I love the expression, "You aren't what happens to you in life. You're the story you tell yourself about what those things mean," right? We are only... We are meaning makers. And so, if to your child when a friend is mean, it means, you know, maybe they're having a bad day or maybe everybody feels mean sometimes, and, you know, maybe tomorrow, they'll be feeling better. Maybe that's not a narrative we need to really intervene with, or, you know, it's okay to feel sad when that happens.

But if the meaning that they're making from that is, like, "Maybe I'm not a good person. Maybe people don't like me. Maybe..." you know, then those are the narratives that I think we need to dig deeper into with our kids and, you know, acknowledge their sadness and also help them at the other side of that, try to think of some other meanings that they could take from that. So, as your child grows and develops, if you can hear their narrative, I think that's probably the most powerful thing you can do as a parent, is try to really hear the meaning that your child is taking and, you know, help them shift it into something that is self-serving and powerful for them.

Katie: I really like that tip of asking them, "What does that mean?" Because that does shift it as well. And I think it also helps protect against that parental instinct to try to fix it for them, like we talked about in the very beginning, and/or projecting any of our own discomfort with them feeling that emotion. I think they should be allowed to feel it. And also not defining it for them. I feel like that's an easy loop to fall into as a parent, is to ask them if they're feeling sadness or, "Oh, are you feeling...?" But instead of doing that, giving them the space to say what they're feeling and what it means. And I've definitely made a note to use that with my younger ones.

Dr. Jen: Yeah. Yeah. It's a great question. I've learned so much about my kids. And I would say... And, I mean, I do this for a living, and I'd say I'm probably 50/50 with guessing what the meaning, you know, from looking at my kids what I think they're taking from an experience and what they actually are.

Katie: Yeah, and I wonder if... Because if we project wrong and think like, "Oh, are you feeling sad?" and they're not, then it might be harder for them to speak up and say they're not, and/or they may internalize, "Oh, I'm supposed to feel sad now."

Dr. Jen: It's confusing when your parents try to talk you out of your feelings, right? Because it does actually... The question is, okay, are my feelings wrong, or do they just not get me or...right? And that comes back to those teen years, is kids will talk...

Katie: Am I weird or...?

Dr. Jen: Yeah, kids will talk to you if they think you understand what they're going through. And if you don't, they'll go to their peers. And, I mean, I certainly... I love my friends or my kids' friends, but I don't know that I want them to be, you know, the person that my kids are always going to for answers when they need something. So, yeah, keeping that dialogue or that openness with not presuming you know what their experience is is really helpful.

Katie: So, you mentioned, of course, your book, and you mentioned courses as well. I'm gonna make sure I put links to all of these in the show notes. But where can people start really delving into this and springboard to use this in their own families?

Dr. Jen: Yeah. So our website is probably the best spot to find a lot of centralized information. It's umbrellaproject.co. And there we have a blog with all sorts of parenting tips that are skill-based. We have links to our parenting courses. We have links to the curriculum and to our pop-up in the different programs that we have for education. So we have all sorts of information there to get you started. Our Parenting 101 course is a great spot if you want to assess your child's coping skills and your own and get a really good foundation in what the parenting dos and don'ts are depending on your individual child. Something we've really tried to focus on is, like, if you could just do two or three things for this type of child or this skill that you're trying to build, what would those be? So that's a great starting point for parents, for sure.

Katie: I love that. Another question I love to ask for the end of interviews is if there's a book or a number of books that have had a profound impact on your life, and if so, what they are and why?

Dr. Jen: Gosh, there's... I am such a reader. I love reading. So that's a really hard question. But one that stands out to me is "Piece Is Every Step." Have you read that by Thich Nhat Hanh? It's a mindfulness book. And I would say, for me, mindfulness was probably the skill that I put into my umbrella first as a grownup that changed everything about the rest of my life because mindfulness is really the skill that helps you pay attention to how you're feeling in the moment and why. So, when I started to build that skill, it really allowed me to see all the other gaps that existed in my coping skills and where I needed to focus my attention. And that book was really the starting point of all of it. This is a great read if you wanna delve into mindfulness a little bit.

Katie: I'm definitely gonna order that now. That sounds like a great one. It's a new recommendation here. And also that's been a recurring theme for me recently, is the importance of mindfulness and meditation. It's one of those things I've certainly seen the research on it, I'm now learning the application of after probably many years of putting it off. So, I love that you brought that up. I'll make sure that's linked, as well. Any parting advice that you wanna leave, especially with parents that are listening today?

Dr. Jen: Let's see. I kind of think of what we haven't talked about yet. I think embracing imperfection in yourself and your kids. You know, imperfection is really what connects us as humans. When you think about that person you perceive as perfect or who has it all together, there often isn't a lot of connection in that. Where people really connect is in that sense of common humanity in our imperfections. But, for some reason, we all think we need to be perfect parents and we need to have perfect kids. And if you can really embrace mistakes and imperfection as chances to grow and connect and be vulnerable with each other, I think that is my advice to all parents, just it's okay to be just who you are, you know, a person slowly continuing to grow and change, and it's okay for your kids to be that too. It's what makes us...it's what brings us together.

Katie: I love that. I think that's a perfect place to wrap up. I'm excited to read your book. I'm excited to keep learning from you. And thank you for your time today. This was awesome.

Dr. Jen: Thank you so much for having me, Katie. This was great.

Katie: And thanks as always to you guys for listening and sharing your most valuable resources with us, your time, and energy, and attention. We're both so grateful that you did, and I hope that you will join me again on the next episode of the "Wellness Mama 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.