Episode 472: Josh Trent on Breathwork for Health, Inner Peace, and Learning to Feel Safe In Your Body
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 Wellnesse with an E on the end. And this podcast is all about breathwork and how this can affect our health and lead to feelings of safety in our own body, parasympathetic nervous system activation, and so much more. I'm here with Josh Trent, who is the founder of Wellness Force Media and host
of the podcast by the same name. He's also the creator of a Breathe Wellness program. And he has spent the past 18 years as a trainer, researcher, and facilitator in this world. And he shares a lot of his expertise and insight, especially related to breathwork, which I think is an often underestimated tool for really dramatically improving health.

And he talks about how breath is the only lever we can manually pull that directly affects so many aspects of the nervous system and the sympathetic-parasympathetic nervous system connection. And since we are all breathing all day long, he talks about how small changes in this area can have a really profound effect in things like our sleep, our HRV, many other aspects of health and wellness. And he gives some tools on how to develop this habit in ourselves and in our children. Some really practical advice and I think you will really enjoy. Josh, welcome to the podcast.

Josh: Thank you so much for having me.

Katie: I'm so excited to chat with you, because you know a whole lot more than I do about a topic I've been delving into recently, and I think can be really helpful and impactful, especially for a lot of the parents listening, and I know you're a new parent, so you're getting to apply these strategies very directly in your own life right now. But to start broad and then kind of narrow down from there, walk us through, for people who aren't, maybe are familiar with the term, but not really the specifics, walk us through what breathwork is.

Josh: So, breathwork is the controlled release and response of respiration. So, it's the only lever we can pull, Katie. We have this autonomic nervous system, right? The sympathetic, the parasympathetic, which I'm sure you've gone deep into on your show. But for people that don't know, just a super high level of breathwork, we have these two areas in our body that are controlled by the automatic nervous system, autonomic. Breath is the only lever we can pull in our entire physiology, where we can actually manually down-regulate stress.

Now, how incredible is that? Because there's nothing else we can do. We can't control our heart rate, we can't digest our food faster or slower, we can't pulse our blood through our heart faster or slower. I mean, unless you're, like, a Shaolin monk. I've heard they can do some interesting things. But think about this. Breathwork is the only lever we can pull that'll allow us to really modulate our stress. And so, on a high level, breathwork is controlling that lever.

Katie: It's so fascinating to me. Can you walk us through kind of the science of what, like, how that actually works within the body? Because it makes sense. We can't, like, you said, most of us can't control our heart rate or control how much blood is pumping through our system. But indirectly, controlling our breath does affect those things as well. Kind of walk us through what's happening in the body in different states of breath, and how that impacts us.
Josh: Sure. So, let’s use the example of me being a new dad. When I hear my baby cry, I go like this. I breathe in and I hold my breath. So, when we breathe in, that’s actually a constriction, a contraction. When we’re breathing in through our nose, we’re actually activating the sympathetic nervous system. When we exhale through our mouth, we’re activating the parasympathetic. So, how do we do this in a circle, so that we’re actually present in our body? And for those who are spiritual-minded, I’ll talk to you, and then for those who are scientific-minded, I’ll talk to you, too. Because breathwork is both, you know, science, and spiritual.

So, when we have the inhale, we have these spherical cores in our nose. And when we breathe in, we’re actually admitting ourselves to the stress that we’re experiencing. A lot of people, Katie, they’ll leave their body when they’re stressed out. And it could be a child crying, it could be you in traffic, it could be a fight with a spouse, it could be, like, load up any kind of stress in the bathtub. Most people don’t breathe through their nose. And so, when you bypass the nose, you actually miss out on your nervous system being friends with the stress that you’re experiencing.

So, on a scientific level, we have that air that’s going through the spherical cores in the nose. That goes into our lungs, and then when we exhale through our mouth, we’re turning on the parasympathetic system. Now, the even more depth of science on this is that we have what’s called the enteric nervous system, which science shows us as the second brain. The enteric nervous system dovetails into the back of the diaphragm. And then on the back of the diaphragm, we also have our vagus nerve, which runs all the way from the back of the cranium all the way down to that diaphragm.

So, think of the diaphragm as, like, the most important balloon you have in your entire body. And the enteric nervous system and the central nervous system, and your vagus nerve, they all connect to that diaphragm. So, Katie, here’s what happens when we take that deep breath in through our nose, and the diaphragm fills with air. We’re actually pushing physiologically on that vagus nerve. The vagus nerve has a direct impact on the parasympathetic nervous system as well.

So, why do we do this? Science shows us, also my anecdotal experience, and thousands of people who have taken the BREATHE: Breath & Wellness Program, we are all hearing and seeing the same thing. And that is, when you’re using what’s called circular conscious connected breathing, you’re actually turning on all these synergetic systems in the body, so you can be friends with your stress. And that’s really the science and the spirit of breathwork.

You know, thousands of years ago, breathwork came from India in the East. And I think in the West, we’ve been so inundated with stress, and we’re, like, the highest-stress people we’ve ever been. We need breath right now, more than ever. And so, the science is great, but really, it’s, like, how do you feel? The report card of how you feel and how you’re using this conscious respiration, that is the most important thing.
Katie: Yeah, and I think I've always kind of thought of it in sort of like a triage effect kind of way. And I mentioned like, I'm kind of on a journey with the breathwork side myself, but it's actually not 100% scientifically accurate, but that saying that we can go three minutes without air, three days without water, three weeks without food, kind of to me indicates the importance of, in order, optimizing those things, and I feel like a lot of people understand the importance of drinking clean water, for instance, and the importance of eating clean food, but the breath part, until recently, at least, hasn't been talked about as much, which is interesting, because we are doing that all day, every day, and so much more.

So, it would seem like, on a base level, the quality of the air we're breathing makes a big difference, and the quality of the way that, in which we're breathing, makes a really big difference as well, just because it's something that we're doing literally all the time, even when we're sleeping. And I know that it seems like there's kind of a woo connotation with breathwork and changing breathing in certain ways.

Josh: Yes.

Katie: And so, I think, often, it gets discounted. But I think it's also really important to remember this is something we're doing all day every day. So, can we, by consciously working on our breathwork and our patterns, can we create changes that are actually, like, lasting, even when we're kind of just breathing without thinking about it?

Josh: Oh, yes. And for the people who are science-minded, for your show notes, I can give you PubMed study after PubMed study about the benefits of what I call conscious controlled respiration, or circular breathing. But I wanna talk about two things, because you mentioned something really amazing. We're all breathing all day long. So, for the people who are like, "Oh, breathwork is woo-woo," or "Breathwork might be too much work," you're already doing it anyways. Like, that's the big thing to point out here. Everyone is breathing all day long, but we are breathing from what's called an upper-cross position, our scalenes, our sternocleidomastoid, our pec minor, our pec major. We're all flexed forward in this life, Katie, like, we're driving, we're on the phone, everything we do is sagittal plane.

So, my background's 10 years in fitness. I was a health professional, so, 10,000 hours with clients. And the number one thing that I saw, especially with moms, when I was helping moms that were either postpartum, or even moms that were just dealing with a lot of stress, and they have more than one child, they're all forward flexed, they're all kyphotic. On the back of their thoracic spine, they have this bubble.

What that's doing is that's pulling their shoulders in, and it's actually turning off everything you and I talked about earlier, with the vagus nerve, the enteric nervous system in the diaphragm. And so, when that's happening, women, specifically, are actually getting less oxygen than they were designed. And then they get what's called carbon dioxide toxicity. So, over the course of time, their cells get less oxygen.
So, how do we fix this? We fix this by first doing the corrective movements, which I talk about in the BREATHE program, getting your chest to open, your posture. Your posture is so huge for getting respiration. And Katie, like, if we're not in the right posture, if we're slumped forward, you could read all the books, you could take all the programs to breathe right, but you have to address your posture first, so that's something that, for the people who might say breathwork is woo, well, actually, breathwork is very scientific. It's very physiologically connected to our posture, and the way that we sit.

Right now, I'm actually on this meditation cushion. I'm doing this interview, and I have a little backrest. I'm sitting upright. You'll notice, too, when you ask me questions, or when I'm present with you, I close my mouth, because I'm breathing through my nose. And that's something we can dive into a little bit later is the impact on posture and nasal breathing and breathing through the diaphragm.

So, it's for everyone, and for the people that knock it, I get it, I understand, because there's a lot of woo-woo stuff out there. You know, there's a lot of things out there that people jump on the bandwagon for, and the next thing you know, people are on the top of a mountain saying, like, "Hey, we should all breathe wearing a crystal around our neck." Well, breathwork is for those people, but it's also for the average people like you and I, people that have a lot of stress, and people that really want to use it for the right reason.

Katie: Yeah, I love that you brought up the differences, especially for women, because that was the thing I noticed after 10 years of being pregnant and breastfeeding is just the amount of time you spend bent forward, holding a baby, or nursing a baby, in that posture change. And it was something I had to really consciously correct through my posture, through bodywork, even to kind of rearrange my fascia back to where it was supposed to be.

And like I mentioned, I'm learning the breathwork side now. But it also seems like there's a little bit of societal conditioning that seems to happen somewhere in the teenage years, where, like, that diaphragm breathing, women tend to stop doing it as much because we wanna look, like, thinner, and our abs tucked in. And so, I feel like women especially tend to breathe more in their upper shoulders and not into their diaphragm. Do you notice that as well?

Josh: I 100% notice that, and I think it's a great point. Because think of, like, the baby carrier. We just got, like, a, I forget the name of it, but it's, like, this baby carrier that you put in the front. It's all front-loaded. So everything that moms do is about this what's called sagittal plane. You know, in our movement patterns, we have sagittal, we have transverse, we have frontal. We are designed to rotate, to pull back, but everything as far as a mom's life, and especially in our society, where it's tech-focused, it's actually pulling them down to the ground. It's pulling mothers down to the ground. So, moms have to work on their posterior chain, their intercostals, by the way, and the intercostals go all the way around to the back, almost to your kidneys.
So, when moms, specifically when moms have a little bit of trouble in our BREATHE program, I will actually direct them to breathe through their kidneys, which sounds a little weird, right? Why would a mom breathe through her kidneys? Well, because your intercostals are back there as well. And so, if you can create what's called the mind-to-muscle connection, to the intercostals, and to all the breathing musculature in your body, you're going to have this be a habit that sticks in 21 days.

That is what this is all about, is training your posture to have that mind-to-muscle connection. If you don't have it, then you're gonna go through the motions, Katie, and that's just not fair to anyone. Like, I want people to get the best results. There's a huge backstory as to why I even got into breath in the first place. It came from my own anxiety, it came from my own poor posture, it came from me, just like you, being a professional, and being in the field of wellness, yet working on my own wellness, right. Which is, I think, the story of the wounded healer becoming healed. So, we're all in this in the same reason, and that is to breathe so that our breath can set us free. That's really what this is all about.

Katie: And you also mentioned the vagus nerve. And I'd love to go a little bit deeper on this, because I think this is another thing that we're just starting to understand, or at least starting to talk about more. And I think it's super important. And from an anecdotal perspective, I noticed when I really started being more conscious of my breath, and making time to breathe more and breathe intentionally, I noticed big changes in my heart rate variability. And I wondered maybe this goes back to the vagus nerve connection, or, I'm curious if you see this in other people as well.

But for people who probably have heard me talk about this term before, but if they haven't, HRV is the measure of variability between our heartbeats. And from the data I've seen, it's actually a really good predictor of longevity and overall health. And also, it's a good stress indicator. Athletes often use it as a measure for recovery, so they wouldn't wanna train if their HRV was low, because it would be a higher risk of injury, for instance. But I'm curious what you see when it comes to HRV, and if you think that maybe is linked to the vagus nerve or something else?

Josh: Yeah, that's a great question. There's a multifaceted answer for that. And the HRV, for people that don't know, it's this micro time between when your heart beats, the greater variability, the greater health. So, the higher your HRV score is, and you can get it through a fingertip app on the phone... I have a bed called Eight Sleep, so I get it through the bed. You can also do it through Oura device. All these devices are great. The main thing is that you just wanna see your HRV either stay the same, or increase, based on your adaptability to stress.

So, how can breath impact this? And this is, like, the ultimate home run. Breath impacts HRV, because when you're using your respiration to both clean out your cells, clean out the carbon dioxide in your cells, get in the fresh oxygen, well, then guess what? You're gonna be more adaptable to stress.
The number one thing, and I mentioned earlier, when my son cries, I go like this. Well, any mom with us knows that when your baby cries, or when you're in that fight-or-flight mode, what is the first thing that we do, Katie? We stop breathing. And so, if we can train ourselves to breathe effectively, and to breathe consciously, like, circular connected breathing, we are going to show up in a much more loving state and a much more open state, and guess what? The HRV will absolutely reflect that.

So, I love how you've been asking such scientific questions. And I also wanna speak to the heart in everyone. Lots of times, we can get caught up, and I wanna presence this, because I've fallen into this trap, too, Katie. I wanna see the data. I wanna see my HRV score, I wanna see my adaptability score, I wanna see all my science. And then I forget, "Oh, yeah, I'm a human being in a meat suit, walking around on a rock in the middle of outer space." Okay, so there's so much more than just data, when it comes to the breath.

And like I said before, if we can breathe, then we can actually choose. This is on my arm, and it's "Se posso respirare, posso scegliere". And what that means in Italian is, "If I can breathe, I can choose." I mean, it's on my arm for my own reminder for myself, because I struggle with anxiety for so long in my life, and the only thing that really allowed me to break through, I tried plant medicines, ayahuasca, and mushrooms, and all these insane things. They were beautiful in their own way. But what really brought me back home was learning about my breath and learning about how conscious respiration can center me back.

So, this goes for all parents, all people that are interested in how do I find my center without having to take a bunch of pills or supplements or another cup of coffee? You have all the tools right in you, it's just learning how to use them effectively, as nature designed it.

Katie: That's such a great point, too, is, you know, often in health, it's easy to get distracted by the silver bullets and the shiny new biohacking things. And those certainly can be great and have their place.

Josh: They're fun.

Katie: But we're talking about something that's free, that you're doing anyway, and so, it's like...and you're doing all day long. So it makes sense, if you can optimize this, it helps kind of have that carryover effect. And it seems like it almost would be a self-improving cycle, in that when we learn to breathe better, and like you said, that's reducing our stress, it's creating these physiological changes, that also probably help us continue to breathe better. And so, it's, like, just like you can get in a negative cycle if you maybe don't optimize that part, it would seem like this one change could create this very positive cycle going forward, as you optimize it more and more.
And you mentioned that circular conscious breathing, and you explained it a little bit. Can you kind of give us a deeper explanation of what that specifically means, and how it maybe differs from just the unconscious breathing we do all the time?

Josh: Yes. And if it's okay with you, I'll just do a quick demo. Is that all right? All right. So, everyone, if you're driving, don't do this. But if you're seated, put your right hand on your belly button and put your left hand on your heart, and just close your mouth, and just push your tongue to the roof of your mouth, but relax your jaw, take a big breath in through your nose, and then breathe out through your mouth.

You just performed a circular breath. So, when you do that, over the course of time, connected, with no pause at the bottom, no pause at the top, eventually, what's going to occur is your body is gonna become fully oxygenated. The cool thing about this, both science and spiritual, is that when you do the circular breathing, you're giving your body every possible thing it needs to be in your center.

Now, what does that mean? Being in your center means that you're not pulled by that sympathetic branch of your autonomic nervous system. So, you could actually use that circular breathing I just showed you. In our BREATHE program, we have 5-minute, 7-minute, 21 minutes. Those are our meditations. Those are the practices. Every single person that does this over the course of three weeks, they report the same thing. Either, "You know, Josh, I realized I can't relax," or, "I realized I still need to go longer." Or, "Hey, I really found my center when I was in traffic, when I was with my child, when I was with my relationship or spouse or work."

A lot of people, Katie, that have public speaking, I know you're perfect with public speaking, because at the Paleo Conference, you sat outside with a bunch of people, and it seemed like public speaking was natural for you. But for a lot of people, it is, like, considered to be almost the fear of death, to be on a stage and be a public speaker. In our program, and both, in my own life, I practice and I teach controlled respiration in this circular format, so that people can find their center.

Now, there's also another style of breathing that's called box breathing. Box breathing was developed, I believe, by Mark Divine and Special Ops, but I'm sure they learned it from somebody who created it a thousand years ago. Box breathing is where you inhale through your nose, you hold at the top, you exhale through your mouth, and you hold at the bottom.

So, there's only two ways to breathe. It's either circular or box. Circular, which we just described, is really about finding your center. Now, box breathing is when you're going through extreme stress, and you wanna find your focus. So, those are two styles of breathing. There's also the acute style breathing, which is, like, the pranayama, or the emergency breathing, which is like a quick inhale and exhale only through the nose. There's cooling breath, there's sleep breath. There's relational breath, where you can actually tune in using that same
tool of HRV, and heart coherence, by a company called HeartMath. One of the things that we go over in the program is how do we achieve heart coherence with our partner? And what kind of breathing will allow us to actually connect to our partner's nervous system?

So, long answer to your short question, but this circular breathing is the breathing that can center us. And that is the most important breath, I believe, is that circular breathing. Not that the box isn't important. But we all need to learn how to breathe like a circle. Because the Earth is round, Katie. We live in a round world. Our life is not this linear, boxed life. We need to learn how to use our breath so that we can adjust to the demands of this modern world that isn't always so linear and isn't always so predictable.

Katie: And you also used the term "the mind-to-muscle connection," and I really love that phrase. And you've touched on a little bit, like, the enteric nervous system and autonomic nervous system. But can you go deeper on that mind-to-muscle connection and kind of what is happening over time as we learn that?

Josh: I love it. It's time for us to put on our science hats right now, because we have this brainstem, and it goes through all of our arterials and our veins and our capillaries, these micro branches, almost like if you look at a tree. You know, a tree and our vascular system are so, so similar. Every single message coming to and from the brain is on an efferent and an afferent wavelength. We are electrical beings. And so, if we're getting these messages back and forth from all these sensory neurons, the photoreceptors in our skin, we are the most beautiful creation, aren't we? We are so incredible. We are such an amazing piece of machinery.

What happens is, is when we're going to this mind-muscle connection, we are actually grooving in those afferent and efferent connections to the brainstem. Within the brain, we have literally hundreds of millions, if not trillions, I don't know the exact data on it, we have an unthinkable amount of synaptic connections in our brain. Like if you're in the forest, Katie, and you went on the same path day in and day out, eventually, you would carve a trail, right? Well, the brain is the same way.

And so, if we're practicing over the course of time, and science shows it's either 21 or 66 days to have any kind of habit, both physiologically or mentally. Within three weeks, I have seen people literally transform the way they adapt to stress, because guess what? They're walking in the forest on a new path. The synapses in their brain are literally, and figuratively, both, being changed. They're walking and grooving new neuroplasticity within their brain, by this circular conscious controlled respiration.

And then, guess what? The next time after those three weeks that they have the same fight, the same traffic jam, the same screaming child, the same fill-in-the-blank stress, they are able to meet that stress with a more open heart, with a more relaxed nervous system. That is a massive tool that anybody can use, at any time. And that is really what this mind-to-muscle connection is about. We are physical beings. We are also spiritual beings.
So, I’m not gonna get too woo-woo on your podcast right now, but, look, both of these branches deserve respect and deserve attention. When you hold your child, you don’t exactly know what love is with your words. You only know what love is because you know the feeling of love. Well, it's the same way that you connect with your own self. If you can be in your body when you're experiencing stress, you can learn to love yourself more. Yes, this might seem a little soft and a little mushy, but this is what life is about. I mean, I just had my heart crack completely wide open, having my son.

So, I think about science, just like you, but also, the other side of the coin deserves respect, too. And that's what this breath and this mind-to-muscle connection can give us, the actual connection to what it's like to be in our physical body, which is where a lot of us, through trauma and through different things that happen, we tend to leave our physical body when we're stressed, because our physical body isn't safe.

And a lot of people deal with this. I believe Seth and I talked about Mark Wolynn, and I introduced him to Mark Wolynn. And I think you’ve either interviewed him, or maybe not, but it's such a powerful thing to talk about. There is so much more than meets the eye when it comes to how we actually deal with stress, deal with trauma, deal with compression in our lives, and breath, in my opinion, is the most powerful tool we have.

Katie: I'm really glad you brought up the self-love and trauma piece, because, Episode 309 of this podcast, I talked a lot about my own trauma in the past and the things I did. And it was very much a long journey and multifaceted to figure out what was finally gonna help unpack some of those things. But I've heard from literally thousands of people since then who shared their own stories. And I think we have an epidemic of sorts of people really struggling with that self-love component, and people with past trauma who are having trouble finding tangible ways to process that.

And so, that's another reason I was so excited to chat with you today, is that, just like in other realms, there's all these silver bullet, shiny, fancy things that people do to help process trauma, and I think they all can have their time and their place. I know we've got organizations like MAPS doing incredible clinical studies. They're now in phase three on some substances that they're finding can be really helpful for this. But I view this kind of like with, you know, people wanna take all these fancy supplements, but if you don't have your diet and your sleep optimized, the supplements aren't gonna be that effective. Same thing with, like, yeah, you might need these more intensive therapies, depending on what trauma you have, but if you don't have the breath optimized, it's not gonna be as effective as it could be.

And I think it can be hard to understand how something as simple as breathing can make such a profound difference, but I think when you frame it in that aspect of self-love and feeling safe in your own body, that's a really key phrase, I think. It was for me, at least, and I think for a lot of other people. And that was one of my final keys that had to click into place was that I was doing all the dietary stuff, and I was doing all the supplements, and I had even optimized my sleep pretty well. But because of the trauma side, I didn't feel safe
in my own body. And when that shifted, all of the other stuff got so much easier and fell into place, and my health issues resolved. And until I experienced that, I would never have believed just how profoundly of an impact that can have.

And I think, yes, it can be a little bit more soft and spiritual and woo, but I think you also...it's really important to talk about and delve into, and not discount how extremely important that is for the physical side as well. Because I think our world kind of naturally predisposes us to try to disconnect those things, and we live in a society that is somewhat disconnected, and tapping back into that can be an interesting process for a lot of people, but such an important one. Do you have any other tips, I know that you've worked with so many people on this, for helping to start to establish that self-love and that inner peace connection?

Josh: I love this. I love your question. I love it so much, because it really takes me to a place that I ignored personally for so long. And that is, I wasn't inhabiting where I live. My body, right here, if you're watching us on video, our bodies, it is the only home we will ever have. So just let that land for a moment. If you're not happy where you live, right, Katie... You've moved a bunch in your life. We all move. If you don't like your house, you move. Well, what happens is, is that we all are matched to our house at birth. This is where we live.

So, me, personally, I used to be 280 pounds. I've gained 100 pounds, I've lost 100 pounds. Like, I've run the gamut on weight gain and weight loss. So, I found a drug really early in life, and that drug was called food. Maybe you've heard of it. Like, we all, I think, have had our relationships, maybe our battles, with food. And so, what we're looking for with food is we're looking for that deep breath. Most people, when they have eating disorders... I did a great talk that I can send to you, on "What We Crave," from Errin Smith, the "What We Crave Summit." And in my research, and in looking at all the speakers, guess what? We're all looking for the same thing, and that is a deep breath. You don't actually eat the food because you want the food. You eat the food because you want the peace. You want peace. That peace is something you don't feel in your body. I didn't feel it for a long time. And so, I got to this place where I really was, like, feeding an empty ghost. This is what Gabor Maté talks about, right? The hungry ghost inside of all of us. Everyone deals with this.

And so, what Katie, if we want more self-love, we have to be comfortable living in self. Like I said earlier, we're this spiritual being. Nobody knows where consciousness comes from. We're all figuring that out. Nobody knows why the SA node inside of the heart beats. Why can you take a heart out of one person and put it in the other? Where does that actually come from? Well, in my opinion, it's God. Y'all can learn whatever you want about your higher power in your studies. I believe there is a omnipresent being that is loving awareness. And that's it. Loving awareness of all things.
And so, when we get down to the nitty-gritty of what it really means to be a human, what it really means to love thyself, if you wanna love yourself, you have to know yourself. And if you don't know yourself because your parents, society, school, and all these things, tried to distract you of who you actually are, then the very first thing you have to do is a pattern interrupt. Like, literally, just like this. You have to interrupt yourself, by, maybe, a lot of people, Katie, they'll get a divorce. Or they'll have a leg break, or they'll have a tragedy. That is that pattern interrupt, that happens, that gets them back to loving themselves, because that's what they needed.

Some people need to get their ass kicked a little bit, so they can get back to center and understand who they actually are, so then, they can turn to themselves, look in the mirror, and be like, "Wow, I actually really love you. I'm so sorry for abandoning you." We all abandon ourselves at certain points in life. And this is both on a psychological level, and also on a physiological level. For me, personally, the reason that I use the food, and that I needed more padding, which is really what fat is, it's padding, it's protection, is because, Katie, I didn't feel safe. And when I don't feel safe, what do I need to protect myself? Well, I need some kind of fortification. For some people, it's muscle. For some people, it's fat.

And so, there's lots and lots of programs and lots and lots of things out there, but they all deal with talk therapy, Katie. And in my opinion, the only way you can move energy out of the body that's trying to make you not love yourself is by breath, and movement, and actually getting that stuck energy out of your tissues.

You and I both know, we have this Bruce Lipton, who's famous for being...the quotation, I believe it's "The issues are in the tissues." Well, why is that? Why is that that we have actual issues, like trauma and constriction, in our tissues? It's because that energy is asking to be moved. Emotion is energy in motion. So, what happens when we don't move the motion? Well, then that energy gets stuck.

So, it's actually quite simple. But just because it's simple does not mean it's easy. A lot of these concepts we're talking about today, yeah, they might be simple, but they're not always easy to execute. And so, that's where getting coaching and having support, to take these tools for breathing, will take you to the next level, because you actually can get held, which is what you want, so that you can use the breath and use the tools to move the energy. That's what this is all about.

Katie: And you also mentioned that breathing is something that can be done with a partner, to kind of sync up into feel like in the same relational space, and I'd love to hear a little bit more about that. And also, now that you're a parent as well, and this is so top of mind for you, about how we can incorporate that with our kids. Because unfortunately, I've seen a lot of data from the last couple of years about how the stressful situations we've all gone through the past couple of years have especially impacted the mental health of children.
And even without all of those factors, I know kids go through various phases of learning to process their emotions, to feel safe in their environment, and there's a whole psychological journey throughout the phases of childhood related to that. So, I'd love to hear how we can start incorporating these more conscious breathwork practices with our kids from an early age, to help them maybe not ever have to process so much as adults as you and I have, and to have this framework for a better, you know, breathing foundation for their whole lives.

Josh: Well, first of all, kids don't do what you say, they what do you do. And I'm sure you could tell me that a lot more, right? I'm just learning. I'm just starting. I'm three weeks in. But if I, myself, am "eating my own dog food," if I'm doing the things that I tell my kids to do, and kids are watching me do it, well, guess what? They're gonna mirror you. There are mirror neurons in the body. And so, we are all empathetically wired. Kids, Katie, kids want to please.

Most people don't know this. I spent a year, year and a half, teaching youth martial arts. And this was in, like, year five or six of my fitness career. And what I found from my coach, and just from working with kids is, if I would use positive reinforcement with these young kids in martial arts, they would, 9 times out of 10, mirror back to me the behavior that I wanted them to do. When I would be upset with them, or when I would get frustrated, they would naturally resist me. So, what am I saying here? Kids want to please. There is that same empathetic wiring inside of them that actually lives inside of us.

So, if you want your kids to use this circular breathing, so that they can potentially have some of these traumas... And by the way, to be a human is to have trauma. We're never gonna escape trauma, right? There's capital T and lowercase t. But if you want your kids to have a greater toolset about how to deal with the two types of trauma, the best thing you can do is actually have what I call breath breaks. So, you take this breath break, you sit down, you know, wife, husband, family, you all get together. However you relate is fine. And you say, "Okay, we're gonna take a break," and you give a positive reward.

As you know, Katie, the limbic system, the reward circuitry in the brain, if we're giving the limbic system novelty...we're novel beings. This is why, like, these things, these phones, are so popular. If we are constantly checking Facebook and Instagram, guess what we're looking for? Look at the work of Nir Eyal. He's been on the podcast. He actually helped Facebook and Twitter make the products more addictive. And then he had, like, a come-to-Jesus moment, where he was like, "I can't do this anymore. I can't addict people to these social media outlets." What did he say? "They are all looking for the variable reward."

So, how do we create this conscious respiration with our kids? We apply the variable reward to their young minds. We sit as a family, we take a breath break. There's a reward when we breathe. Maybe it's a healthy treat. Maybe it's that we all get to go to the park. Incorporate breathing in these fun breath breaks with your kids, and you can actually have them draw the circle, draw the box. You know, do those things as a family, as a unit, so that you can behave together exactly how nature designed you to be, and that was relaxed and at peace and in love. Does that make sense? Like, did that answer your question?
Have the breath breaks with your family, get out a piece of paper, have your kids draw a circle, have your kids draw a square, and say, "Hey, practice with mom and dad. Practice this breathing." And then afterwards, there's a variable reward, a treat of some kind, doesn't always have to be food, so that you're actually moving your kids in the right direction from that positive reinforcement. And I saw this time and time again when I worked in martial arts. I know this will work. Obviously, I can't communicate with my three-week-old son. He doesn't use words yet. I'm sure when he can use words, like, he will love doing this with us. It'll be a part of our life for sure as a family.

Katie: And in the meantime, I know there's some cool data that I've seen, you probably have encountered it as well, about just the breathing interactions between parents and their children. And I had one child who was in the NICU for a couple of weeks, and they would really encourage skin-to-skin...

Josh: Couple of weeks?

Katie: Yeah. He was early, and thankfully is, like, incredible now. Has no lasting effects. But I had placenta previa and emergency C-section, and he was in the NICU for a couple weeks. And they talked so much, especially with the micro-preemies, about how that skin-to-skin was vital for temperature regulation, but also because babies would interact with and, like, mimic the breathing patterns of their parents, and the heart rate. And so, even pre-verbally, when we are holding our children, and in that probably relaxed state ourselves, our child picks up on that, and their nervous system adapts. And so, it's really cool that even from the earliest of moments with our kids, and, of course, while they're in utero as well, they're interacting with our nervous systems, and we're interacting with theirs, and they can, if we're able to stay in that calmer state, I feel like our kids do pick up on that.

And as parents, I'm sure many people listening have had experiences of if we are chaotic and stressed, our kids feed off of that. Whereas, conversely, if we're maintaining a state of calm, our kids benefit from that as well. And so, I think your point was well made that they do what we do and not what we say, and that that's always, of course, the first step, even in simple things. Like, if I sit down and draw, my kids are much more likely to sit down and come draw with me, than if I was like, "Hey, you guys should draw and be creative." It's, they mimic what we do. Or if I work out, they're much more likely to come join me, and it's play, for them, versus if I just told them they should get some exercise.

So, I think that's a great starting point. And I know, like, the importance of community is so important when integrating any new habit. So, if people are able to do this as a family, not only does that create benefit for everyone, but it also probably makes the habit much more likely to stick, I would guess.
Josh: Yeah. I would say you're guessing right on. And I just wanna presence what you said. We were...I haven't talked about this yet. You're my very first podcast interview I've done since we got back. We were 10 days. We were 10 days in the NICU. And so, like, when you said that, my heart just dropped, because it was so traumatic. I mean, God, like, it brings up emotion to me right now just thinking about it. Like, all the leads attached to him, and...it was really intense. And if I didn't have my breathwork, like, I don't know what I would have done, really. Like, I...first of all, she had to have emergency C. He was 10 days there. I had to fight the hospital to get him back. They wanted to do a spinal tap, they wanted to do extra antibiotics. I literally had to pull on 18 years of being in wellness, and bring them study after study, and second opinion. And then we had CPS called on us, because we weren't, like, being good parents. I'm just like, "Oh, my God, the Western medical system is great. It's great. It saves lives. And, there needs to be a deep inventory of the practices that exist there."

So, yes, I wanted to presence that for a moment, because it's so insanely traumatic, and just, my heart goes out to every single parent that has ever had their baby in the NICU. Like, yes, they save lives, but also, there needs to be a deep inventory of the systems and practices that go on there. So, if I didn't have my breath, Katie, I don't know what the hell I would have done. Like, there were moments where, I wheel her up there, and I'd go off and I'd go to the bathroom, and I would sit in the bathroom. And I would breathe like a circle, for seven minutes. I would, like, just do the breathing. Because I knew that it wasn't just the time for me to walk my own talk. It was, like, literally how I've trained myself over the past five years.

That was the only thing that allowed me to stay grounded. And there were moments that I wasn't, as I'm sure you can relate to, being in the NICU and worrying about your baby. It's like, it's the most insane thing any parent could ever experience. But the breath is the only thing I had. I wasn't drinking, I wasn't eating crappy food. Like, I was in the hospital. So, that was a beautiful space for me, that I can share, like, that really allowed me to surrender to what was happening, instead of trying to fight what was happening. Yes, of course, I experienced waves of anger, too. But what really saved me was all this training I've been doing since 2016. All this training I've been doing, it was almost as if God said, "Okay, well, now that you've trained, you're ready. Here's your initiation into being a parent," you know. So, yeah, I just wanted to presence that for you, and all parents that go through that.

Katie: Yeah, that's an interesting point as well, that I feel like has a crossover metaphor into maybe, like, physical training and exercise, is, you know, strength is built under load. We don't build strength by just thinking about the theory and the practice of strength. We build it by testing it. And that's been a recurring theme for me as well these last couple of years, is... And I even had a mentor say that to me recently when I was stressed out about a lot of things, and I had done all this work. And he was like, "Oh, that's cute. You thought you were gonna get all this strength and not have it tested? Strength is developed under load."

You know, and, like, this is when you actually get to see if those things are gonna work. And we're all gonna encounter things in life that we would maybe choose not to go through if we got to choose. But instead, we get to choose to maintain that inner peace and that inner calm, and that feeling of love and kindness and
gratitude, especially in the hard moments. And I think maybe that is part of the lesson in the journey, and when we really get to test it.

Josh: Yeah. I feel like I am coherent with you right now. You asked me earlier, and I skipped over the question, so I wanna go back. You said, "How do we connect to our partner, and how do we go through that relational conscious connected breathing?" If you look at the work of HeartMath, HeartMath is probably, I think, they were first on scene, Katie, in the scientific community, when it comes to HRV, and this term called coherence.

So, we've done a lot of episodes on this. It's a little device that you wear on your ear. And it actually allows your respiration to be matched with your heartbeat. So, when you have heart-to-body or heart-to-mind coherence, you actually can increase your HRV, you can decrease your stress, you can become a better breather, essentially.

So, we have some data and some practices in the BREATHE program that allow people to wear that little device on their ear, train themselves over time, have some feedback on their phone, so that you can actually see yourself, both data and anecdotally, become a better breather. And when you can become a better breather, you can practice this with your spouse, your partner, you know, however you relate, and you can actually compare your data together.

But more than that, you can practice breathing like a circle together. That's essentially what this is all about. And I hate to be so reductionistic, but yo, it's just so easy here. It's so simple. If you breathe like a circle, and you breathe with the right posture, and you just combine good posture with good breathing, I absolutely promise you, 100%, and I say this because it's my own experience and thousands of people in the program, you will have a higher quality of life. Period, end of story.

Like, if you're the kind of person who has been stressing out, especially, Katie, with what we've gone through, the hell we've gone through since 2020, there is no better time to become a better breather. But you have to be in a trusted space where it's not just a bunch of woo. There actually is some science behind it, there is some real data and some real significance to this process that I've created. Trusting your teacher, trusting your community is huge. The results will speak for themselves if you have the trusted container or spaciousness, essentially, a vetted space, with both science and spirit, for you to learn.

So, if you can learn how to breathe, then you can learn how to choose. It's written on my arm, but it doesn't have to be written on your arm. You can just practice the breathing in a space that's trusted, and it will allow you to connect better with your partner with that coherence, to connect better with yourself with that coherence, and give yourself some accountability along the way. You know, we really need, as human beings, that external locus of control sometimes. Sometimes we really just need to be obliged.
I interviewed Gretchen Rubin, as I think you have, too, and she talks about obligers. I’m an obliger personality, so I do really well with external frameworks of control. So, when I can see things, when I can have frameworks around me, if you’re that type of a person, this is the program for you. This is the path, because we really fortify this space around you, so that you know, you can see, you can feel, that you’re on the right path.

Katie: Oh, I did interview her as well, and I was their rebel. So “you can't tell me what to do, and I can't either”, which was a thing I had to overcome. I couldn't even, like, give myself too intensive structure, or I would rebel against that as well.

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I really think all these things that you’ve said really drive home that point of just how important and core this habit is. Like I said, and it crosses over into every other aspect of health, and it's a free daily habit that we can all learn from and benefit throughout our whole life from.

The data, especially right now... I'm a data nerd, so I always go back to this, but it's really cool. We know that we're seeing a huge rapid increase in things like dementia and Alzheimer's, but we also know that people who make a regular habit of breathing and meditation, their brains are on average 7.5 years younger than those who don't. So this is an extremely tangible science-backed way.

And even just, you mention the oxygen component. Like, that impacts every system in the body, in a very, very profound way. So that's why I just think, I think really important to drive this home as a core foundational habit that will cross over into every other aspect of health. And I wanna make sure, of course, the links will be in the show notes. But I know that you have a very specific course related to how to integrate this habit, so can you just talk a little bit about that before, and I have a few more questions I wanna move on to with you?

Josh: Yes, Katie. I love how much into science you are. And I also wanna point out, like, there are some things in life that we can't always explain. And I think, for me, maybe you can relate. Like, it kind of bothers me. I'm like, "I wanna know why." I wanna know why something exists. Like, show me the data, show me the things.

When it comes to breath, I built this program. It's a three-week program. It's called "BREATHE: Breath & Wellness." And I have a really special gift that I can share with your community at the end as well. And this is really about getting people to clear their stress by using their breath. I know that’s very simple, but the only way you can clear your stress is by using your breath to consciously respirate. And notice I said conscious. It's actually taking back your breath, so you can let go of the old stressors, by the way, both physically and emotionally. I talked about my weight gain, and you and I both have shared that in our lives.

This program is built for people that want to, in three weeks, learn the fundamentals, the brass tacks. The things that are actually going to allow you to groove those synapses in your brain, so that you can apply this conscious respiration, in three phases. And this program has acute stress breathing practices, we have meditative practices, and then we also gear people towards one-on-one coaching with myself, that is more of a catharsis breathing. And that is for journey breathing and for letting go of a lot of things that are much deeper.
I've had a lot of people cry with me, I've had a lot of people shake, I've had a lot of people get rid of some very dark things. I'm not a psychologist, I'm not a therapist, this is not medical advice, but those three phases, the acute, meditative, and the catharsis, those are the things that we cover in the most depth, for the average person like you and I, who doesn't wanna sit on a mountain and chant. Like, this is for the grounded person that just wants to get the real science, the real practices, in three weeks or less, in a guided format, so you have accountability to actually get a result. That's what this program is all about.

Katie: I love that, and it's the shaking part that you mentioned, like, the catharsis of that. I had that experience as well in trauma processing. I thought I had talked through and processed a lot of it, and then when I had the actual, like, body somatic experience of processing it, I likened it to when an animal is almost killed, like in a nature show, and then they get out of the danger situation. Animals instinctively, like, shake, and they release all the extra hormones.

Josh: That's right.

Katie: And, as humans, we kind of have a little bit more control over that. And often, we can, like, pack down that response. And that's what I had done in the trauma, was be like, "I will never feel these emotions again." I put up walls, and, like, locked it down. And then, when I finally unpacked that, and was able to, like, release that trauma, I shook for hours. For like two hours, all those hormones just came out, and it was such a profound experience, and that was kind of the thing that started the cascade of hormones changing. And for me, being able to lose weight, to your point, as well, is I started to feel safe in my body again, because I had to release that somatically. And I think that is a tough thing for a lot of people to get to, and breath is probably the easiest, most accessible tool to be able to start doing that. So, I love that you brought up that component as well.

Josh: Katie, it's tough to wrap your head around, for maybe a lot of people, what you just said, but it's because the solution isn't in your head. That's really what we're talking about here. Like, for most people that have been through capital T severe trauma... And by the way, we all go through lowercase t trauma. Trauma is not necessarily just sexual, physical, mental abuse. Trauma is also maybe not being held enough, not being acknowledged enough, not being seen enough. There's so many variables in the emotional intelligence front that we're just beginning to both science and anecdotally understand.

We know that a baby that potentially has trauma through circumcision, an incredible documentary, "American Circumcision," that's why we chose to not get our son circumcised, because we did not want to traumatize him. There's also a lot of things that happen when kids are growing up where they're bullied, and if you look at the research on bullies, the trauma that happens from bullying is so severe that when kids grow up, it actually stunts their expression.
So, all of us, Katie, and I'm so...I'm honestly so, like, enamored, and I'm so grateful that you share about your own experience on your show. Because, man, haven't we all been through certain things? I mean, some people more than others, but we all go through these things. And so, how do we make sense of it all? How do we wrap our head around something that has nothing to do with our head?

Well, that we have to get out of our head, and we get into our body. That's the only way we do it. And so, using practical language here, I'm just gonna speak to everyone. You have to get out of your head, you have to get into your body. If you can do that, and use breath as a bridge, to connect yourself back home, right, to your heart, to your tissues, you will go through some shaking, I'm sure, like you did. You will cry.

I'll never forget the first time I ever did catharsis breathing. I was laying on the floor with a bunch of Navy SEALs and Special Operations people, through Mark Divine at SEALFIT. And I'm like, "why am I crying?" I just had, like, tears coming out of my eyes, but it was just my body releasing all these things that I didn't even know were there.

And the last thing I'll say, because I know I'm going on a tangent here, but I promise it'll all make sense, is that we have experienced so much micro-trauma in our life that the only way we can let go of that is to leave the mind completely. And you can't get it through meditation. I always tell people, like, the BREATHE: Breath & Wellness Program is for people that can't meditate well. It's for people that have trouble meditating. So, you have to get into your body, you have to get out of your head.

If you have trouble meditating, this is the path for you, with this breathwork. I talked about this with Michael Ruscio just recently. Like, we have to be able to be still. You know breathwork is for you if you can't be still, and if you've tried to meditate and you've been kind of struggling with your meditation, like, give breathing a chance. Because when you breathe, you can get back here, and out of your mind, and then you can probably become a much better meditator. I know it's made me a lot better, too, so thank you for letting me share such a long tangent, but it really makes sense for all of us that struggle being still.

Katie: Yeah. Oh, such a great point. And a question I love to ask as we get toward the end of our time 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?

Josh: Well, I have, like, hundreds. I remember, somebody asked me this and I was like, "You're gonna make me say one book? You're gonna make me say one book?" I really love Hawkins, "Letting Go: The Pathway of Surrender." I would say that's the number one. Number two is David Deida, "The Way of the Superior Man." And that's for women, too. It's really this mastery path of health-wealth relationships. You know, the triangle that we're all walking here. But I love "Letting Go" because he has this approach, and it's not necessarily
Buddhist, or Christian. It's a non-denominational approach to letting go of the things that we're having struggle surrendering to.

And why I love that book is, I love the audio version, is there’s actual practical things that I've put into place over the past seven, eight years. People don't know this, but, I mean, I even launched the podcast in 2015. "Wellness Force" came from my own pain. It came from me fighting, and not surrendering. So I just took it upon myself to discover, like, okay, what are the tools? What are the things? What are the ways of being that I myself must do so that I can have peace in my own heart, peace in my own body? Like, the physical and emotional intelligence that we talk about on "Wellness Force" is really a byproduct of my own lessons, my own learning, my own trauma, my own healing with public spotlight on me, like, how do I heal?

And so, I think if we all can, like, let go of the pride and the ego around healing, and around how do we have peace in ourselves, we can all just connect more with one another. Because everybody’s got their own journey. Everybody’s got their own battles. I’m sure there's a quote out there that I'll butcher but, you know, be mindful, be kind to people, because everyone has a battle that they're fighting. And so, we don't know what people are fighting, but these books will really help you if you're interested in stopping the war with self, stopping the fight within your own self. I think those two books can really help people.

Katie: I love those recommendations. Those will be linked in the show notes as well, at wellnessmama.fm. And if you could leave one piece of advice with everyone listening, what would be the one piece of advice you would want everyone to know and remember?

Josh: So, whether it's with me, or whether it's with someone else, you must do the work to be courageous, and really to be brave, that when you're in the face of fear, and, like, the fear dragon is right there, or you're triggered by your partner, or you're experiencing pain in your life, if you can do your work to take a breath when it matters most, and love your wife, love your husband, love your children, and actually, as Gay Hendricks told me on the podcast five years ago, love your fear, which might seem a little crazy. If you can do the work to love the things that scare you, and actually accept them and be friends with your ego, and be friends with your pain, that is how you win the game of life. You win the game of life by treating it like a game, because life can get so serious, Katie. Oh my god. Like, there can be so much suffering in this world.

So if we can train ourselves to have the courage and the bravery, to really be present to what's going on, and to do as much work as we can to love it, then that is what can set you free. That is what can connect you with the most enjoyable life. And that's how you win. But not win from a competitive standpoint. Win, like, in the same way as if you were playing tag with your kids in the park. You wouldn't treat it so seriously. We have become so serious in this world. And I've fallen into it so much. I think if we can learn how to breathe and that can get us closer to the piece of advice, I would want everyone to know.
Katie: And now it's my turn to share a thing that's written on my arm, which is Amor Fati which means "love what is," and not just accept what is, but truly love what is, even the hard things. And like we talked about earlier, that's when we get to apply these things and learn such beautiful lessons. And I think that's a perfect place to wrap up. But you mentioned a gift for the audience as well, so wanna make sure we just touch on that briefly, and I'll put links in the show notes as well.

Josh: Is that Italian, Amor Fati?

Katie: Latin, actually.

Josh: Latin, okay.

Katie: And I have a memento mori on the other wrist.

Josh: Okay, yes.

Katie: Remember you will die.

Josh: Yes, yes. It's a great reminder, isn't it? I've so enjoyed this, Katie. I didn't... This is the first time you and I are really tuning in as friends and as colleagues, so I just wanna thank you for letting me be here and just share my experience. The greatest gift I can give to anyone is my own experience. But I wanna give your community an incredible gift, and that is 20% off this program. You go to breathwork.io. That's breathwork.io. And the code is "WellnessMama." So, enter "Wellness Mama," you get 20% off. And then, for that, it's three weeks long. I add an absolute promise to everyone here that if you commit to something like this, you will change. You will change in three weeks, because thousands of people have already proved it to be so.

So, it's the code "WellnessMama," over at breathwork.io. That is the gift. It's already a very affordable program, so do this instead of going out for drinks this weekend, okay? Learn how to breathe instead, with me. And thank you, Katie, for having me. And thank you to everyone for spending time with us. You guys, this is huge. Your time is your most valuable resource. So, truly, from my heart to yours, thank you for being here with us. And thank you for hearing me out about the power of breath.

Katie: I love that you said that, because that's a thing I often say as well, just gratitude for everyone for sharing their time. That's the most valuable resource we have. And I don't take it lightly that people share that
resource with me on this podcast and with you today, and also very grateful for you and the work that you're doing, and congratulations on the new little one.

Josh: Thank you. Nova says hello to the global community. Thank you, Katie.

Katie: And thanks to all of you guys as always for listening. I hope you will join me again on the next episode.

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.