

Where You Are

S4 Episode 11 — Words of Wisdom: Reflecting on 4 Seasons of Where You Are

TRANSCRIPT:

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Char Black: It's special that we get to talk to all these guests, like across all four seasons we get all these experts, we get to talk to them. So I feel really honored that I get to hear all of that.

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Bryn Askwith: This is Where You Are, a podcast that helps families and their children promote their mental health and wellness. I'm Bryn Askwith.

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Char Black: And I'm Char Black.

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Bryn Askwith: Typically, on Where You Are we end each season with an episode that pulls together questions we've received from BC families at the Kelty Center on a variety of mental health and substance use topics. But today we're changing things up. We've done four wonderful seasons of Where You Are and we've gotten into conversations about everything from school anxiety to eating disorders to obsessive compulsive disorder and much more. This year, we want to end the season by reflecting on things that we've learned as hosts and parents ourselves.

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Char Black: Today on Where You Are, we're looking back on episodes that have resonated with us. We'll highlight some gems shared by our many guests over the years. They've taught us so much about how parents and caregivers can better support their child's mental health and wellness. And who better to join me and Bryn today than Michelle Horn. Michelle has been a co-host on all four seasons of Where You Are. Welcome back to the podcast, Michelle.

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Michelle Horn: Thanks so much, Char. It's so great to be back with you and Bryn, joining you on this episode and I'm so excited to dive into looking back at the last four seasons of Where You Are. Can you believe it's been four seasons?

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Char Black: No.

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Bryn Askwith: Not at all.

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Michelle Horn: All right, I'm so excited. Let's get into that conversation.

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Bryn Askwith: All right, Char, can you start us off with Where You Are episode that's been memorable for you and share with our listeners why that is?

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Char Black: One episode that I love being part of, Bryn was called Cake and Broccoli, Promoting Mental Wellness through Feeding and Eating. And firstly I love the title of that and I think it was Bryn that you came up with that because it really to me highlights kind of the balance that we achieved through eating. All foods are good foods.

And this was really special to me because I was a guest on this episode instead of a host, so I got to answer questions instead of asking them. And when I was re-listening to this episode, I laughed throughout the entire episode because I even had my youngest at the time because I was on mat leave, during the recording and you could hear kind of chirping up and making random noises in the back and it was so fun. And that was a big highlight for me.

And there was a point in the conversation where we talked about how food and eating is a key part of supporting not just your physical health but your mental health. And I really, really wanted to highlight that because that's a really big thing I want people to know. It's so interlinked. So I think we have a clip of what I said about that.

We talk about the connection between physical and mental health, eating well and how that impacts their physical health. I talk about how that gives us energy and that allows us to go run outside for an hour or go biking and the physical activity itself then improves our moods.

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Michelle Horn: Char, I totally remember that episode and how much fun that was having you join as a guest and having Lorrie Chow join us as a dietician on it. And I totally agree with you. I have two young kids as well, and this is a conversation that comes up in our home and I feel like this language of there being good food and bad food is so prevalent in our society that it's always ... I remember to think back on that episode and think about how to frame that differently for kids and to reinforce that idea that when we eat a variety of different foods that can give us the energy to go and do things that can then impact our mental health as well too.

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Char Black: That's awesome, Michelle. And a quick update. So it's been three years, I guess, since this episode. And when I listen to that clip, it's still very reflective of my home. So I still talk about it this way and I'm glad that it is just a consistent message that still happens in our home. So I think that's great. In that same episode toward the end, I remember Lorrie, the registered

dietician, guest in that episode, she and I being asked about any words of wisdom on feeding and eating. So I'd love to hear that as well. I think it's going to be hard to start with like any change that you make in your life. Don't stress out over these meltdowns that may happen, but just keep trying. And I think the main thing I'm trying to do is not change my life too much. Don't try to make all these separate things for your kids. Make things that we all might like parts of, like what Lori was saying. They'll eat something out of what you're making.

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Lorrie Chow: You might need to have a family meeting and sit down and say things are changing and explain it to your child what's happening and why you're doing it, but try and relax through the process. And I have a lot of friends and family members who say that life just became so much more relaxed and enjoyable when they were able to have calm family mealtime.

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Char Black: Just listening to Lorrie, I definitely am more relaxed around mealtime. And as a parent, we're already ... there's so many things that could stress you out. You're worried about so many things. Maybe that's just me, but I think it's all parents. We don't need another thing to worry about including family mealtimes. And I'm not saying I don't have meltdowns, I definitely have meltdowns, but not around family eating anymore. And even Ruby, who's, you could hear her in the background in that clip, she definitely has challenged me a lot in the last three years. She refuses to eat vegetables except in smoothie form. So occasionally she'll have smoothies. She only picks meat or high carb things or fried foods, but I'm just going with it. And she recently ate a carrot, a raw carrot for the first time in her life. I'm just going through this process and just sticking with it. So that was a great episode to listen to and to hear it again.

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Michelle Horn: Yeah, I totally agree, Char. We take a similar approach and what I found in taking this approach to feeding and eating with my kids is that when the focus is not so much about what your kids are eating at the meal or trying to get them to eat certain things, it just frees up that space to have conversations about life and your day and to just catch up and reconnect as a family. My kids are a bit older, they're in a bunch of activities and sometimes meal time is our time to come together as a family and just catch up altogether. So I feel like yeah, just taking the pressure of what people are eating just frees up that space.

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Bryn Askwith: So I'm going to play the devil's advocate because I love this feeding and eating episode so much and the takeaways, Char, that you and Lorrie share. But in my household, I definitely needed to sit down and have that family meeting about how things will be changing. And I actually needed to have it as well with my amazing spouse because he comes from a different cultural background. And it was that whole thing of we're not wasting any food and we're going to eat everything on our plate and you're not leaving the table until you finish. That was definitely an opportunity for me to be like, " Hey, check out what the latest research says

and shows around feeding and eating." And brought that conversation and some of those changes in styles around the way we eat and share family meals.

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Michelle Horn: So Bryn, keeping with the theme of healthy living, is there an episode that comes to mind that's memorable for you?

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Bryn Askwith: Yes. One of the healthy living episodes that I loved was from season one, Sleep, Building the Foundation for Family Mental Wellness. And it could just be because I am a huge fan of sleep. When my kids were newborns, I was that parent who in at 2:00 AM after some kind of feeding was whispering in their ear saying, "Sleep is such a good thing, it helps your brain and body grow." And I really hoped that they would through that messaging, adopt it for life. But sleep was like for many families, a struggle. And the thing that I find myself using and going back to is this great little acronym that they offer to support healthy sleep, which was RED.

R standing for routine, E standing for environment and creating a healthy sleep environment and D, addressing devices. Ultimately, if you can have one little takeaway for routine. So for example, Dr. Naidoo always talks about putting my child to bed early or at the same time or waking them up early, which one should I anchor? So Dr. Naidoo would say, "Anchor the wake-up time." So that would be one thing. So routine environment is really important. We want to create a sleep zone. Not everybody has the opportunity to sleep in their own bedroom. Some people share with siblings, some people are in bunk beds, some people sleep on mattresses on the floor. So ultimately is creating an environment that feels calm to the child, that is free of distractions. And then the last one would be devices. When you can time those devices and when you can stack those devices earlier in the day, whether you have a Monday to Friday, no rule with devices or if you need it for math homework, we're going to do it before dinner. Or if you're going to watch it after dinner, it's going to be before bath. Come up with some rules, stick it on the wall, use the timer. These are the rules in the family. Put it on the wall so everybody can read. If they can't read, draw little pictures. So routine environment and device. Come up with what works for your family.

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Dr. Naidoo: The only thing I would say with environment, if I can just add one thing, is for teenagers. So as they're getting older, a lot of teenagers have a desk in their room. I don't know why that's been accepted in society. I understand that space is limited in Vancouver, but we have to be very clear that there has to be a clear environmental boundary of work and sleep.

A child doing their homework in their bedroom is not a sanctuary anymore. Their desk should only be used for crafts, for fun things, things that are calming and a very safe room for them to decompress. With environment, we have to be very clear that one thing society has in some ways instilled in our brains and even on Pinterest is having a desk in your room and it shouldn't happen anymore.

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Bryn Askwith: Not only do I love that RED takeaway and it's really handy and quick to revert back to, but I also love Dr. Naidoo's add-on about desks in bedrooms. That really connected with me because I have a child who started middle school last year and when he was about to start middle school, of course, what did he ask for a desk in his bedroom in order to be able to do all his work that he wants to do. And when I heard that, I literally went to the clip in the episode that we just heard and pushed play, let him listen to the clip. And then I basically followed up with, "And that's why it's not the best thing to have a desk in a bedroom. It doesn't really promote healthy sleep and healthy sleep is what you need in order to be your best self and be a great student each day." And so to this day, the desk sits in our kitchen.

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Michelle Horn: One of the things that I remember about that episode and has been really beneficial to me as a parent is just that link between sleep and mental health and how important that link is. And talking to my kids about that has been really helpful for them to understand the need for getting a good night's sleep and getting that buy-in for creating that routine or not having devices in the room and being really clear, helping point it out to my kids. "When you get a good night's sleep, this is how you are the next day. You're much more in control of your feelings or you're less anxious or you're better able to regulate."

Or when they don't get a good night's sleep, being able to make that link to potentially them having more meltdowns the next day or whatever it might be. Right? And they're starting to see that themselves. So they're starting to build in those habits. "And even though my friends might be out playing later, I know that I wake up really early so I need to go to bed earlier so that I can have a good day the next day." But just having those conversations has been really beneficial in my family.

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Char Black Wow, Michelle gold star for parenting there when they initiate themselves. That's what really impresses me.

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Michelle Horn: We're getting there. Yeah, it doesn't work all the time, but sometimes. So I love how the first two episodes that we focused on talked about this link between healthy living, whether it be eating or sleep and the link that they have to mental health. But let's switch gears a little bit. So in the last four seasons, we've also looked at mental health challenges and disorders where kids are really struggling and parents are looking for practical ways to best support their kids through these really tough situations. I found that there was a lot of takeaways in these episodes like the importance of connection and how to build a base of trust with your child.

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Char Black: I agree Michelle, and I'm thinking of our Self- Harm, What Families Need to Know where our amazing youth guest talked about how parents and health providers can help a young person who is self- harming.

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Youth Guest: I think I spoke to that trust I had with this physician and I think that is so important to try to build up that base of trust and connection. And then you can ask questions once you have that trust built. And then I think you mentioned asking and that was a big thing too, is having parents or service providers ask what would be helpful for you right now?

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Char Black And that clip makes me think about when we were talking about family meals. That is a lot of people's point of connection where we can build that trust and connection with our kids. So that's what makes me think of that. I also really liked how the clinical counselor on the episode underscored that these are tough situations and that parents are doing the best that they can in these really difficult situations.

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Victoria Keddiss: But what about those people who still hear that all of this is happening for a reason and blame themselves?

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Kim Leifso: I think for parents, we always, and I say this to myself as much as to anybody else. We have to cut ourselves some slack. We're all doing the best we can with what we've got. And if what I have today isn't as much as I have tomorrow, then maybe I'll do differently or do better tomorrow. You could spend hours unpacking why it all has happened or you can just say, " This is where we're at and how do we move forward in a better, more positive way?"

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Michelle Horn: That one just really resonates with me. It reminds me of something that one of our parent guests in another episode, Mary McCracken said when she said, "Kids don't come with an instruction manual. We're all going into this. We're doing the best we can. And if you're stuck in this place of self blame or guilt, it doesn't allow you to go and try something new or move forward in a positive way."

You get sucked into this really negative space where you're not able to fully be there for your child or try something different that might be helpful for the whole family. And I know it's come up in quite a few episodes, just how helpful it's been for parents to connect with other parents who have been through something similar because then you see it's not something that you did as a parent that caused this, right?

It's not, you weren't the one to blame for this. Parents are doing the best they can and there's a lot of parents who are in a similar situation and that can be so helpful to connect with other

parents. And I think that one of our other guests, Jennifer Toomey, who's a BC Children's Hospital nurse clinician, talked about this in our Concurrent Disorders episode.

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Jennifer Toomey: As a mother of two children with ADHD I have also accessed support groups for parents of children with ADHD and I found exactly that I wasn't alone. How we support our parents is to let them know that they are not alone. It's not their fault.

So often parents blame themselves and sometimes the most supportive friend that may not be going through the same experience, they can say things that add to the guilt and blame. I know for example, I was told, "Well maybe if you just put your son in soccer, Jennifer, that would help." But we know that these mental health concerns and substance use concerns have a genetic component to them so it's not anyone's fault.

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Char Black I laughed when Jen Toomey was saying, " People just told me to put them into soccer." I know parents are just trying to be helpful. They are coming from a place of trying to be helpful from their own knowledge and every child is different. So you can't just apply the same things to every child. But at the same time, that's what really to me demonstrates that we are trying our best. We really don't know what we're doing there. Like you said Michelle, there's no instructional manual. It's just like you got to try to listen to your child. You got to know what meets the needs of your family and try your best. But it is hard not to blame yourself.

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Michelle Horn: Yeah, that similar theme of not getting it perfect and making mistakes and that being okay came through in another episode we did, which is one of my personal favorites, When Parenting Gets Tough. So Dr. Ashley Miller was in that episode and she even goes a step further to highlight that if you don't like how an interaction went with your child, you can always try again. You can have a do- over. And that's really, there's a sense of relief in that as a parent to be like, " Phew, I don't need to get it right the first time. We can try again." So our kids give us a lot of opportunities and chances for these types of do- overs.

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Dr. Ashley Miller: It's a hard journey and as a mom as well, I'm not going to say, " Oh, this is easy, just repeat this mantra or do this thing and it'll be gone." I think first knowing that it's never too late to do something differently. So if there is something that you maybe regret and we all have them, nobody is perfect, thank goodness because kids would think that was weird if we were always acting in this perfect zen- like way all the time.

But if there are things, more genuine things that we feel badly about as parents, I think A, recognizing that we're doing the best we can and that no kid comes with an instruction manual. We can't know ahead of time. Giving ourselves a bit of a break about some of the things that haven't gone well and knowing that we can always do something differently, make it up to our child or to ourselves.

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Bryn Askwith: Oh, I love her comment there about if thank goodness we're not always perfect because our kids would think that was weird, because they really would think that was weird.

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Char Black: Yeah, totally.

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Bryn Askwith: And it made me think back to an interaction I had with my oldest. It's funny how you record these episodes as a co-host and then these gems ring in your ear a little bit when you have interactions with your kids and you're like, "Hmm, that wasn't exactly how I thought I wanted that to go. I'm really glad there's an opportunity for a do-over."

But my oldest and I were driving to one of his hockey events and the GPS told me to go one way and the road sign told me to go another. So I was like, "Okay, which one do I follow?" So I followed the road sign and of course that had us arriving like 15 minutes late and out comes a comment of, "Well, I should have gone with so-and-so's parent or my friend's parent because we would've got here on time."

And I remember having this moment of how ungrateful and I went into this zero to 60, "Are you kidding me," response. And I kind of shared my big feelings in that moment, maybe not in the most ideal way. So then driving along two minutes, three minutes later, I definitely took some deep breaths. I really focused on some strategies for regulation, calm down a bit and explained how that felt for me and moved on from there basically saying, "What would be helpful to me in those situations?" But again, two minutes later down the road, I just thought to myself, I had Dr. Miller's thoughts running through my mind, "Don't worry, you can do this again."

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Michelle Horn: I'm always amazed if we flip our lids or lose our temper and then we come back after and talk to our kids about it, how much they're willing to just forgive and move past it and be like, "You know what? Everyone makes mistakes. It's okay." Kids are so resilient in that way.

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Bryn Askwith: Absolutely. What sticks with me from some of our previous episodes is in tough moments when kids are struggling, parents will often say, "What can I do to help my child?" It's that do piece. So what kind of practical strategies, what can I actually do that's within my control to make a difference in this moment and to help support my child? And I know one of the themes that came up in previous episodes was validating your child's feelings and experiences and what they're going through and how that can really make a difference, even if you don't always necessarily agree with what they're saying or their perspective.

And you don't have to necessarily take on their ideas. You can still have your own and you can still have a voice and explain things, but really it's about just meeting them where they're at and

validating their feelings. That can really go a long way to opening doors for conversation and connection. And another strategy that came up through multiple episodes was the theme of modeling, modeling regulation, kind of like we just spoke about and how we deal with our big feelings, modeling confidence. So that idea of that you know as a parent or caregiver with supports or with the right supports that your child's going to be okay. And I know that came through in our Tackling Anxiety episode from season one.

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Dr. Sandra Clark: It's a balance between being empathetic and supportive and modeling confidence that your child will be okay. The tendency is don't worry, don't worry, don't worry. We don't want our kids to worry. So really giving kids an opportunity to just talk about what's going on for them. And then knowing as a parent, anxiety is a false alarm, there isn't a danger, they're going to be okay. So modeling confidence.

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Bryn Askwith: And when I hear that, it also reminds me of another episode where Dr. Linda Uyeda talked about that some stress is good stress and it's okay for our kids to experience stress and to learn how to manage that. So that idea that don't worry, don't worry, don't worry. I think I fall into that camp often and so I'm having to use or go with different strategies and again, modeling that with the right tools and supports we're going to get through this and this is going to be okay. So again, as a parent, it feels really nice to know that there are things within your control that you can do when your child's struggling because on this journey there's so many unknowns, there's so many layers and things outside of your control. It's good to know that there are things that we actually can do every day.

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Char Black: So I agree with you about what you were talking about the, it's nice to have tools for parents and the other thing I'm really working on is the validating feelings. And every time I've done that, both my kids have been able to regulate faster. Once I'm like, " Yes, this totally sucks, you're freaking out and I understand." It's like some sort of magical thing that happens when somebody feels heard.

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Michelle Horn: And while these experiences are really challenging and tough, I am also always struck by the hope and the positivity and genuine insights that our guests share with our listeners. And when I say that I am thinking back to our Concurrent Disorders episode where our parent guest Ngaire talked about this hope that she had within her family.

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Ngaire: It's a day-to-day struggle. So we have a saying in our family, " Tomorrow is a new day." So no matter how tough today was, tomorrow is a new day.

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Michelle Horn: That one, honestly, out of four seasons has always stuck with me and I still say it to this day in my family, if it's just been a rough day in our family and no one's performing at their best within the family unit is sometimes you just need to take an L for the day. Say, " It wasn't the best day, but tomorrow is a new day," and be able to put it out of your mind and not dwell on it.

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Char Black: Thanks, Michelle. I can see why you really like that one. And I think this is a good mantra for a lot of parents listening and I felt a lot of hope after listening to the episode on a Mindful Approach To Parenting And Caregiving. There was a point in the episode where Dr. Joanna McDermid helps explain mindfulness as a helpful approach to parenting.

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Dr. Joanna McDermid: I think there's a lot of definitions about mindfulness and some people may or may not already have some experience with it. And so the way I understand mindfulness is that it's an awareness that arises when we pay attention in the present moment and also with a sense of openness. And I like to think of mindfulness as a way of being not something that I'm doing, but that I am allowing myself to just be here and now as I am and that's enough.

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Char Black: That's enough part is what gets me. It's like, okay, here I am as a parent, that's enough. I can apologize. I can flip my lid. I could do all these things, but I can come back and show up as who I am as myself. And I think that's relates to modeling to our children that we are who we are and we try our best. And that's why I just love that episode and love that clip.

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Bryn Askwith: Absolutely. I feel that hope coming through in our episodes, especially in our Words Of Wisdom sections. And truthfully, I feel like we could do an audio montage of some of the amazing gems that our guests have shared, but some of the ones that have stuck with me, I just want to highlight and these are helpful for me and give me hope on challenging days. So the first one is, every child or youth just needs one supportive adult, one positive person in their lives that can really help in terms of building them up, bit of a protective factor, but also really helps in building resiliency and their ability to cope with some tough days or some big struggles. Connection.

Connection is key and sometimes connection will be intentional. So putting away devices or things that distract us and our families and making time for each other. And at other points, it'll be informal, like grabbing a smoothie together or when you're on a car drive or playing a favorite activity together. Taking care of yourself is another key gem that got shared. This models healthy habits for your kids. It's really important to put that value on healthy living. It fills your bucket and allows you to show up re- energized and recharge to be able to best support your child as you can in that moment on that day. And then another gem focusing on positives and strengths, the strengths of your child and by focusing on these, it can really help them manage some of the difficulties and tough situations that they're experiencing in life. So that's a bit of a

quick summary of the things that really helped me and the gems that I think of on challenging days. And if we could actually circle back to some of the words of wisdom offered by Dr. Ashley Miller and Dr. Amrit Dhariwal in the No Shortage of Questions episode, I'd love for you guys to listen to that.

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Dr. Ashley Miller: One question that I think comes up a lot is there's so much parenting advice out there, what really matters? And I think there's a book by Dan Siegel called The Power of Showing Up. And I think that title sort of says it all, that it doesn't have to be fancy, it's just your time and effort. Not even all your time, just as much as you can. Being there trying your best is what matters the most and really taking care of yourself as best you can through it as a parent or caregiver.

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Dr. Amrit Dhariwal: Yeah, I would just like to echo what Dr. Miller said. I think that's a beautiful saying, the power of showing up. I think the one saying that always sticks with me is as parents, we always feel like we have to be everything for our children. It's our job to make them happy. And I think that what they need the most is just someone to be with them as they figure life out. And like Dr. Miller said, you don't need to be there all the time, but to be there as much as you are able or when you are able just to be with them and not to have to be everything to them.

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Char Black: I really like that just showing up and the other clip from the mindfulness episode of Being Lit that You Are Enough just showing up. So thanks Michelle and Bryn for making the time to reflect back and highlight some of our great content. What are your thoughts about our last four seasons?

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Michelle Horn: Well, first thank you so much for inviting me back. I was so thrilled to get the invite to come back on the podcast and I think as I said when I was on the last episode, you can't get rid of me. I'll always be around in some way or another. Just thinking back on the last four seasons, wow, what a wealth of knowledge, lived experience, knowledge, clinical knowledge, so much knowledge and expertise from all of our different guests spanning so many different topics. And I'm just really excited to see what's coming up for season five.

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Bryn Askwith: Oh me as well. I had a moment when I looked at our catalog and list of all of our different episodes and I thought, why didn't we do this sooner? But it's a reminder that we definitely need to come together again because I think we've shared some key gems from some of these episodes, but there's so many more that I'd like to share going forward. So I don't think this will be the last of this type of episode and I'm hoping in season five this is one of the things we regroup for.

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Michelle Horn: I'm there. Yeah.

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Bryn Askwith: Char, so happy to have co-hosted with you and Michelle today, thanks to all of our Where You Are listeners as well. Glad you tuned in with us.

00:30:35

Char Black: Thanks, Bryn. It was so fun to have all the Where You Are host together again. This episode of Where You Are is brought to you by BC Children's Healthy Mental Health Resource Center. Our show is produced and edited by Emily Morantz with Audio Engineering by Sam Seguin. Audio Production by JAR Audio. If you enjoyed this episode, please leave us a rating wherever you might be listening now.

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