



Episode #177:

**Parenting the New Teen in the Age of Anxiety,
with Dr. John Duffy**

October 1, 2019

Debbie: Hey John, welcome to the podcast.

John: Thank you so much for having me, Debbie. It's good to be here.

Debbie: It is good to have you here. You know, I just finished reading your book. I really enjoyed it. I think it's obviously super timely for what our teenagers are experiencing today and it was really eye opening for me. So I'm, I'm excited to share this with my listeners who, as you know, are parents raising neurologically atypical kids, so probably kids that even more than your average teen are dealing with anxiety. So as a way to get into this, I always like guests to just take a few minutes to introduce themselves and within that, could you tell us about why you took on this book and why you wanted to write it?

John: Oh, I would be happy to. Thank you. So I am a clinical psychologist up here in Chicago and I've been practicing for about 25 years and I honestly never, if I'm being completely transparent, never really intended to work with teenagers. My plan was to work with high functioning adults, nice and easy practice. And my first, when I opened my practice, my first referral resource was a social worker at a high school. And then my second was, and my third was, and I realized, boy, I really love these kids. They've got remarkable strengths that often go untapped and even when they are depressed or at their worst or when they're super anxious or angry or defiant, there's still some spirit there that I really love and admire. So I've enjoyed my entire career working with them.

About eight years ago I thought, oh, you know what, I want to write a book that's a little guide to parents just based on what I see in session. And that was called *The Available Parent*. I'm really proud of that book, and that was really about parenting free as we can of our own fear, our own judgment and our own ego. And really I kind of left it at that. Like if you can do that, stay in that lane, then you're available to your kids in the way they need you to be and you're fine. So that came out in 2011 and in the last eight years since then, maybe four or five years, there's been such a dramatic shift in the landscape of adolescence to the point where I think the talks we were saving for 12 or 13, we now have to have at 8 or 9.

Adolescence now stretches, in my mind, to the early twenties because a lot of the challenges of adolescence we have trouble meeting because of what I call in the book identity traffic and a few other factors that plague the late adolescent. And I do think that they're, these kids are dealing with a whole new set of stressors that no other group of teenagers before them has had to deal with. And even the stressors we dealt with when we were kids, they're amplified now in ways that I think a lot of people in my generation, a lot of parents just don't have a good grasp on. And so that's why I wrote the second book, *Parenting the New Teen in the Age of Anxiety*, to kind of just highlight that for parents. Here's some of the stuff you don't know. Here's some things you can do with that and more stuff is

going to come along that you don't know. And so here's a way to talk to your children about that as well as those things rear their heads because some of this stuff is, is really scary. And I'm struck by what we don't know as parents.

Debbie: Well you know what you just said in terms of teens dealing with things that we as their parents can't really relate to, that, you know, when I started reading the book, that's what really just stayed with me the whole time. You know, many years ago in a past life, I used to write self help books for teenagers. And so I thought, well gosh, I really struggled with the, the elementary school years, but once my son hits the teen years, I am going to be, you know, good to go cause I get these kids right and I, and so I'm reading your book and you just really paint a picture that really shook me. Like, we really don't have a clue like what our kids are really going through. The depth of, you know, you talk about their psychic pain, like the, the depth of what they are experiencing is something we can't relate to. So can you talk a little bit about that? You know, what is it that we're not getting that could really be affecting our kids that we have to wrap our heads around?

John: I'm so glad you focused on the psychic pain piece because there's, there's a number of things, you know, that, that we see our kids doing. They're on YouTube, they're on their phones, they're disengaged somehow. They're up in their rooms. There's these behavioral things that you kind of notice. And parents can ask questions about that and I, I kind of talk a lot about those things, and the vaping and all this other stuff that's kind of hitting the headlines now. But the psychic pain, that more than anything else is what I want parents to be able to recognize has changed and shifted dramatically in the last few years. And there's a number of reasons, in my experience, for that. One is that kids are super aware today of the idea of mental illness and mental wellness, mental illness in particular. They know what it means from a very young age to be depressed or anxious or suicidal.

They certainly know what ADHD is. They know what the medications for these things are. Kids play defacto therapists for one another via text or Snapchat or Instagram late into the night, a lot of the time unbeknownst to the vast majority of parents. So there's this empathy that I really admire in them that I do not remember having when I was a kid. I think I highlight that in the book. But I think they are taking on emotional challenges that their young minds are entirely unprepared to take on. And that part worries me quite a bit for these kids because whether they're prepared or not, they're taking them on. And I think they're doing it in a real stealth way that we moms and dads are having a very hard time tracking. And so when our child comes to us with attitude, we assume that's attitude. We assume that's defiance as opposed to the accumulation of all this psychic trouble that they're carrying around.

Debbie: Yeah. And I think about a lot of differently wired kids already, I feel like, tend to move through the world with a heightened sensitivity. You know, often these kids feel things more profoundly, you know, they experience, they might be overly empathetic or just very sensitive to energies around them and taking it all on. And so, you know, when I was reading that, I was like, wow, these are kids

who have already are wired to, to struggle in this area. But now they're growing up in a society where that is almost, you know, double the impact on them.

John: Absolutely. And they're so much more socially aware in part because of all the information they have access to, which is in effect all the information. I mean, you know, now that, you know, they're carrying the internet around in their hands, and a lot of kids are exceptionally well-informed. So if something's going on somewhere on the planet, they're aware if there is suffering happening and they feel that in a way that I think a lot of us, when we were teenagers were kind of blissfully unaware of. You know, there's that idea that those teen years are almost by definition egocentric and we're working on developing a separate identity for ourselves and a sense of competence and resilience for ourselves. And that's the challenge of those years. Well, kids are working through all of that for sure, but they're also taking on, you know, all the world's problems and they're wondering like, am I ever gonna make any impact on any of this?

Will I ever have the agency over any of this or the awful things that I'm hearing about? Am I just kind of stuck with, you know, being kind of enfeebled and disempowered to do anything about that? Will I be able to take care of my family? So they have this kind of like long range view that I think a lot of us had a cushion away from when we were, when we were younger. Somewhere in the book I mention the disappearance of the tween. And I, the reason I bring that up is that I think that that cushion between childhood and adolescence that a lot of us had the luxury of, kids don't have that luxury any longer. You know, they, they move very quickly and abruptly from the innocence of childhood. And that lack of self awareness and that lack of awareness of mental illness or suffering to kind of a pretty hard stop in this awareness. Like, oh, I think I might be depressed. I don't like the way I look. You know, and this is happening at eight or nine or ten, not twelve or thirteen or fourteen now. And those young minds are really not very well prepared to take that on. So they get overwhelmed pretty easily.

Debbie: And so also, you know, as you're explaining that, I'm thinking about the fact that as parents, we're also getting messages, you know, we're reading books about the teenage brain and you know, part of being a teenager is taking risks and, you know, we or we read, you know, I'm a big fan of Julie Lythcott-Haims' book *How to Raise an Adult*. And so that's always in the back of my mind. Like, okay, how do I build scaffolding to support this child but give them, you know, that sense of agency and, you know, so I think many of us are trying to do what, those are still kind of old playbooks in some way if they're not taking into account the levels of anxiety that kids, most kids are kind of moving through the world with.

John: I think you're right. I think that's the trick of parenting today. I love, I love Julie Lythcott-Haims' book as well. And she spoke at the conference last year and I got to meet her and talk to her about this a little bit. And she would agree that yes, you know, you want to build that scaffolding, but there are new challenges to that. So there's this little bit of a high wire act in parenting where you want to create some, some degree of safety, you want to keep communication open, but you do have to be informed about some of the challenges, at least, that your child is facing. Because a lot of them they're facing without your awareness in complete silence in the dark, in their room or with their friends. And so when

they present a certain way to us, we can make easy assumptions that, oh, you're just being obstinate.

You're being difficult. Why won't you focus on school? Why won't you sign up for the thing? You know, like what, why are you making life so difficult, without recognizing, oh, they're already reaching the end of their bandwidth before you even get to them. You know? So we have to recognize that as parents, and they're not going to tell us every little bit of what's going on in their minds, but they need to know that they can, you know? And that's a point I try to make kind of consistently throughout the book is, you know, do not expect that your child's going to be completely transparent with you. That's not a hallmark of the teenage years. But to know that they can be and to know that if you have something you need them to understand about, you know, the world, that you get, that you think they might not get, you need to establish a lot of goodwill between the two of you in order to make that message heard. Otherwise they're going to trust what they're reading and hearing and seeing from peers or, or online at Reddit or with each other on Snapchat.

Debbie: And is that the emotional bank account that you're talking about there?

John: Exactly.

Debbie: Can you, can you explain that to listeners?

John: Yeah, I've, for about 20 years, I've been looking for another phrase that I think that I think suits the dynamic between parent and child. And I've come up with nothing more effective than something I read in Daniel Goleman's book *Emotional Intelligence* 22 or 23 years ago, the emotional bank account. And effectively every one of our relationships carries an emotional bank account and that's kind of the sum total of our interactions and whether they are positive or negative. And if you've got net negative interactions, you've got a bank account that's in the red and your interventions in that relationship, whether it's parenting or an intimate relationship or a work relationship or a friendship, is going to be far less effective than if you built up a lot of positive interactions so that you are in the black.

And that's the good stuff of parenting is the more you spend time connecting in a genuine way, where you're not just collecting intel or looking at portals, but you're talking to your child, you're getting to know his or her world, you're understanding their music a little bit better, you're understanding the culture of their class a little bit better. The more you understand and the more they know that you are curious and interested and still have positive regard for them, that bank account's in the black and the interventions that you execute as a parent are far, far more likely to be effective. And if they're in the red, you are going to find yourself super frustrated because you can read a Debbie Reber book and a John Duffy book and a Julie Lythcott-Haims book and still feel like I'm not getting anywhere here.

Debbie: Because there's no trust there.

John: Yes, exactly.

Debbie: So what if there are people listening who are recognizing that this emotional bank account is probably very much in the red? Is it possible to turn things around and how would you even go about doing that?

John: Yeah, absolutely. A hundred percent possible. One of my favorite examples happened in my office recently. A mom recognized like, oh, I get why you don't listen to me. You know, I come down really hard on you. I'm not a very good listener. So she, she copped to all that. She said effectively, I don't like the way I've been in our relationship. And so, and I apologize for that and I want to get to know you. I want to understand your world. I don't want to take any risks with your wellbeing. I love you too much. It's too important. So even if you have really hard things to say to me, I'm going to work harder than I ever have to listen and to be an ally to you as opposed to working against you and you feeling like you can't talk to me. So she kinda hit this really, really elegant reset with her daughter and her daughter responded beautifully and said, I really appreciate that.

You know, like, and this is a 16 year old talking to her mother. It was really something to witness, but I learned a lot there because it was like, oh yeah, it isn't too late. You can always come back to it and say, this hasn't gone very well, has it? You know, and if your, if your meta about it like that and you're not defensive, I think you can get, I think you can get movement very, very quickly and the emotional bank account is super malleable so you can move from the red to the black in the course of an hour. I watched it happen, you know? And it is a lovely thing to see happen and you get hope very, very quickly.

Debbie: Yeah. And that requires a level of vulnerability on the parent's part too. But I think our kids, because they are so sensitive, they, they are able to tap into that right away.

John: Yes. And as a cautionary note, it can go the other way too. You know, I'm thinking of a father and son I worked with not long ago where dad decided to launch into a lecture because he had, you know, his son's attention in a session and you could watch the lights go out in the son's eyes and I could feel like that bank account draining. And you know, so I intervened but left untouched, that would have created, I think, a lot of frustration and division between them. And there's never been a time when our kids need to know that that emotional bank account is available and that you are available to them, now more than ever they need to be aware of that.

Debbie: So what then, you know, you talk about a parent's need to listen, support and understand without judgment. And that's something I'm really working hard on at this moment in my life. And I'm just wondering, I don't know what that looks like. You know, does that mean no matter what they say, we just kind of continue to listen and hold a space for them? You know, maybe you could give us an example, if a child is really unloading some emotionally difficult stuff. Like what does that look like?

John: Yeah. So, okay, so let me, let me think of an example that doesn't present any identifying information. A couple of years ago I worked with a young man. He was vaping and smoking pot. He was deejaying, in other words, like he was trying to rap and DJ in the basement instead of doing homework. He was difficult. And so his parents were angry at him. You know, why aren't you doing your homework? Why are you wasting your time with this nonsense? Are you kidding me? You know, like, you know, you, you tell us you want to go to college, you're doing nothing to support that idea. And so there's a lot of judgment that came in. In fairness, if you think about it, that all feels really, really reasonable from a parent's point of view. And I don't know if it's reasonable to say extract all that judgment, but I think it's important to recognize our children aren't just trying to test our acumen as parents.

And sometimes I work with parents where they really feel like that's what's at play here. More, they engage in things because those things support their wellbeing or their self esteem and they might not have other areas of their life in which that happens. For this young man in particular, that pot smoking, juuling, vaping crowd was really, really welcoming to him and he was struggling to connect socially with anybody else. He had tried out for a team that he did not make and he thought that was going to be his saving grace and his social life and it turned out not to be. And that group was super welcoming to him. That was just hanging around in the basement and this making music was kind of a replacement for him, for the athletics. And he didn't, it wasn't a full replacement, but he felt decent about himself knowing, oh, I can create something from scratch.

It might not be great. But I like the idea of that. So I encouraged the parents, well don't shut that down altogether because, do I think he's going to be a DJ or a rapper? Maybe, but probably not. But is there some, is there a seed of something being sewn there that is meaningful to him? Yes, probably. You know what I mean? There's some creative element that he is drawn to and if we shut that down, we might be creating more anxiety and more distance than we want to. So that's where taking the judgment away is super important because if we judge and we assume our child is just being difficult for the sake of being difficult, I think we're missing a big point. They engage in things because they're drawn to them. And if we shift our assumptions about what we think our child is about and we kind of follow their lead, they'll show us what they're about.

And one note to parents, you know, there's an awful lot of this stuff where kids are trying to be DJs or you know, I'm going to be Insta famous or something where parents think like, oh my gosh, that's so soulless and awful and I, I so don't want a child who's involved in this. Ask your child what they're drawn to about it and you'll learn that there's something interesting there. But if you make assumptions, and the more assumptions you make, the more off you probably are. I worked with a mom recently and she said her daughter came to her, 15 year old daughter, and said, I'm kind of bummed out about Sundays. I hate Sundays. And the mom thought I'm going to align with her and I'll share that I hate Sundays too.

Oh, I get it, honey. You know, that kind of Sunday night blues, you're not looking forward to the week. But she held back and she asked her daughter, well, what do you mean? And she said, and she didn't mean that at all. Her take on that was completely different. So if I had gone forward and said, I know exactly what you mean, she would have missed everything that her daughter meant. And that, that's a great example of, you know, if we think our tool for connecting comes from our mouth, we're probably missing the boat. If we think it comes from our ears, we're getting a little closer.

Debbie: Yeah, that is a great example. I mean, you like the word curiosity, as do I, and I think that's just such a great reminder to just lead with that, to always be asking why and going deeper and not getting our own baggage enmeshed in what's going on. You know, when you're talking about anxiety in the book, you write that as parents, you know, our anxiety can create more anxiety in them. You know, our concerns about the future, the fears that we have for who they are. So how do we kind of temper our own knee jerk reactions, our own fears and anxiety, especially with that kid who's who, you know, to an outsider or to us might look like they're really failing big time and going nowhere.

John: Yep. That's a really, really crucial question because I don't begrudge any parent their anxiety. I think that's kind of the sign of a really good parent who worries about their child, wants their child to be happy and successful. I think that's what we all want for our kids. And so I think in order to manage our own anxiety, it's important to talk to our partners about like our fears and our anxieties. Not even in the extreme. I often encourage parents, even when things are going pretty well, stop in and see a therapist on occasion and, and work through your feelings. Somebody who knows parenting pretty well, and talk about what your insecurities are, what your fears are, what your anxieties are. The only place I encourage parents not to bring that is to their relationship with their kids because I want parents to recognize that your children are already pretty anxious.

You know, just by virtue of being their age right now, there is an awful lot of anxiety and coming from a whole bunch of different places in their lives. Most every significant area of their lives carries some degree of anxiety and in a cumulative way, they don't have space to take on yours. So anywhere else that you can share that. And you know, I love, there's a group here in town of parents that get together and they just talk about parenting teens and I will probably be speaking with them in the next month or so. And I think that's so beautifully adaptive to the times because it's difficult and it's different to be a parent now than it ever has been. So to talk about like, you know, okay, I found this in my child's inbox or in my child's backpack, or I'm worried about this, you're usually gonna get some nods from other parents, you know, where it's like, yep, me too.

You know, like let's talk about that, you know, like, how do we ease our minds? Or let's brainstorm like, you know, what's the best way to handle this without adding to the anxiety our children are already carrying, but also addressing our concerns. You know, we don't want to be completely disempowered as parents. So I love the idea of parents empowering each other and brainstorming together

in this new age. Because I feel like in a lot of ways, just like kids are pioneers in that they're the first to have been brought up with social media and some of the academic and social pressures, we parents are also pioneers. We're the first to go through and raise people in these circumstances. And I think it's fair to say, you know what, sometimes I'm going to need a little consultation on this. I don't think I'm always going to be able to do this on my own. And there's nothing wrong with that. I love when parents seek each other out.

Debbie: I love that. I never thought of it that way. But you know, something I'm often telling my child is, you know, I, I don't know what I'm doing. Like I've never raised a teenager before. I'm totally new at this. So yeah, I think that leaning on each other is, is really important. And so you mentioned the word disempowering. In your book you talk about that there are ways we can both empower and disempower our kids who are struggling with anxiety. So can you give me an example of what each of those would look like?

John: Yeah, absolutely. So, the most empowering thing I think a parent can do is to let their child know underneath it all that they trust that their child has good instincts, is heading in the right directions and is competent and resilient. I hang on those words for dear life because I, I think at the end of the day when our children are 17 or 18 or 22 or 24, if they move out of our house and they go onto their next adventure and we can say that person is competent and resilient, they are capable and they know it and they can handle a difficulty if it's thrown their way and they know that, I'd say that's a pretty solid parenting win. So if that's the vibe that we present to our kids, I'm not sure that this test is going to go well. But I know on the whole you're, you're on the right track.

And I have faith in you that things are going to work out, you know. And I think that's a vibe that parents can give their kids pretty readily. I also think it's a vibe that you can extract pretty readily. You know, I think the more we try to clamp down and control our kids, whether that is, you know, show me your homework. I'm going to track you on the portals. I'm going to reach out to your teachers. I'm going to track your phone when you go out. Not that I'm against that altogether, but I think that can be disempowering at times. Anything that tells our kids, I don't know if you've got this, so I'm going to be a manager here. I'm going to be the general contractor and I'll be controlling your life behind the scenes. I'll be texting and emailing your teachers or your coaches and I will be right next to you at the job interview so that you never really feel empowered to do anything on your own.

And then when that child leaves the house at 17, 18, 19 or 20, that child might have difficulty. I work with a frightening number of college freshmen who are back on my couch by Thanksgiving or even Halloween wondering like, how did I dysregulate so readily? How, why did I stop going to class? Why did I start drinking so much? And a lot of that has to do with never having been responsible and accountable for their lives ever before in the past and then suddenly they're thrust into this new environment and they cannot manage it.

Debbie: Yeah, I was really shocked. You know, I think one of the statistics you mentioned in the book is that around 30% of freshmen don't go past the first semester. Is

that, that was really surprising to me and daunting. You know, I think so many of us think, oh gosh, all right, we just need to get them to launch and then, you know, we'll be home free. But that's not really the case.

John: No, I would love to say it is, but launching I think has changed over the past, well I'll say past eight years. I would argue that, you know, I think a lot of us would say eight, ten years ago, if we get our kid to the 18th birthday, you know, and we drop them off at, you know, whatever college it is or whatever apartment it is, we've done our jobs. We can wash our hands and say, hey, we just won parenting. Brilliant. Brilliant of us. Now, you know, our kids are dependent on us financially for a longer period of time. I think it is much more difficult to manage those challenges of adolescence in a timely way between 13 and 19. So I think that takes longer. And a lot of kids do have this, this empathy and this worldview where they want to make some impact. And so they may find themselves even with a degree in their hands thinking, I don't think I'm going to make any impact with this or I don't think I'm going to make any enough money to take care of myself with this. So I still need help, you know? So, parenting is becoming, if not a life sentence, certainly a longer sentence than I think we were led to believe when we had kids in the first place.

Debbie: So for those of you who are listening for some reason who don't have children, this is a cautionary tale for you. But, so I want to go back to something you said before. I really love the language of really expressing to your child and making sure they know we believe that they are resilient and competent. And it, you know, it reminds me of the language that Ned Johnson and Bill Stixrud write about in their book, *The Self-Driven Child*. You know, I trust you to make your own decisions and to learn from your mistakes. It's very much letting them know that you believe in them. So what if there are parents listening to this who want to say those words but they don't believe they're true? What do parents need to do to, what kind of work do they need to do on themselves? Or how do they get to a point where they can say that and so that they're not continuously sending the message that they don't think their kids are going to get there?

John: Well I love, I love your initial thought. What is the work they need to do on themselves? So, sometimes we are, all of us, blind to what is driving us and what impact our behavior is having on the people around us. So, I've worked with and known many parents and I've been the parent at times that felt a need to be needed in a certain way in the life of my child, you know, or in the life of our children. And so we may unwittingly at times create a sense of disempowerment or a lack of ability in our kids. I talk a lot about the vibe we set in our home and the messages we give our kids about themselves and sometimes it is a handy feeling for a parent to have to feel I'm necessary. My child, this particular child just doesn't have the internal strength or the wherewithal to make it in the world on his or her own.

So I'm necessary here. I'm going to be necessary in their lives for a very long time. And we create, unwittingly I think sometimes, and unconsciously a role for ourselves over the long-term where we're not necessarily considering like maybe I should redefine what my role is in the life of my child and consider what my life is about. As opposed to just saying I'm just about being a parent and so

I'm going to create the circumstances where that stretches almost ad nauseum into the future. I think it's important to recognize, you know, what drives you and what role you play. The other thing is, I hope that makes sense. The other thing is to step back and really attend to your child's capacity to do things on his or her own. Capacity is different than action. I feel it's important to point that out because a lot of parents will say to me, there is no capacity.

They wouldn't write the teachers if I didn't. But I always encourage parents like, okay, but they might do something. Why don't you take a step back? You know, while they're in the comfort of your home and the risks are relatively low, they're not off at college, they're not on their own yet. Let's test out like how capable, competent, resilient they can be. Let's say they get themselves into an academic hole. Let's see if they can find their way out of that. And you can make yourself available as a guide and a consultant and an ally in every way. But they're the contractors. They're the ones who have to figure it out. Let's see what they can do and let's give them the opportunity, at the very least, to try.

And if they decide I'm going to opt out altogether, let's give them the opportunity, and this is hard for parents, I recognize this, to fail and to see what that's like and to see what they do in the wake of failure. And sometimes that's, I think most of us have needed that moment where it was like, oh, this one's so much worse than I thought. I'm not gonna let this happen again. This, that feeling of, boy, that went poorly and that's on me. We only need that once or twice in life I think in order to hold ourselves more accountable the next time. Because if we allow our kids that feeling, then we will support that depth of recognition that, oh yeah, this is on me. I have agency over this. I created this issue for myself. And I think next time it comes up, I can do something about it. I can mitigate it. There's power in that too. So there's even power in the loss or the failure if we're willing to allow our kids to experience that. And I think more and more parents are reluctant about that because, because of our own fears.

Debbie: Yeah. And for, you know, the parents listening to this podcast who, who's kids are differently wired, and so they, I guess in thinking about the context of this question too, it's also about recognizing, you know, where they are versus, you know, compared to their same age peers. So you can still practice this and giving them, seeing where their capacity is, even with the scaffolding that you might have in place and doing that removal of the scaffolding in a way that that is appropriate for, for wherever they are. Right?

John: I love that. I, and I'm really glad you brought up parents for kids who are differently wired. Right, it might feel like this metric might not apply to my children, but I think if you can adapt that a little bit, I think it absolutely does, you know. And there is no child who can't find some degree of competence in what they can do. And the mistake or the misjudgment we make sometimes is we place unnecessary limitations on our kids and they are sometimes capable of things that we, that would really, really surprise us.

Debbie: Yeah, that's a great reminder. So, just two more questions. One is, you know, you talk about the vibe in the home and that's something I talk a lot about too at Tilt Parenting is, you know, the importance of creating a secure world for your child

at home. So, can you kind of explain what you mean by the vibe in the home and what we should be going for and you know, maybe a tip or two on how we can create that ideal vibe?

John: Absolutely. So if you consider your child's world today, picture their day at school, you know, if this is a weekday, picture your day, their day at school right now. There is a lot of noise. Socially, academically, there's insecurities that they're carrying around. There, in their minds there is noise. It is loud. Kids describe this to me every single day, literally Debbie. And so at home, especially as they walk through the door, they need to experience some sense of sanctuary. There needs to be some peace and some feeling that somebody is there for me unconditionally, no matter how today went, whether I want to talk to them in depth about it or whether I don't want to say a word about it, I need that time to kind of regroup because there's more I have to do today. I might have a job to go to, I have homework to do.

I might have a play practice or swim practice or something else I have to do. So I need a little bit of a reprieve. And I think moms and dads, more than anybody, can be that sanctuary for them. And, and now it's so critical because kids have precious little time in their lives where it's silent. They have very little time in their lives where they have the luxury of a little bit of regression. So I'm talking about kids as young as seven or eight or nine or ten, being aware of everything that's going on in the world, all their insecurities internally. So everything external and internal, they're kind of hyper aware of, overwhelmed by, and if you can just imagine how important, crucial, sanctuary is to the establishment of wellbeing and the idea of self-regulation, like emotional self regulation.

You're kind of introducing that idea when you create a vibe in the house that is calm as opposed to having a television on or having conflict the minute a child walks through the door, which just is more noise, you know what I mean. And more noise and we want to give them at least some time during the day where they're allowed, for lack of a better word, to regress a bit, to step back, to be young and innocent and off the grid for a little while, even if it's just 20 minutes. That is refueling, rejuvenating and regulating in a way that I don't think anything else could possibly be. It is so important to the wellbeing of kids today. I cannot emphasize it enough. And kids share with me that too often they step through the threshold of their home and it doesn't feel safe and it doesn't feel comfortable and it does feel like an interrogation. It does feel like more of the same and their inclination is I'm going to go up to my room, put earbuds in and create more noise. And so they're never really in touch kind of with themselves, you know, emotionally, psychologically and they're not regulating very well at all.

Debbie: Wow. Thank you for that. It's a good reminder. And you know, even one of the tips you had in the book is just to have like soft music playing in the home. Like I think there are really simple ways to create, you know, just the other day we came home from school and I was like, oh, I'm getting into pajamas now. I don't know about you, you know, and that can instantly change the energy in the home.

- John: Briefly, I work with a boy, 17 year old boy, tough kid, multi-sport athlete, a guy's guy all the way. In his room is a weighted blanket, scented candles, essential oils and the calm app on virtually all the time. And this is like brilliant self regulation. And recently he described to me three other football players coming into his room and he's like, oh no, I'm going to get mocked so brutally for this. And they're all like, where did you get the weighted blanket man, this is great. So he was like, everybody wanted a piece of whatever peace he's found. It was really lovely and profound.
- Debbie: That's great. That's great. Well, before we go, you have so much experience and a lot of wisdom to share. So I'm just wondering if you have any last parting words of advice for parents who are listening and this conversation is, is really resonating with them and they want to make a change in the culture of their family. What, what would that be?
- John: It would be, if you listened to just our, our discussion here, you'll find that it is never too late to make a change, no matter how frayed or damaged you feel like your relationship is with your child. You can always reset in a, in a meta way. Your child wants you and needs you in his or her life. Regardless of what they say. 99% of the time, I trust the kids are telling the truth. Well if they say, I hate you. I want nothing to do with you. Get away from me. Do not believe them. They want you and need you in their lives. The other thing is to be gentle with yourself. This is a really interesting time to raise kids because you are raising a generation that is kind and sensitive and empathic and deep. They're also overwhelmed, anxious, depressed, and taxed. So if you can be a conduit for them navigating this space successfully and as happily as they can, you are doing amazing work as a parent. So be gentle with yourself and give yourself credit for what you are doing super well and know that you can make adjustments for anything that you feel like, mmm, I could make a little movement here. But don't be too tough on yourself. Be gentle with it and be gentle with your children.
- Debbie: Thank you so much. That's just a wonderful note to end this on. And so listeners, the book is *Parenting the New Teen in the Age of Anxiety* and I will have links on the show notes page. And John, is there anywhere on social media that you're particularly active that listeners can check in with you on?
- John: Yeah. So, my website will show all my social media and stuff. My website is drjohnduffy.com. I'm Dr. John Duffy on Facebook @Dr. John Duffy on Instagram and Twitter.
- Debbie: Perfect. Awesome. Well thank you so much. I'm really happy to be able to share this conversation. We could have talked for hours, so I look forward to actually following your media tour for this book too and listening to what other interviews touch upon cause there's a lot of great stuff in the book.
- John: Well, thank you Debbie. It's been absolutely a delight to talk with you.

RESOURCES MENTIONED:

- Dr. John Duffy's website
- *Parenting the New Teen in the Age of Anxiety: A Complete Guide to Your Child's Stressed, Depressed, Expanded, Amazing Adolescence* by Dr. John Duffy
- *The Available Parent: Expert Advice for Raising Successful Teens and Tweens* by Dr. John Duffy
- Dr. John Duffy on Facebook
- Dr. John Duffy on Twitter
- Dr. John Duffy on Instagram
- Zen Parenting
- Zen Parenting Conference