



**Episode #245**

**Dr. Marsha Brown on Mental Health, Stress Management,  
and Educating Law Enforcement About Neurodivergence**

March 9, 2021

Debbie: Hello, Dr. Brown, welcome to the podcast.

Marsha: Thank you so much for having me. It's great to be here.

Debbie: I'm really looking forward to this conversation. So could you take a few minutes and just tell us more kind of about the work that you do in the world? And also, I'd love to know, your personal why for doing that work?

Marsha: Yes, absolutely. So I am a licensed psychologist, I am in private practice, my private practice has changed in the last five years that I've been doing it now. What I do now is I work a lot with people on mental health, education and awareness, stress management, and self care. And I work largely with people in high stress occupations. So for example, people who are in the legal field, the mental health field, law enforcement, and sometimes medical health care. And so with them, I just work to educate on, you know, mental health symptoms of mental health, I also help them to, I call it deconstruct your stress. So being able to really, you know, as a person who has to function in high stress, occupation, break that down, and make it so that they're not so you know, overwhelmed in situations where they have, you know, a lot of responsibilities and a lot of things coming at them. And then also just teaching them to take better care of themselves. What my practice started out, as was forensics. And so I worked with the court, in family court, criminal court and civil court. And that was largely just doing psychological evaluations to help inform the court in cases where there was, you know, a custody battle going on, or a case where someone who was accused of committing a crime needed some kind of evaluation to determine how much mental illness was a factor or how much mental health impacted the behavior. And then in just civil cases, things like psychological damages. In terms of the why of this work. Like I mentioned, I started out in forensics, and I was just always fascinated by human behavior and why people made the decisions that they made. So for example, since I was, since I was nine years old, I used to read a true crime novels, which are just basically they they outline an actual crime that happened, and they talk a little bit about everybody who was involved and what the event was, and you know, kind of the events that transpired leading up to whatever crime took place. And I was just always fascinated by that. And not just human behavior, but criminal behavior. And that kind of led me on the path to becoming a forensic psychologist. And then, once I got into it, I started to morph into working with people in high stress occupations, because forensics is a high stress occupation. And having been in there for such a long period of time, I really saw myself and my colleagues just plagued with being stressed out all the time, and, you know, not sleeping enough, not eating well running around, not taking care of ourselves. And I thought there was a real opportunity for me to help myself and others, to manage that stress and to take better care of ourselves. So we can take care of other people, which was our job. And so now the majority of my practice is just working with organizations and professionals, to help them to just, you know, manage the stress and decrease the stress and take better care of themselves. So that's where I am and sort of the why.

Debbie: And I can just imagine that in the past nine months, 12 months, that your work has just become even more relevant, right?

Marsha: Absolutely, yes. In the past, you know, this year has been so stressful for people and as mental health professionals and in the other fields as well, the legal professional law enforcement profession as well. People are leaning on the professionals in those fields more at this time when there's just like, some chaos and some unknown and so there's even more stress. So yeah, becomes a lot more relevant. So I'm doing a lot more, you know, webinars and helping out any way that I can.

Debbie: And do you work with families as well and adolescents who have mental health issues or who are neurodiverse?

Marsha: I do, actually. And in those cases, it's more of either one on one sessions, or it's a family session. So to help the family out with some issue that they're having in terms of like a behavioral issue, or coming up with some kind of tweaks in the house, that or at school that will help to make sure that the the the child or the adolescent is in an environment that's more comfortable and more appropriate, and that will help to decrease any behaviors that may have proven to be challenging or a problem at home.

Debbie: So I would love it if you could tell us a little bit more about the part of your work that is focused on reducing stigma, and increasing education surrounding mental health management and mental illness and treatment of mental illness.

Marsha: Yes. So a lot of times, what I do with that work is I do well, before 2020, it was in person a lot of times, and now it's you know, largely webinars, but really just helping people to understand certain mental illnesses or certain conditions of neurodiversity, in terms of helping to, you know, there's a lot of stigma that surrounds anything related to mental health or mental illness or neuro divergence. And so there are a lot of things that people don't know. So I'm often called in to explain a little bit about certain, just certain presentations, whether that's, you know, depression or anxiety, or whether it's something like, you know, stress management, for parents of neurodiverse children, anything like that. And so what I really do is I come from a place of education, but also understanding, and also, once I'm able to give that information, okay, where do we go from here? What can I do next to either learn more, or do more, or, you know, contribute more. And so teaching people a little bit about symptoms, a little bit about behaviors that you might see situations that you might see these behaviors arise, things that might make the behaviors, worse things that might help the behaviors, whatever it is, that's kind of the work that I do to sort of increase education and awareness. I think that a lot of the conditions if we just had more awareness, a better understanding, and more tolerance, it would make things better for not just the individuals with these conditions, but it would make it better for for everyone.

Debbie: Yes, 100%. So I think the first time that I, you came on my radar, and I learned more about your work was through an interview that you did for the different brains, podcasts. And I think it was specifically about neurodiversity and mental health and the work that you do in training law enforcement officers. So I would love to know just a little bit more about that, I would say that I, I see a lot of conversations in my Tilt Together community and hear from parents who are

really concerned about their kids as they become adolescents, and they get bigger, and they may be on the spectrum, they may not respond or react unexpected ways if they encounter people in authority positions. So I'd love to know how you support law enforcement officers and others to better understand neurodivergent kids or kids who may be unpredictable, and also just how open they are to incorporating what you're sharing with them and changing the way that they work.

Marsha: Yeah, that's that's a great question. So I am part of the faculty of the Broward County Sheriff's Office crisis intervention team training program. And so for me personally, what I do is help to teach law enforcement officers so any law enforcement officer in the county can attend these training, it's a week long training. My part of it is usually the first or second day. And what they're really trying to do is help the officers understand working with people who have some kind of mental illness or mental health issue or you know, a neuro divergent individual. And what happens is I talked to them a little about behaviors that they should look out for that might indicate to them that there's something else going on with the individual. I think that just in you know, law enforcement in general, they need to be able to assess very quickly what's going on. A lot of times they're going into situations and they don't know, they don't have a lot of information, They just know that they're called to something and they have to show up. And they don't know whether or not the person that the call is placed about whether they are, you know, dangerous, whether they meet them harm, whether they're under the influence of something, whether they have some kind of condition that makes it so that they're unable to respond or unable to respond in a way that the officer would like. And so what my part in doing it, and with the training program in general is trying to do is just teach the officers some of the behaviors that somebody might exhibit, if they're undergoing some kind of mental health crisis, or if they are, you know, neurodivergent, or whatever the case may be. And that can be really important, because if the officers are going in, they just don't know. And if the person is not able to respond, or they're not responding in the way that the officer has asked them to respond, then the situation can escalate unnecessarily. And I think, you know, you mentioned that your listeners, you know, really wanted that to be addressed. And I think that's absolutely relevant. And I think it's absolutely valid, because we're seeing these situations where law enforcement responds, and then something goes wrong in terms of the communication and the law enforcement personnel assumes that this individual is just not following orders, or this individual is just being obstinate, and it ends up escalating, when all it takes is a little bit more information. And perhaps we could avoid any sort of, you know, tragic ending, or any sort of, you know, unnecessarily violent response from law enforcement. If that answers the question.

Debbie: Yeah, it does. And, and, and I'm wondering, first of all, I'm so glad that you do this work, I think it's so important. And I think it makes parents who do have differently wired kids who are going to be teenagers and adults feel better knowing that that education is happening, do you have thoughts on how parents can also be a part of preparing, like our protecting our kids in those situations, and also be a part of maybe changing things in fostering more awareness and reducing that stigma? Like what can we as as parents and caregivers do,

Marsha: I think, you know, keep doing the educational part of it to kind of educate the public and just educate the community about these conditions and some of the behaviors that happen in these conditions and understanding, you know, what situations will exacerbate what's going on and what situations might be able to calm it. I think one thing that I've seen that I just, I'm not sure, it's such a great idea, in fact, I'm going to go ahead and say that it's not a good idea is when we see schools, calling the police on children, and having, you know, law enforcement enter the equation for a couple of reasons. One, because the schools, we're in trusting our kids to the schools, where we would hope that the schools and the personnel have special training in this, and that they are prepared to handle children who have these challenges. But when you're bringing someone from the outside, and not only are you bringing someone outside from the outside, but you're bringing someone that you don't know who is going to show up, you don't know whether or not they understand the situation, you don't know how they're going to react to the situation. It's just kind of adding fuel to the fire. I also think that intervening in a situation where somebody you know who's neurodiverse is upset, is not necessarily something that law enforcement should be tasked with, because they have a lot of other things to do. And for them to have to show up at something like this is probably not the best. So I would say like encouraging schools to not call outside parties, but to really come up with some kind of plan when we're working with neurodivergent children and adolescents and saying that, okay, well, if this happens, if we have some kind of meltdown, or things are escalating, here are all the things that we have in place, and really doing the best that we can to avoid bringing someone in from the outside. Because as we know, that can also make situations worse just by having a stranger show up and be, you know, part of whatever's going on.

Debbie: That's such a good point. Yeah, I'm, I'm wondering, and I don't know if you can answer this, but I'm going to ask and you just tell me, but in terms of thinking about the schools themselves, I think it's It makes total sense that bringing someone in from the outside can escalate things, and that it's really important that schools have a plan. And they know, this is how we're going to respond. Do you find that most schools have these plans in place? You know, I'm curious if you have a sense of kind of the status quo in how schools are prepared to deal with, with neurodivergent kids who might get dysregulated, because of something and we know that when a child is dysregulated, that they're in fight or flight mode, they're not going to respond to necessarily in a way that that we would like so. So maybe just speak to how schools are, are prepared to do that, generally speaking.

Marsha: I don't know that I can talk about schools generally, I can only talk about the schools that, you know, I've had some interaction with or that I don't have knowledge of, I would say that some schools do it well, and other schools don't, I think that schools are also, you know, a lot of schools are also just struggling in terms of having the resources to, to adequately prepare for these situations, and to adequately give the students what they need in these situations. I think a lot of times, the teachers in the schools and the instructors in the schools, or just the staff in the schools are absolutely overwhelmed. Because there's just so much going on. And there's so many things that, you know, just have to be thought about and prepared for, and it's just, it's a lot, especially with schools that just don't have that many resources. And so I think that most schools are trying as

best they can. And whether or not they're able to accomplish that just largely depends on you know, resources, and the ability to prepare for these situations. And then other schools that might not have the resources may not be able to do it so well.

Debbie: So I'd love it if we could just spend a few minutes talking about what's happening right now, again, the climate, especially in the US, we know that stress and anxiety rates for kids in general are skyrocketing right now. And I believe that that's more true, most likely for neurodivergent kids. So I'm just wondering how that stress and anxiety, how you see increased stress, anxiety, impact neurodivergent kids and individuals, right?

Marsha: I think that in general, something that's really impacted neurodiverse individuals at this time, is the loss of routine, and just the loss of any semblance of what usually used to happen, and what's happening now. So what I've seen is, for the kids who were doing really well, they had this routine, they knew exactly what they were doing on, you know, certain days, they look forward to it, they were fine. And then when that was completely yanked from them, and they lost going to school, they lost, you know, the commute to school, they lost activities. So for a lot of kids that were in activities, and as long as they have their routine of activities, they were doing well, you know, they were getting exercise, they knew what to expect. And then all of a sudden, everything shut down. And I just saw sort of a downward spiral in terms of the stress, the anxiety, the behaviors and things like that. So if there was one thing that I had to pick, it would be that loss of routine that really impacted neuro diverse individuals, and not just neuro diverse individuals, I would say, you know, many people were just impacted by that loss of what we always you know, had and knew to be true and available to us.

Debbie: Right, so any specific suggestions for how we can help to mitigate that, I mean, obviously, it seems like making sure that we create new structures, and create new routines with our kids, collaboration would be a good idea, but any other thoughts on how we can, we can help our kids environment not feel so chaotic, and so that they can maybe not feel the effects of that stress and anxiety as much?

Marsha: Yeah, so I think it's a really tough one, that's easier said than done. But I would say, just being able to remain calm in the face of all of the chaos and everything that's going on. And I say that's, you know, easier said than done, just because for, you know, the adults that are also in this, it's new for everyone. And so it's hard to remain calm, if you don't know what's going on, if you don't know what's going to happen next, things like that, but trying your best to release the pressure valve outside of the presence of the kids. And doing what you need to do, because I'm not saying ignore it, because that's not you know, a great way to handle it, but really being able to get it out and process it for yourself. But trying to do that, not necessarily in the presence of the children. And of course, depending on where they are and what their level of you know, their level of understanding and you know, their level of functioning. But doing that outside of, of their presence, so that you can remain calm for them so that you can provide, as you said, that new routine for them, kind of understanding and accepting that this is where we are, it's not going to always be this way and it is going to get

better. We just have to be patient and you know, know when, but also make sure that the kids can get out because now they're also just cooped up. So if you're supposed to be staying inside, it's you know, it's hard to just be cooped up and not doing anything. So giving them an opportunity to get out and, you know, run it off or play it off or do whatever the case may be. And making sure that there is a you know, there's some semblance of you know, they're still going to school on some places they're back in you know, in person, but if they're doing online school, still have some, you know, play at home and some fun at home and some, some part of the home day that's also you know, fun, but structured, I think would be very helpful.

Debbie: A lot of what you're talking about too sounds like self care, you know, we're talking about parents releasing that valve and getting the stress out of our systems. And so I know that self care is something that's very near and dear to your heart. And you know, as a way to kind of wrap up I'd love it if you could tell us a little bit about your new podcast that you recently launched and your work in that area?

Marsha: Yes. So I have a new podcast, it's called the Self-Care Chronicle. And it is where each episode I interview a different mental health professional, about how they take care of themselves. Because, you know, we as mental health professionals are usually trying to take care of other people or help other people to manage their lives. And in trying to help as many people as possible, sometimes we forget to take care of ourselves. And sometimes it's a challenge for us to turn that back on ourselves and make sure that we're really, you know, taking care and making sure that we're okay. So that's, you know, basically the podcast, it was launched December 2. And that's basically the idea, but I think it's really relevant for anyone who takes care of someone else, especially parents, because parents, you know, are all about the kids taking care of them, making sure they're okay, you know, making sure they're where they need to go, whether it's a doctor or school or an activity, because I know in a lot of places activities have started again, and some have started and shut down again. But really just a good conversation about knowing that we have all these responsibilities and all these, you know, other people to take care of, how do we make it a priority to take care of ourselves? So that's what the conversation is really about. And it's, it's been really interesting to hear how the other mental health professionals do it and hear about their challenges really into practicing good self care.

Debbie: I love that. And first of all, I know that mental health care providers and therapists and anyone who's doing that kind of work right now is doing heroic work. And I know that it takes a toll, a personal toll. And so I love that you're doing that podcast, and yeah, we any parent caregiver of a different American kid is also in some ways and playing that role of like a mental health coach or support system for our human apps, right? So I love this, this resource. I'm a huge proponent. My listeners will be like, okay, Debbie, get off the self care thing. But I just think it's not an optional part of our lives. It has to be something we commit to. So I think this is a great resource for more ideas. So congratulations on that. Yes.

Marsha: Thank you very much. Yes. And I agree. It's so important. It makes a very big difference. Yes.

Debbie: Awesome. Well, listen, we have gone all over the place. I appreciate you kind of following my, you know, very nonlinear thread here, as we've talked about your work in various spaces. But before we go, can you tell listeners where they can learn more about your work?

Marsha: Absolutely. You can go to [drmarshabrown.com](http://drmarshabrown.com) and all about my work and the podcast. Everything is right there.

Debbie: Awesome. And listeners, I will have links in the show notes page as well. And Marsha, thank you so much. I really enjoyed spending some time with you today and I look forward to checking out more of your podcast.

Marsha: Thank you so much, this was great.

## RESOURCES MENTIONED:

- [Dr. Marsha Brown's website](#)
- [Dr. Marsha Brown on Instagram](#)
- [Dr. Marsha Brown on Twitter](#)
- [Dr. Marsha Brown on LinkedIn](#)
- [The Self-Care Chronicle \(Dr. Brown's podcast\)](#)