

Jessica Lahey on Her New Book, *The Addiction Inoculation: Raising Healthy Kids in a Culture of Dependence* [Transcript]

Debbie Reber: 0:00

Good morning, Jess, welcome to the podcast.

Jessica: 0:03

Thank you for having me. I love this podcast so much.

Debbie Reber: 0:07

Thank you. And you know what I was actually, I think I was just saying when I had you on last, and it was almost four years ago, 2017, which is surprising to me. I feel like we've lived many lifetimes between that.

Jessica: 0:22

And the time that *Gift of Failure* came out to now has gone so fast, mainly because I've been on the road traveling a lot, and a lot has been going on. And, you know, it was funny, before I figured out what I was going to write about for my second book, I remember talking to actually Susan Cain, who wrote *Quiet* and she said, I said, you know, I'm feeling some pressure to write the next book. And she's like, why? And I said, because I'm feeling the pressure. And she said, from anyone other than you, and I said, No, just me. She said, Well, sometimes it's good to just live in the content that you worked so hard to put together and are still exploring and still teaching to people and let that be enough. And so it was nice actually, to sort of sit back and get to teach really, for over the years in between that book and this new book.

Debbie Reber: 1:11

Well, and I just imagine that *The Gift of Failure* is still, well, I know that it's still incredibly relevant. And it, it's probably something you get emailed to speak about all the time still, right?

Jessica: 1:22

But I do. And the interesting thing is, there's all sorts of new research coming out about not just the parenting style stuff, but how disparate attention paid to students, affects school budgets affects how we, you know, even if we don't think that we're treating students differently, when one set of parents has the power to come in and demand a lot of attention, or resources, or whatever, and another parent just doesn't feel like they're in a position to have that kind of power, then we disproportionately meet our attention and our resources and all of that stuff. And it really affects the equity in schools. And that research is fascinating. And so, you know, as we sort of look at, for example, how gift to failure applies when our kids are home all the time, or when we're sort of the ancillary teachers, or whatever the situation is, there are all these new applications that of course, when I wrote

gift to failure I couldn't possibly have predicted or even thought about. So the nice thing is, the last five years of my teaching life were spent teaching in a drug and alcohol rehab for adolescence. And one of the things that's generally true about that situation is that not only do the kids generally not want to be in rehab, they really, really, really don't want to be in school in rehab. So all of a sudden, five years of four or five years of teaching engagement was pretty much the only thing I focused on, like, how do I engage these kids that do not want to be a part of learning right now? And that was fantastic for me, because now during COVID, when kids are feeling like, why does this even matter? I'm not even there. Who cares? That engagement piece has become increasingly a big part of what I talked about.

Debbie Reber: 3:05

Yes, things are changing. And I hope they don't ever go back to the way they were, I hope we take all this information with us and change it for the better.

Jessica: 3:12

I think there's going to be some permanent changes that happen. I'm but I'm always optimistic. I'm just like this eternal education optimist and just sort of hope that we're heading in the right direction.

Debbie Reber: 3:22

Yeah, that's awesome. All right. Well, we could obviously, keep talking about this for a long time, but I want to talk about your new book. It's called the addiction inoculation, raising Healthy Kids in a culture of dependence. And, you know, you just mentioned that you spent the past five years working with kids who were in a rehab, I'd love to know, you know, as a writer, when did you know that this was going to be your next book? And when did you really start working on it to make that pivot?

Jessica: 3:52

Well, out of that conversation I'd had actually with Susan Cain, I had been, you know, one of the things I think the writer we writers often do is okay, we file a piece and then we're like, okay, what's next what I have to do next, because as writers, you know, we're only as generally speaking, unless you are able to be out on the road speaking. And I'm very fortunate in that we're generally only as relevant as whatever we wrote last. And so I was constantly thinking, What's next, and the sophomore slump thing is real and scary, really scary, especially when your first book, you know, my first book had like this big 14 publisher editor bidding war, and you know, how am I supposed to top that what what on earth can I do to sort of, at least create something that that I'm proud of, and that's, you know, meets expectations. And so I think that was actually really a stumbling block for me for a long time. And my agent actually told me that first books can happen really quickly, because you've, you've been thinking about it for a really long period of time, and all these ideas have been coalescing, and no one saw that process that could have been going on for 10 years. But the second book, everyone starts asking what your next book is almost immediately, and there's a lot of pressure and, and I proposed all kinds of things that were like a fine, like I quit, I gave my agent all kinds of ideas. And she's like, not yet. That's not it, but you know, work closer, whatever. And I was driving down to and I had been teaching at the rehab, I guess for about

two or three years, assuming I would not write about that, like I wrote about it for the New York Times. And just the experience of asking kids who had gotten into the weeds of substance use disorder, like what any adult in their most receptive moment could have said to them that might have made them think differently about substance abuse. But I had no thinking that I was going to write a book about it. And then I was driving down to Boston for an event. And I had to pull over off the side of the highway, because all of a sudden, all of the ideas I'd had that were not quite sort of coalesced into one thing. And I even texted my two podcast hosts and my two best friends KJ Dell'Antonia and Serina Bowen and, and I said, I got it, and like the title was there, the book was there. And actually, at first it was gonna be about prevention and treatment. And my agent said, Look, you know, let's just do the prevention stuff. There's a whole book there. And that's where you as a researcher can really shine. And so you know, it once it happened, it happened really fast. But it also took five years to sort of get there. But, you know, along the way, the students I was teaching, they were just, it was the best teaching experience of my entire life. I knew that and I knew, if I was going to write more about teaching, it was going to have something to do with the fact that it doesn't always look like A's and it doesn't always look like all my students getting a five on the Advanced Placement English exam, or that the rewards I was getting from teaching these kids was so much bigger than any, you know, hoity toity private school teaching experience I had before. So there was something there, I just didn't know what it was until it just all went ching, ching, ching, God, little pieces came together.

Debbie Reber: 6:59

I love that.

Jessica: 7:00

I did actually write about it for creative nonfiction. I wrote about one of the writing assignments that I do, it's called, I've taught monsters. And it has to do with the assignment, obviously, not the kids. And that was really great. But I also sort of felt like, I didn't just want to tell the kids stories, I wanted there to be some bigger purpose for talking about these kids. They've been used enough, you know, there's no reason to exploit them for the purposes of just telling fun stories, which there are plenty of them that I've never told I wanted there to be a bigger purpose for.

Debbie Reber: 7:33

Can you tell us then just before we get into I have some specific questions about the book, which I had a chance to read. And I think it is fantastic. And very personal. And it's just a really powerful book. So can you give us the broad overview about what readers would expect to find in your book?

Jessica: 7:52

So it's a really, I like writing books that cross categories. And this is a cross category book, mainly because it's very much a memoir. You know, I have, by the time the book comes out, God willing, or whatever, willing, I will have seven years, I'm almost there. I'm sorry, I will have eight years by the time this book comes out. And so it's the story of that recovery. It's the story of Well, what do I do now with my you know, about my own kids, my husband and I

both have substance abuse on both sides of our family, big time. So how do we, you know, what part does that play? I didn't know what the genetics, you know, what percentage of risk and all that sort of stuff at plays? So what do I do with my kids? Do I have to do something different than people who have no substance abuse in their history? Do I don't know what their school is doing? Their school is supposed to be doing something right? Isn't there like a program at their school? I don't know. Ours? Is what schools are doing? Is it even based on any evidence? Or is it just kind of like, I'd heard that, you know, kids who took care, in the late 80s, dare to keep kids off drugs, that their risk of using drugs and alcohol actually went up, have we definitely done something about that I had no idea. And then I also wanted to talk a little bit about as a parent, how I talk to my own kids about my own substance use. And I don't keep that a secret. And it's very much out there because you know, a lot of what I had experienced and a lot of what people talk about in substance abuse memoirs is just gaslighting and secrets and secrets are really toxic and keep us sick. And there's all sorts of research outside of substance abuse on that as well. My husband is a HIV doc. And there's a study that shows that people who keep their HIV status secret have poorer outcomes than people who are out with their HIV status. And, you know, when controlling for a lot of other factors, it seems to be that that secrecy and shame makes us sicker because it affects our immune system. So what does that do to kids so it was really for me, it's memoir, but it's also an evidence based guide to parenting and teachers and coaches. There's a lot of stuff in there about sports, and colleges and how to essentially, if you picture addiction risk as scales, those old timey scales, you know, if your kid has a lot of risk factors, I just wanted to give parents the ammunition to raise the risk factor will make the risk factor side as heavy as possible. The more risk we know about the more honest we are with ourselves in evaluating risk, the better we can heap protections on kids. And I wanted kids to, I wanted to prevent kids from ending up in my classroom, because I was seeing the same stories and the same risk factors and the same situations over and over and over again. But that's anecdotal evidence, right? I'm not, I didn't do any control, you know, double blind studies I just watched, and yet, over and over and over again, I can predict what the risk factors for my students would be. And thank goodness, this the ACEs study, the adverse childhood experience study is becoming thanks to a bunch of writers who have written about it. It's becoming something that people actually know about. And it's a huge factor for substance abuse risk. So I want to talk about adverse childhood experiences as well. So lots of different things. That's the broad strokes of the book, lots of stories when it's my favorite way to write, which is, you know, data in an accessible way couched in a story, because storytelling is how we learn from each other.

Debbie Reber: 11:29

Yes, for sure. It's my favorite way to learn for sure. My favorite way to read and it's hard, it is not easy to write that cross genre book and have that and strike that right balance, I think, Yeah, I do. Yeah.

Jessica: 11:42

Well, in from a writing perspective, I had plenty of chapters that were done from a data perspective, but I just didn't have the story yet. So they sat there in a folder while I worked on other stuff. And I figured out what those framing stories would be.

Debbie Reber: 11:56

And so I will say, you know, I come from a family where substance abuse is not really prevalent on either side. And so it's something I think about just because of my, you know, experimentation in high school and college, and I happen to have a teen who has zero interest in any of that. So that's not something that I think about a lot. And then in reading your book, I just was struck by how, how this is just critical for every family, no matter what your history is, your family dynamic is, because it's really also just about values. It's about how you show up as a parent, the conversations you have, and I'm wondering, like, one of the things that jumped out for me, we had lived in Europe for a number of years. And there's a whole mentality there around alcohol, you know, as you just have your child have a drink at the table with you. And you know, you don't make a big deal out of it. I'm wondering what kind of surprised you as you were writing this in terms of family's values around alcohol, and how they incorporate it or talk about it in their lives?

Jessica: 13:01

Well, I was, as I was writing this book, The monitoring, the future study comes out every single year talking about kids attitudes towards substance use, and we can see from that survey, how team use is going, essentially, and it's been going down for a long time. And that's great. And so, you know, there was a lot to celebrate, this was like two years ago, there was a lot to celebrate in the survey results. But the American Academy of Pediatrics came out with their own little statement on the survey saying this is fantastic. But we have to stay focused, because a lot of what we're doing in terms of our parenting in terms of how we approach things as physicians is based on sort of this wishful thinking or, or, you know, the way we'd like things to be a part of that. And they didn't write about this, this is sort of extrapolated out has to do with this. If we're more like the French and we're just laissez faire about our drinking, then somehow we will raise moderate drinkers. And it turns out that is so exactly wrong. First of all, this fantasy that we seem to have about if my kid has a sip, or if my kid has, you know, some watered down wine like the French do, then there'll be this attitude of, Oh, it's just wine. It's no big deal. And so when our kids, American kids go off to college or have their first you know, drinks of alcohol in, actually as the research shows, in middle school, not in high school, I'm even I do it. I'm like, oh, when they start drinking in high school, and then No, no, most kids will have their first taste in middle school. So if we're waiting until middle school to start talking about the stuff, we're waiting too long, that somehow like we won't have these binge drinkers because they'll be like, Oh, it's just alcohol. It's no big deal. I'm allowed to have it around the house all the time. That just doesn't hold. And if you look at the data from Europe, I mean, Europeans have the highest levels of alcohol abuse in the world, and France has just had to change their thinking and make their official limits. On the amount of alcohol that people should consume during the week, they've had to lower those. And there's been a lot of resistance to that. And if you look at what works and what doesn't work, what works is having an attitude of abstinence in the home for kids, you know, it's illegal kids shouldn't drink till they're 20, at least 21. And here's why. And talking about how the brain works. But PS, talking about how the brain works is good for kids, no matter why you're doing it, whether it comes to learning whether it comes to, you know, it's okay that you forget things occasionally, sweetie, because that's where your brain is right now. And let me explain how that works. But for substance abuse, the brain is so delicate, and so plastic and so, so sensitive to outside environmental factors, that if we can

just keep kids abstinent as long as possible, whether that's 1821, you know, it would be great if we could keep them abstinent that long, it'll affect the brain last, it'll do more or less damage to the brain. And there are places like for example, New Jersey has an exception in its laws around religious exemptions for alcohol consumption. And so a lot of parents will use that rule. If they were to provide alcohol in and there, it's not for religious uses. If they were to provide something like a keg for the keg party, they will often use that religious exemption. There's a bunch of cases of this and that thinking is just altogether upside down and backwards, it does not work, it increases the chance that your child will have substance use disorder over their lifetime. It does not work to create wonderful laissez faire, European drinkers. And by the way, there aren't a lot of laissez faire, European drinkers, Europe seems to have a big problem with alcohol abuse. And so we just need to, we need to smash that myth right there to smithereens.

Debbie Reber: 16:40

Yeah, I mean, and it surprised me, honestly, I was like, wow. And yeah, I totally see that. Like, I just hadn't made that connection. So thank you for that. I want to talk about differently wired kids and alcoholism. I know that there are studies that show high incidences of alcoholism within differently wired people, there have been studies that show a strong connection between ADHD and drug abuse and alcoholism. Are there specific approaches the parents of differently wired kids might employ when inoculating our differently wired kids against having problems with drugs and alcohol?

Jessica: 17:16

Yeah, so I think there's a couple of things we can do. Number one, you're totally correct. And in fact, Gabor Mate has a whole book about ADHD and, and substance use. And, you know, having gone down that rabbit hole, it's really an interesting field. Because people have different ideas, researchers have different ideas about what causes people to go on and have substance use disorder, whether it's a developmental, because you know, as we know, with adolescence, there's there, frontal lobe is not finished cooking yet. And so they just don't have as much sort of impulse control around those things. And they and their dopamine levels at baseline are lower, and so they crave more sort of novel experiences. So I kind of like that developmental model, because actually, there's a lot of research to show that you know, kids can use if kids are going to use during adolescence that that doesn't necessarily mean that they're going to carry that into adulthood with them once their frontal lobes kick in that can be and it can also be situational. There's the trauma camp, Gabor Mate is in the trauma camp, that essentially, trauma turns on our need to self soothe, or self medicate for traumas. And that trauma net can get really big. I mean, I was at a talk with the government one time and he started talking to a woman, she's like, well, I don't feel like I have any trauma, really, that would have triggered my use. And he started talking to her and like he was like, Okay, well, that time when you b ah, blah, blah, blah, that's your trauma. That's possibly what caused it. So everyone can go a little bananas, I think, in expanding their nets. But when it comes to differently wired kids, this is a thing. This is real, for a couple of reasons. So risk factors, some of the bigger risk factors for substance use disorder during your lifetime. Yes, trauma is one of them. If you look at adverse childhood experiences, that provides a really great list of the big risk factors abuse in the home, that kind of stuff. But academic failure falling behind academically is a really big risk

factor, mainly because it can cause so many of the other risk factors to happen like social ostracism, feeling stupid. I always had at least one or two kids in my rehab classroom with ADHD or ADD and, and dyslexia, oh my gosh, there's always someone there with dyslexia. And what they would say to me was, I was just always told I was stupid, or I don't read like my biggest goal was a ways to get a book in their hands and find something that they wanted to read. And many of them said, You know, I have a problem with reading, I don't read period and just shut down. That's it. It's not for me. And so many of them had social ostracism. So many of them were told that they were stupid, so many of them had low expectations for their academics, so many of them were closed out from having social conversations around books, I mean, you know, the Harry Potter series was like a global phenomenon. And yet so many of these kids because they thought reading was done for them were closed out of that cultural conversation and felt even more alienated by that. So early intervention for reading stuff, and in the past, I've written in various articles that there's sort of a balance to be made about, I wrote an article based on the book *Leo, the Late Bloomer*, because I've always loved that book so much about that balance between not pushing them too hard and not being impatient when our kids aren't reading. So having that balance, I think, is gonna be really important, but also, you know, asking those questions, are you a teacher? Are you getting nervous about the fact that my kids still can't read? Or are you getting nervous about his tendency to disrupt classroom behavior and get all the other kids off track and then meeting with the teacher meeting, and I talked a lot about school counselors and school nurses and their ability to direct you toward resources that can be really helpful, especially for people who need sliding scale pay, and that kind of stuff. But the social ostracism, and then early aggression is a really big risk factor beat, often because it can then go turned into social ostracism. So the early aggression, early learning issues, social ostracism, those are sort of the Big Three, and you can see how those self-perpetuate each other. So if we see that happening with our kids, especially the early aggression, I think it's gonna be really important, from a danger perspective, of course, to seek outside counsel about how to best help our kids, because much of that can be addressed not just through individual help, but also really good social emotional learning programs in schools. And spoiler alert, if you read the addiction inoculation, you'll find that much of what I prescribe much of what I help schools toward is really good social emotional learning programs. Because that right there, that's the secret sauce, not just for differently wired kids, but for all kids, because that's where not only are they learning the traditional SEL stuff, but they're learning early refusal. They're learning how to self-advocate, they're learning how to speak up for themselves and get the help they need or the things they need. So differently wired kids, I think, it's really tough to balance our need to want to do everything for and fix immediately. But there is some level of urgency to get them help. And to feel like adults have their backs no matter what and not, because we're disappointed in them that they're not, you know, getting all A's and that kind of stuff. But because we want to be there for them. Because those things can very easily snowball. And then once they've started to snowball, it can be very difficult to figure out what's the main problem? Is it social ostracism versus aggression versus academic problems? So the earlier the better early intervention?

Debbie Reber: 22:55

Yeah, I wanted to ask you about that. In terms of age, you said, if you're waiting till Middle School, you're waiting too long. So when do you recommend parents really begin? And how do they begin having these conversations? If they're listening to this podcast? They've got

kids and maybe elementary school, Early Middle School or beyond? And maybe this isn't that one's come up? I mean, I will say that in reading your book, that's when we had conversations at the dinner table. I'm reading this really amazing book by my friend, Jess. And this is what she said, What do you think like, that's when we started our conversation. I've got a 16 year old.

Jessica: 23:30

So how do we start these conversations? Just jumping back when you said if you're waiting till Middle School, you're waiting too long. That was not about their interventions. This is about starting to talk to kids about substance use. So we don't want to start with starting to talk to kids about substance use. We start by talking to kids when they're sitting there, you know, hypothetically, in the bathroom with us while we're brushing our teeth and their medications sitting on the counter, and a kid is just starting to learn how to read and you ask them to read, you know, can you find any of the letters in mommy's name, or in your name, let's say the medication is for the kid. And that's an amazing opportunity to say, you know, the reason your name is on this medication is because you're only supposed to we only take medications that are that are prescribed for us sometimes, like mommy could even have the exact same medication as you do because we have the exact same illness problem infection, but they're two very different amounts. So we couldn't just switch these two bottles. So you know, these little and why we brush our teeth. We tell kids to brush their teeth. But do you tell kids it's because there's bacteria on their teeth kids crave wise. I mean, you know that whole because I told you so the parenting thing doesn't work mainly because kids crave the why and especially as they get older and you know, not that toddlers don't I mean toddlers are all about the why and we can only go so far. But these sort of caring for our bodies and speaking up for ourselves and saying, No, that doesn't feel good or no, I can't take that medication because it doesn't have my name on it. Or, why don't we swallow toothpaste? Or why do we only put soap on the outside of our body and not the inside of our body? Why does mommy keep them? Why does daddy keep the, you know, the laundry detergent pods up on the top shelf and not down on the bottom shelf. All of these conversations about what's good for us and what's not good for us as all precursor to a discussion of that first time, we see a movie that has drug and alcohol use in it. And there's a section in the book about how much media are how much advertising our kids get around substances and how much not just advertising but, you know, use in films and television shows in cartoons even there's a ton of reference every time you see and it's not as much anymore, obviously, we've but if you look at the cartoons we used as kids, the time you saw characters in those drinking was, you know, something bad happened drink a big bottle of, you know, a bottle that said, you know, had a little skull and crossbones on the front of it. That like why we drink? Why in the show? Do you think that that, you know, especially around things like mommy culture, that mommy drinking culture thing? Like, why do you think that this woman is saying that, you know, she needs a drink at the end of the day after being home with your kids all day, or I was at a bookstore. And there was a set of glasses that says, I teach therefore I drink? And number one, what does that say to our kids about their teachers, it says that it's all suffering, and therefore we have to drink to deal with that there's so many layers to that messaging. But having all of these conversations along the way as we notice things and yes, I tend to notice things more because mommy culture mommy wine drinking culture, you know, wine glasses, sippy cups on top just gets me a little irked because it's normalizing the idea that we have to drink in order to deal with our

children. And you know, I belong to multiple groups on Facebook and other places that are about, you know, women who are trying to get better and trying to get into recovery either mostly from pills, a lot of them from drinking. And that culture can be really toxic for those people and really can keep their drinking going. So talking to about kids all the way through is really important along with and you start and in the book, I lay it out really, really step by step here are some scripts, even from smoking through, you know, marijuana legalization, there's a lot to talk about, and they're listening when the news is on. So having those conversations can happen naturally for listening for those moments, but they don't start with drugs and alcohol, they start with toothpaste and why we wash our bodies and you know, great stuff. It's about health generally.

Debbie Reber: 27:38

Yeah, I'm thinking of the Tintin books, which there I can't remember that character, but the captain or he's perpetually got a bottle in his hand and is drunk the entire time. And that's a favorite.

Jessica: 27:51

There's actually this one book that I bought when I started to research a book, I essentially my advance goes to books. I mean, I buy every book I can find, and there actually is somewhere in my bookshelves, the Oh, here it is, I am holding in my hands a book, you're gonna love this, a book called Stoney the pony, teaching children about addiction through metaphor. And it's essentially about a pony who becomes a little bit crazed by those mints that we give pony sometimes. And all of his friends are like, dude, you have a problem with those mints. And he experiences pony ostracism from his friends. I mean, it's just very funny. But it's also that's kind of beside the point. And it's cute. And I'm glad someone went to that effort. But really, it's about talking about health and talking about what's good for our bodies, and what's bad for our bodies. And that includes a discussion about how our brains are growing and how, you know, the things that kids find difficult, like whether that's impulse control, or moderating their sugar intake is part of growing up, that's a part of how our brains develop. And someday, when they're, when they're big, when they're going to be adults, that will become easier for them, but their brains are still developing. And that's an important part of teaching them about themselves, too.

Debbie Reber: 29:05

Yeah, and for differently wired kids, we know that they, I mean, we know the frontal lobe. I think 25 is around the age when it's fully baked. And for definitely married kids that may be even longer because their timeline is different.

Jessica: 29:18

And by the way, I've used that, that line about being fully baked, and it does not go over and it did in an addiction talk. And I made that metaphor once and I was like, yeah, that didn't go over too. Well, you know, but the reality is in there, the statistics, if you look at the statistics, you know, if your kid starts drinking or taking drugs in middle school, then they have a very high chance of having substance use disorder in adulthood. And if you it with each year that goes by that risk goes down and down and down into the point where we're near down

nearly like 10% if we can get them up into their, you know, up to the point where they're at legal age and the nice thing about that is that There are so many things we can do along the way. And, you know, as someone who's been in recovery for a long time, you know, the Serenity Prayer is part of sort of the way I think, which is, you know, give me the strength to change the things to know the things, I cannot change and change, whatever change things I can, there's a lot I can't control about my kid. But research is really clear that even once our kids are in college, we are still an influence on the way they think. And not just because of our words, but mostly because of the way we've modeled behavior for them. And, you know, for my kids, my students, my kids and their rehab, many of them were going home to a home where substance use was normal. And so it's so hard for me to send them home, because, you know, I don't know what chance they have if substance abuse is normalized in their household. But along those same lines, if and I'm not saying that parents can't drink, you know, or use drugs and that sort of stuff, because for adults, especially around for example, marijuana use, you know, there's a ton of risks to kids, especially around the hippocampus and short term memory, that just sort of go away, there isn't as much risk to adults as there is for kids. And it's just a matter of waiting until the risk level goes down. And that, honestly, is the conversation I keep having with my 17 year old which is so hard for you, you know, those times when you come into the kitchen, and you stand there in front of the refrigerator, and you say, wait a second, why am I in this room? What did I come in here for? That's all short term memory, hippocampus, working memory stuff. And that's, that is where the receptors for the active ingredients in marijuana are. And it messes with that area. So if you want that to get worse, or and we talk about the fact that my husband smoked a lot of pot when he was in college, and he says for sure he knows that it affected his short term memory. And unfortunately, there were a lot of things he needed to memorize in graduate school, and he could tell that his short term memory had gone downhill. And that was in his early 20s. So you know, having these honest conversations with kids, we don't have to be perfect ourselves, my husband drinks I don't. But on the other hand, he models for my kids a sense of caring for my situation, because he doesn't leave alcohol open in the house. So if he doesn't finish a can of beer or doesn't finish a bottle of wine, it goes down the drain, because he just doesn't want to put me in that position. And that's about having a healthy relationship where people make accommodations for each other. And that's also teaching my kids about healthy sharing, giving relationships. And so the modeling stuff, you know, this, the modeling stuff is so important.

Debbie Reber: 32:35

So important. It's great. Alright, so I'm going to ask you one last typical interview interviewer question. You know, for listeners, what is kind of one thing if this is really landing with them, and they're like, I just want to be sure that I take a step today, right? You know, the takeaway that I can leave this conversation armed with? What's one thing you want to make sure that they kind of know about the power they have with their child's relationship with drugs and alcohol?

Jessica: 33:04

I remember, when I was just reading the audio book this past week, and rediscovering stuff. I don't know if there are many writers in the audience, but you do sometimes have this amnesia about what you wrote. And you come back to it, you're like, oh, wow, I wrote that.

Or I didn't realize I included that. And that is that. Number one, our kids are listening. Number two, our kids are watching. And number three, that even as our kids individually, even as our adolescents pull away from us, they are still listening. And the key is going to be finding ways to talk to them that allows them to relate and makes them want to be a part of the conversation. And then the fun part. That's fun. Like there's a whole chapter in this book about the fact that we get precious little of our kids attention and time. And so I was trying to find ways to get it back. And so one of the ways I did that was by creating a dinner that was around this, this game, this interview show called hot ones, which is about a guy Sean Evans, who interviews people while they eat hot wings. And we love that show. We've seen almost every episode of that show. And so I created an entire dinner. It was a secret where I ordered all of the hot wings sauces from a particular season, and I went and got unseasoned hot wings and some vegan wings and made all the wings and laid them out on a tray. And my husband and I came up with a question for each wing. And the questions were not overly invasive. It was we didn't want to, you know, rip their guts out with the questions, but we wanted to just know about how their brains worked and what they were thinking about. And so it was one of it's going to be I think one of my favorite memories from our lives together. And we spent two and a half three hours eating wings and drinking milk and then we ran out of milk and we started once they got hotter. We moved on to well basically liquid vanilla ice cream, which really worked well because these things get really hot and I learned so much about not just facts about my kids lives, but how they think. And it showed them that I was willing to come to them to where they are, and on their terms and with things that interest them. And I wasn't asking about grades. And it wasn't asking about like, what college Do you want to go to? Or, you know, that sort of stuff. I was asking about stuff that really mattered. Like I, one of the questions was about which of their grandparents Do they really see attributes in them? What grandparent did they think that they resemble the most, and that led to like a half an hour long conversation about not just what the kids said, but what other people's perceptions were affected. And it led to a conversation about what we admire in their grandparents, it was really cool. And so that idea of we may feel like they're not listening, we may feel like they don't want to talk to us, we may feel like we're getting separated by age and distance, and all the other stuff and interests, but there are ways to get there on their, on their plane and talk to them about the things they care about. And I remember distinctly a bunch of years ago, when my older son was first going into high school, and there was this great panel, I talked about this and gift to failure, there was a panel discussion where students were talking to parents of incoming freshmen about how to be as supportive as possible during freshman year, which is a really difficult year for some kids. And one parent asked that question, what is what is the one thing you wish your parents had done to really support you during freshman year, and they all basically said, we really do want to talk to our parents, we really, really do. We just don't want to talk to them about the stuff they want to talk about all the time. Sometimes we just want to talk about the stuff that interests us without feeling judged without feeling like someone's going to say, Oh, that's stupid, or, oh, that's not relevant to a future business degree or whatever. So finding ways to get there and be able to talk to kids in a way that's not judgmental is supportive. And on their level, I think it is the big takeaway. I mean, I think before you even start this book, the fact that you're picking this book up means you're thinking about substance use. And so honestly, thinking about your own substance use, if you're at all concerned about your own use, I think it's going to be really important for you to confront that. And, you know, we're seeing that in the media a lot, just you know, a couple, Christy Teigen just read Hollywood occurs drink like a woman, and you know, decided to get sober because not because she

felt like she had a real problem, but because she just didn't like her relationship to alcohol. And I think it's I'm so grateful for this, that it's becoming normalized to have like dry January, to take a little bit of a breather and reassess our relationship to substances. That's something I think it's going to be important to do before you even start to think about how you're going to talk to your kids about their use.

Debbie Reber: 37:46

So good. And I'm really glad you shared the hot wing story. I loved reading that I loved it. And oh my gosh, it was so much fun sounds like it, and it what it really underscored for me and also what you just shared is that ultimately, and this also comes through when they get to failure. This is about having respectful relationships with our kids like that is really the key. Because without that respect without that connection, they're just gonna shut us down and just not be available.

Jessica: 38:15

Yeah, a bunch of years ago when I was well, when I was doing all the speaking when the world was we were allowed to do that stuff. I did a lot of talking about my now 17 year old when he was like 14, he got really into crystals like not like geology crystals, but like the metaphysics and like the cleansing and the auras, and all that sort of stuff. And, you know, from my academic perspective, I was kind of like, Oh my gosh, really crystals. But I was like, okay, teach me about crystals. I don't know anything about crystals. And he started traveling with me. And we started going to Crystal shops, and I was thinking about it the other day. crystals, the interesting crystals came out of an interest in aliens, like most young kids are like to think about aliens and stuff. And then the crystals things happen. And then the crystals turned into this. this other thing which turned into a music thing, which turned into the fact that now at 17, he is all in on digital music production. And I can trace the trajectory of those interests because they are connected. And you know how kids tend to go all in on one thing, sometimes it's sometimes you have to have respect for that thing. They're going all in on even if you don't believe in it yourself necessarily because it may lead to the next thing. And I remember to give to failure talk a dad, have a very religious conservative dad said I'm scared to death. How do I talk to my kid about the fact that she's exploring things I really don't want her exploring right now. And this was a high school aged kid. And this was in a very religious place. And I said that actually her exploring stuff that makes you uncomfortable is an incredible starting place to not only support her and show that you respect her and support her interests, but it can strengthen her perspective. have on your religion because asking questions and asking questions wasn't a really big, strong point of this particular religion. But if you support her and asking questions, you're going to show that you respect her. And you're going to show that you respect her intelligence and her seeking. And that in the end, doing the opposite, which is, you know, disregarding this interest and telling her to just not do it is going to drive a wedge in your relationship. And that will probably be more likely to separate you from her and her from her religion, but giving some support to that seeking could actually strengthen your relationship and help her understand why you feel your faith is so strong and so important to you, and could bring you and her closer to her faith. So, you know, I really think that supporting kids as they're searching is one of the most, it's the biggest gifts we can give kids.

Debbie Reber: 40:52

So good. What a wonderful note to end on. Jess, I'm so grateful for this conversation. And I'm excited for your book. And it's really powerful. And I encourage listeners to check it out. Check out the show notes pages. Jess, where can listeners connect with you? You're super active on Twitter. But how can listeners learn more? Everything?

Jessica: 41:15

Is it jessicalahey.com and then yes, I'm over at Twitter a lot because as a professional teachers are some of the largest biggest users of Twitter and teacher Twitter is fantastic Twitter I love teacher Twitter. And I'm on Instagram @teacherlahey. So @lahey twitter. And the book comes out April 6, and hopefully I'll bombard you from all sides on where to get the book but and I also got to do as I said, I got to do the audio book again, which for me is one of my favorite parts of the process. So the book will be available on audio as well. It'll be everywhere you can find books I hope so.

Debbie Reber: 41:56

Exciting! Well, congratulations and I believe actually, this episode even though we're recording it in January, I have it slated to come out on your book birthday. So I'm gonna say yeah, happy early book birthday.

Jessica: 42:08

Thank you. Thank you.