Building Stronger Families Through Connection

[00:00:00] This is facets of connection where we are transforming relationships within an evolving world. Brought to you by Relational Life Foundation and hosted by me Sarah Melissa Oswald. This exclusive podcast series delves into the heart of human connection, exploring how we learn, love, and collaborate.

Within a dynamic society, we'll uncover the power of respectful relationships and their essential role in the human experience. I invite you to embark on a journey with me to create a more connected empathic world for future generations.

I wanna start this introduction on a personal note because honestly, this episode is close to my heart. If you're a parent, I know that it will also be close to yours. [00:01:00] Even though my child is still quite young, I already feel a deep concern for what kids and teens are facing in today's worlds. The statistics around youth mental health are terrifying.

My worries are not about my family in particular, but they're about all our kids and my commitment along with relational life therapies to supporting future generations, and that's why I'm so grateful to welcome Susan Casso as my guest today. I invited Susan because she shares my belief that the heart of solving the teen mental health crisis is relationship.

Especially the connection between teens and their families. . Susan is a licensed professional counselor and a mom of three herself. She's dedicated her career to helping families build meaningful bonds. She's a board member and mental health advisor for the live project and has worked on the film, my [00:02:00] sister Liv, and she's served on the board of Rise Against Suicide.

But what really stands out is Susan's deep dive into the parent teen relationship. She's written a book, the Parent Teen Connection on how to build lifelong family relationships, and it's all about creating open, lasting connections with our kids. Her book has been endorsed by unicef, by Children's Hospital, Colorado, and Crisis Text Line.

I can't think of anyone better to help us tackle these tough conversations and inspire hope for future generations. And with that, here we go. I.

hi Susan. Hi Sarah. Thanks for having me on your podcast.

Thanks for saying yes. I'm so grateful to have you here. I heard about you and I heard about your book over and over and over. People [00:03:00] kept, it kept showing up in my world.

People kept asking me if I knew about you or if I had met you. It turns out we live really close to each other. The work that we're doing at Relational Life Foundation is set out to support future generations and end the epidemic of loneliness. And I thought the book you wrote, the Parent Teen Connection,

I thought that that fit really well into my personal mission. I have a five-year-old son and I think about what the future looks like for him. And I hear the statistics on teenage depression and anxiety and the crazy rates of suicide that we're seeing worldwide, and I feel personally driven to make an impact in the upcoming generation.

And you're directly doing that. . Tell me a bit about your purpose here.

What made you write this book? So. I've been a [00:04:00] therapist for over 20 years working with teens and parents, and I'm also a mother myself, and I have three kids, 26, 22, and 12. And I love being a parent and I also love being a therapist. It's really a privilege that people share their internal world with me and they grant me their trust.

And, I feel like I absolutely have the best job. It's really great. The intent of the book is to create stronger families where there's a deep sense of belonging, healthy communication, and an emotional closeness between parent and child. And that's really what safeguards kids in today's world. And I believe connection and learning how to be in a relationship starts at home.

I do too. Yeah. So are we gonna learn that? It's true. It, it really is. It starts at home. We as parents build that connection. We [00:05:00] teach our kids how to

be in relationships, how to communicate, how to care for each other, how to empathize with each other. All of those things are just so very important and set the foundation for our kids for lifelong relationships and their happiness.

Yeah. And I as a parent, I know that there's more. Content out there on the internet than there ever has been about how to do it well, how to be that good parent who teaches all of those relational skills. But why? Why now? Why did you write this book? Why? Why do you think that the world needs this information?

At this time in particular, I see the same patterns and negative cycles of interaction between parent and child and. I wanted to take what I do in session with families that build safer families, safer homes, and closeness and connection. [00:06:00] And I wanted to reach more people with the tools that work. And so that's really why , I wrote the book. There is a lot of information out there right now. It is really hard to kind of sift through it. And a lot of times people will come into therapy and maybe they're, they're not as open and their spouse or their parent or the child has asked the parent to come in and they will even say things like, I don't need therapy.

I get my therapy online from Instagram or TikTok. And you know, we don't know, what that information is, where it's coming from, or who that person is. And really, unless we do the research of, oh, they are certified, they have studied this, you know, I think all of that is important information to have when you're looking at these and trying to follow what these people are trying to tell you online.

Absolutely. And it's not [00:07:00] personalized just 'cause you're. Reading information doesn't mean you're doing the work and bringing it into your home. That's a lot harder to actually implement, don't you think? Yes. Yes. I think that's the other key is that we really do have to look at that. Everyone's experience is a little bit different and.

That's what therapy is about. It's this back and forth open communication to have an understanding of what each person's experience is. There isn't always a cookie cutter solution.

Know, in your book you wrote a lot about, there's a whole chapter about the parents' work about healing their own childhood stuff, and that ties into relational life therapy really well. Right. When I'm working with couples, the patterns that come up between them, the relational patterns, are often ones that stemmed out of their own childhood.

And a lot of the work I do with couples. And that RLT does with couples is helping them heal their wounded [00:08:00] child, developing a relationship with that in your inner part so that they can show up as wise adults in their partnership. And I think you can tell me, it sounds like what you're offering is very similar because the way that we show up in relationship with our teens or our children in general stems from.

Our childhood woundings or patterns. Yes. Yes. We only know what we know, which is our experience, unless we really take the time to self-reflect and to do things differently if we want to. Right. And so the book, after every chapter. There is a whole section on self-reflection because that's how important I think it is.

And I think when we self-reflect in our relationships, we're actually showing the other person that we care, that the relationship matters so much that we're willing to [00:09:00] look at ourselves, look at our tendencies, and own them and repair , if that's necessary as well. Self-reflection really is. I don't think you can have a healthy relationship without self-reflection.

I agree with you. And as a parent of a, just a five-year-old, right. I'm not even at the teenage years yet. I've been surprised by, in how incredibly challenging that's been for me as someone who has studied this for, you know, 15 years. Kids have a way of challenging us and bringing up those patterns that we thought we healed years ago.

It was very easy for me to be in great relationship before I had a kid. And then that a lot of that got reopened and forced me to really look in a deeper way. And it still hard, you know, I'm learning every single day. And how do you find that in your own relationships with your kids now that they're older?

I. [00:10:00] A hundred percent. I yeah, I think when the stress level increases, we can really revert back to what we experienced in our own childhood. And, and I talk about in the book, even if we don't wanna do it that way, sometimes that's what comes up and that's how we interact with our kids. Yeah.

Yeah. So, it is a daily challenge. I think it's just something, you know, I think what's really important in that though is to give yourself some grace and space and compassion and allow that to happen and then, you know, self-reflect and then choose to do it differently next time. We can only do that.

Yeah. Yeah. I love the, I saw it in your book that you're like, perfection's not the goal. Something like that. Yeah. Yeah. Perfection is not the goal. In fact, we

don't want our kids to think we're perfect [00:11:00] because then it sets them up to think that they need to be perfect. And so again, it's just really about owning our own tendencies and being able to communicate that and and repair.

If feelings get hurt or if we say something that's critical or judgmental, I talk about in the book like, talk to your kids. Hey, you know what, if I say something that's critical or feels judgmental, just come tell me. It might be a blind spot of mine. I may not have realized that. That sounded critical.

If it landed that way, just tell me and we'll work it out and I will apologize. Mm. I love that you're encouraging parents to engage their children in being part of the system that's designing their relationships and not just saying parents, it's all on you. Yeah. Yeah. Yeah, and I think that's also a really good segue into [00:12:00] that respect piece.

I think that when. We look at that word respect. It used to go one way, a child has to respect the parent. And now, especially what I'm hearing in my office, teens do want their parent to respect them. They want to feel that respect going both ways. And when you have a relationship like that, it does work a lot better, a lot smoother.

That part about repair as well. A lot of teenagers don't understand why a parent just won't own their part of an argument and just simply say, I'm sorry. And I think parents are afraid that their child will lose respect for them if they apologize or admit that maybe they had done something wrong.

Really what I'm hearing in my office is a teen actually loses respect when a parent won't come and say, you know what? That's on me, and I'm so sorry. [00:13:00] Seems to make sense. Yeah. They're human beings. You know, I could go down a rabbit hole with either of those topics with respect and repair. And I'll just say briefly, I, you know, I don't know the statistics on teenagers, and maybe you have more information about this, but I think it's, Ed Tronick talks about the re the importance of repair even with an infant mother to infant.

Yeah. And how it's not about being perfect, it's about the repair that happens. You can get a lot of it wrong, but as long as repair is happening. Your child's gonna be okay, and that relationship can still be strong and securely attached. Right, right. And again, that secure attachment is what we want. And if we, if we look at how we create secure attachment, when our children are born, we're told to bond with our kids.[00:14:00]

And that is done through what we call a volley a serve return. The baby cries. They serve up a need, A parent responds cuddling, feeding, rocking, changing a diaper, and that's that return. And so that serve return over time creates a secure bond. And I talk about in the parenting connection that that volley, that server return never goes away.

It just looks different. And now it's with communication. Verbally, non-verbally, but the verbal part is really being attuned with your kid, really listening, listening to understand confirming messages received, empathizing, validating, and owning and repairing. And that's that volley. And so when we talk about communicating with their [00:15:00] teenagers, that's how I explain it to them of Are you volleying with your teen?

Yeah. I, I'm thinking about situations that, that could be tricky. Mm-hmm. One came up for me this morning. My kid lied to me. Yeah. For the first time that I'm aware of. Uh, in a, in an intentional way. , I imagine being a parent of a teen is incredibly challenging. Yeah. Yes, yes. It's, yes. And I lied to my dad because he didn't want me to do certain things right. , He wanted to have a lot of control over me and I knew I was fine.

I didn't need him to oversee me. And so I would make up stories to give myself some more leeway. But now as a parent, I see that, that like, to me, lying is the biggest offense. Yeah. And so what would you recommend a parent do , how do you develop a sense of trust that your kid wants to tell you the [00:16:00] truth, even if it's something that might get them in trouble?

Yeah. And I do talk about building trust in the relationship in the book a lot, just so you know, and it's actually the foundation. I have graphics in the book and at the top is building trust. And how do you do that with your kids from day one, right? From day one. What if I'm a parent of a 15-year-old who's just like in the thick of it and I'm just finding your book?

What if I haven't been doing that from day one? I always tell parents it's never too late. It's never too late. Yeah. And in that scenario, going to your teenager and saying, I want things to be different between us. I want to have a closer relationship with you. I want us to have more ease in the relationship.

I want to be approachable for you to come to me and tell me to be truthful when you're struggling, when [00:17:00] you're in trouble, those kinds of things. And so to answer that part, like it's never too late to turn that ship with your child. Yeah. It's really touching. Yeah. But building trust is a daily task with your kids.

And I think it goes back to that topic of respect, respect building a sense of belonging at your, in your home. We talk, I wanna talk about that too. Yeah. We talk a lot about belonging at school, in community, in the workplace. We're not talking about belonging at home, which is the most important place for our kids to feel a sense of belonging.

And so really looking at that, how are we creating that belonging? How would you define belonging? Belonging is that place where we feel that we matter. We feel seen, we feel heard. There's a [00:18:00] deep connection there. We know that we're accepted no matter who we are. Right. I think that is also this piece between parent and teen of do you accept me for who I am?

Do you accept that I am trying to discover myself that I'm trying on different hats to see what fits. Or are you judging me? Are you criticizing me? That doesn't tell a child that they belong. Yeah. So criticism, judgment, those are barriers to a sense of belonging. Hmm. Yeah. Belonging can be done in so many different ways.

And so it's really important for parents to kind of reflect and find out, am I creating that sense of belonging at home? Are we having dinner together? Are we sharing meals? Are we sharing joy together? Are there rituals and traditions that are part of our family that's like [00:19:00] glue that kind of holds families together.

Then there are these small bits for connection that create belonging. When your kid walks in the door from school instead of like, , how was your day? Do you have homework? It's, I'm so glad to see you. I missed you today. Things like that. Like everyone wants to walk in the door and get a response like that, right?

Affection spending quality and quantity time together, all of those things create a, a deep sense of belonging and that helps. Again, you're building trust. Yeah, you're building trust and you're building a sense of the fullness of my human beingness is allowed in this home. Yes. Yes. Yeah. And there are more barriers to belonging, I think, that are really important to mention.

And I mentioned criticalness and [00:20:00] judgment, but there are also barriers that, you know, I hear from teenagers a lot is yelling. Picking kind of bullying behaviors at home. Those things actually do happen, and it does. It tells the person you don't belong here. Yeah. Yeah. Aggression of any kind. Right.

Right. Mm-hmm. Yeah, I like to imagine that as my kid gets older, that's gonna be easier for me. I think as a, in the toddler years, I really, I struggled with not, I

wasn't a yeller, but I felt like I needed to be in charge. But now that he's growing into this whole human being, not that he wasn't a whole human being at two, but.

He's, there's so much more to respond to. Right? I can be more engaged in dialogue with him, right. That I think it's gonna [00:21:00] get easier for me instead of harder. But I might be thrown off game when he becomes a teenager. No, I always say you work super hard till they're five. Sail and then it's smooth sail.

I feel like I just made it it through a marathon, right? I hit five and then it should be smooth sailing until the, , teen ish preteen. Teen ish years. And I don't know, it feels like, although I, my 12 year old's so amazing right now we're still having that great time, but. You know, that kind of teenage time where they maybe don't wanna hang out with you as much and those kinds of things.

And they're starting to have some trouble self-regulating again, and there's lots of stress. And so then that's this other piece of this time that you really need to work hard to help them regulate themselves and maneuver. They're maneuvering so much. There's so much. You're right on this edge at 12.

Yeah. You're in, you're in that moment right [00:22:00] now, Susan, with your kids. So what is it that you are currently doing to support that transition? Well, you know, again, making sure that that relationship is closed, that she knows I'm approachable, that she can talk to me, that we have open dialogue, we talk about everything, anything and everything.

We talk about how she's feeling what she's struggling with in her friendships. The other day she said something so powerful to me, she said. You know, I, I actually don't know who I can trust in my friend group. Every day it feels a little different. And that is right. There is why at home needs to be a safe place.

Home needs to be that place that I can say and do anything. And you're gonna listen. You're gonna [00:23:00] help me. You're gonna support me. Yeah. It was painful to hear that like, I, I have all these friends and they're great, but then I, I actually don't know who I can trust. I bet as mom, that was really painful to hear.

Yeah. I mean, it's hard, when our kids hurt or they're suffering, we suffer a little bit too. Right. Because we just want the best, but. Back to communication on that. Really listening is the answer. Jumping into their emotional experience instead of jumping to like problem solve.

Right? Yeah. I imagine there's a lot, there would be a lot of impulse to try to fix that, of giving advice or helping them find new friends or figuring out who they can trust. But really it's about letting them know that there is someone who's just gonna listen, can be huge. Right, right. Listen, we talk about, when we're communicating with somebody, maybe listening 50%, but during these [00:24:00] years it, it might be 70% that you're just listening and not jumping to problem solve or judging or criticalness or any of those things that are barriers.

'cause they'll just shut down and walk away. Yes. And you might end up problem solving. You know, you just ask, is this something you want me to help you with? Do you want me to help come up with some solutions? And they'll say yes or no. You know, that takes it right back to the concept of respect. Mm-hmm.

To respect that they are grown up enough to be asked to participate in that. The systems level question of like, what kind of listener do you want right now? Do you want my help? Yeah. Yeah. How can we become closer right now? What, what kind of support can I give you? What kind of connection do you want our relationship to have?

As a new mom, I really fell in love with the concept of respectful parenting through [00:25:00] Janet Lansbury's work. Mm-hmm. And with RLT, respectful relationships is the , primary theme. The name of the game. Mm-hmm. And with teenagers, I imagine it's really recognizing that like, I'm not better than you, I'm not, I'm not going one up on your teen.

Mm-hmm. And putting them in a one down position just because you're wiser or older or have more authority, but to. Bring them into the same as position of we, we have equal worth because we're both human beings living and breathing right now on this planet. Yes. Yeah. Yeah. And if your teenager can feel that energy from you, I imagine it becomes a lot easier.

Yeah. Yeah. And I talk about in the book of Let Them Lead. Let them lead. They want autonomy. Teenagers want some agency in their own life, they are [00:26:00] exploring, they're going out. But it is almost like being at a new job every day because things change every day. They're learning every day.

And so I use that analogy,, we've all had that first time job where we're kind of like, okay, what do I do? Right? So if a parent can just be letting them lead and following really close behind, it really works out better than the parent trying to control. Yeah. You talk about the the mom dad role versus the role of parent in your book.

Mm-hmm. Can you talk a little bit about what the difference is there and how it impacts family relationships? Yes. So, I've asked teenagers for years, what percent of interaction do you perceive as positive with your [00:27:00] parent? And I'll ask them for each parent. I do this so I can jump into their emotional experience very quickly.

I can really get a good handle on what they are thinking, what their experience is at home, and most say around 30% is positive. And so when I ask them what makes up that 30%, they say things like. We cooked together. We went for a walk, we cuddled on the couch, we went fishing, skiing, all of these wonderful kind of things where the parent and the teen are experiencing joy together, and those are the times where you're cultivating the relationship.

Then I ask teenagers, well, what makes up that 70% that you perceive as nice? Is that the average you would say? That's about, I would say it's the average, yeah. 30 70. Yeah. 70% difficult with any given parent. Yeah. [00:28:00] Wow. And when I say what makes up that 70% that you perceive as negative? They say they talk about the interactions that begin with have you, when are you going to, you need to, Hmm.

And all of those interactions is what I term the parent role. And we do have to do those things. We do have to make sure our kids are doing their chores and their homework and keeping them on task and all the to-dos of life, right. When we spend the majority of our time doing that, in that parent role, we're not cultivating the relationship.

And so I talk about in the book, flipping it, try to have 30% of the to-dos and the chores and all of that. Those types of interactions and 70% of where you're in [00:29:00] that mom, dad role cultivating the relationship. Yeah, and I have to tell you, it's been this mom dad role versus the parent role has been one of the biggest things that's coming out of the book because parents can implement that right away.

They can stop themselves right before they're interacting with their kiddo and say, am I in the parent role or am I in the mom dad role? And I don't understand the difference. You don't? Oh. Mm-hmm. Okay. So that, break it down for me. Sure. That parent role is the instructional piece. Oh, okay. And the mom, dad is the relational, the relational, that kind of more warm loving side where you're experiencing joy together.

And why do you call it that? Because mom or dad has, because it's a name that's relational rather than parent. That it, it's more [00:30:00] about connection and

then the parent role is what we have to do as the guides or, yes, exactly. And I remember standing in my in my living room and talking to my son and, oh my gosh, did you clean your room?

Or whatever it was. Right. And I just. I actually said it out loud. I just wanna be your mom. I don't wanna be a parent today. Can we, can I just be your mom today? And I remember just laughing out loud and thinking about , when I ask teenagers questions in my office about the percent of interaction you perceive as positive, I'm like, these are the ones that.

I don't wanna be doing either, and I'm sure they don't wanna hear this. Right. And so that's how I came up with that concept. And I like it again, like if you look at right before you're interacting with your kiddo and just ask yourself, am am I [00:31:00] parenting right now? Hmm. Or am I in that mom dad role? Are we having fun together, experiencing joy?

And it is like. It's a really good way to just understand like, what are my interactions feeling like to my kid? Oftentimes, and I know I do this, my kids tell me this all the time. I repeat myself. I. I think that's very common. It's so common. So I repeat myself a lot these days. I know it seems like my kid's, on another planet, like he doesn't know my words, don't actually get into his head.

I'm like, you hear me? Can't tell. But how, you know, what I, I'm curious about is. Okay. There's two things that are coming up for me and I can only relate to this in relationship with a five-year-old, so bear with me. Yeah, yeah. But I think that it probably translates into teenagers, but when I am having to be the parent I'm working at getting.

Into [00:32:00] his world to be able to communicate it rather than, Hey, you need to brush your teeth. We're about to leave. Like, brush your teeth, brush your teeth, brush your teeth. But actually getting down to his level, asking him what he thinks we need to do before we leave the house, you know, like helping him become responsible and being in relationship through.

The need to parent. Mm-hmm. Right. The need to be the parent. I can still be in good relationship with him rather than barking orders from up here. Mm-hmm. And I imagine something similar would be true in teens, that you want to inspire them to have their own ownership over those things. Can you say more about that?

Yeah, I think it is important for teens to have more ownership over their things and their, what they need to do. A hundred percent. I think part of it also when

with a teenager or even a five-year-old is sharing with them, I don't wanna have these types of interactions with you. I wanna [00:33:00] have a really good relationship with you, and I feel like when I have to do.

That parent role a lot. It really impedes on that connection that I wanna have with you. So what can we do together so I don't have to repeat myself or we don't have to have these types of exchanges and whatever that is. Maybe it's you're gonna clean your room on Tuesdays and Sundays, so I don't have to say anything.

I don't have to repeat myself and put it on a calendar or, you know, have your, phone or your alarm remind you that, and you be in charge of that. Mm-hmm. Mm-hmm. And that also entails though, the parent not walking into the room, except on Tuesdays and Sundays and going, why haven't you cleaned your room?

Why haven't you cleaned your room yet? The agreement is Tuesdays and Sundays. That kind of thing where they are taking some responsibility, so it's not on [00:34:00] us. Yeah, right. And I'm not trying to oversimplify it. I don't know if that's, uh, I know. But sometimes using a simple example is a great way to, to create a template for something that we can implement.

You know, a complex scenes, I mean, I do something similar with like bedtime. I was so tired of saying. Okay. You gotta brush your teeth, put your jammies on, we're gonna pick out your books. He now has an alarm, a song that goes off. Yes. And it plays for five minutes. And he knows in these five minutes,

I have to do these things. And then I get to play for a half hour in my room . And he looks forward to that. And so his alarm goes off and he goes, ah. My song is on, I gotta go. Yeah. He gets excited now to do those things and I don't have to nag, which I so appreciate. There you go.

Yeah. So you're doing it. Yeah. That's great. It's not always perfect, but I'm trying . Yeah, yeah, yeah, yeah.

[00:35:00] [00:36:00] there's something called infinite Campus. And, uh, it's been around for many years 'cause my 26-year-old had Infinite Campus and basically it's a place that all their grades are [00:37:00] and their, if they have a missing assignment, all of those things the parent will be notified.

And so it's actually the worst thing that we've done, I think, because what happens is, is now. School is almost now on the parent. They're responsible now instead of the child. Hmm. And so this is like another example of, Hmm. Parents are checking it every day. Uhhuh talk to their kids about it. And again, what we need to do is schedule a time.

They're in charge of it, not the parent. Wow. Yeah. It seems like something that was intentionally done to actually try to do the right thing. Oh, help have more transparency so the parents can step in and support. But from what you're saying, it sounds like it's taken the responsibility right out of our team's hands, right.

The intention. That [00:38:00] was good. Yes. Yeah. Wow. Yeah, so that's a very common one. It's a big topic in my office of my parent is constantly nagging me and then I have to go and explain, well, there's a delay. I did turn that in, , and then I. Oh, are you lying? Are you, it gets very messy very quickly, and so kids need to run the infinite campus.

They need to be responsible for their grades, and then they can report to their parent a couple days a week. Sure. It really, the system works out so much better that way. I bet it does. Yeah. I mean, isn't the whole teenage years like setting . This human up for being independent and a leader in their own lives.

Right. Taking ownership, I mean, it's practice, right? And you know they are gonna make mistakes. They are gonna fail. And we as parents have to allow them to do that, which [00:39:00] is also really hard. But that's how we all learn is trial and error. And right now, I don't think we're giving our kids enough opportunity for trial and error.

And part of that is because the stakes are so high to get into college. You know, kids are stressing over, I got a B on that test and now I'm not gonna get into the college I want. And some of that actually might be true. , To get into college it right now is really hard, depending on what level of college you want.

But it's more competitive now than it was say, 20 years ago. Oh, yes. Yeah. And it, and it, the stress that it causes these teenagers is, it's sad. It, it's, it shouldn't be this way. Yeah. It's sad. I imagine that plays into the rates of anxiety and depression. We're seeing, it's [00:40:00] just pressure. I think we're saying like the landscape has changed.

It really has. And I think for parents where their kids are entering middle school, I think they believe that it has always been this way, but it hasn't. If I just even

look at. What my oldest was, my 26-year-old was doing in extracurricular activities, sports. She was playing soccer and she was on the top level soccer team.

They probably practiced three times a week for an hour and a half, and then maybe a game on the weekend or what have you. Oh goodness. Now it's four, five times two and a half hours. It's almost double. And so. Something that was meant to be fun. Get exercise, learn how to win, lose, learn to work on a team, work towards a goal.

All of those great things is now turned into something very [00:41:00] different. And why do you think we're forcing them to grow up so fast? We are, you said it well. We are forcing them to grow up really fast. Why? How do you think our culture does is doing that better, better improve? Yeah. You know, the, the bar I talk about in the book that, that bar that we're trying to reach, it's moving, it's constantly moving.

And we, teens feel like they've got one hand on it. Like, oh, I touched the bar, and then it just moved again. Mm. And so there's like this place where it's like. Can I feel that sense of accomplishment and just enjoy that or no, uh, no. Now I'm expected to do this. Wow. Or they see it all on social media and they're comparing themselves to people that aren't maybe even the same age as them.

And of course they're seeing a highlight reel, a 30 second snippet. [00:42:00] Right. And that also contributes to mental health issues. Yes, it does. The social media, the online presence. Yeah. That's been more of what I have , focused on diving into in terms of my understanding of this epidemic. But the, the point you're bringing in that our world has become so much, there's so much more pressure.

It's something that I haven't attended my attention to too much. 'cause it's honestly, it makes me a little sick to my stomach. Yeah. To consider that bar continuing to move, like I just touched it and it's moved again. One of my recent guests on this podcast talked about the hedonic treadmill.

This. Go, go, go, go, go. , If I achieve, then I'll be happy. But the bar is always further in front of us than we currently believe. Yeah. And that's, that's no way to live. That's no way to have a sane, [00:43:00] happy relationship with oneself. Yeah. It really does sadden me. And again, I think.

Families where their kids are maybe entering middle school. Maybe think this is the way it's always been, that we have always expected this much from

teenagers with extracurricular activities and academics, but it's not it, it is not the way it's always been. And so I think when we're looking at the teenagers right now, what's happening with

mental health and teens. It's this pressure, it is online presence, which is a whole nother world that we could, I could spend days talking about it. . And I think also that families are really disconnected at home.

Everyone is on their phone, everyone is busy, and so families aren't coming together as much and creating that sense of belonging that I talk about or that emotional [00:44:00] connection.

I wanna go back to this idea of a parent whose impulse it is to want to support and encourage and parent, and you talk in your book about using the body as a tool to use your physical sensations to cue you as to how to change your external expression.

Mm-hmm. Can you speak a little bit about that? Because I'm super curious how you advise parents to use their bodies as information to slow them down and make different choices about how they interact with their teens. Yeah, it's a great question and I use not only for parents, but I also work with teenagers to use their body.

And you know, I talk about how we're in situations all day long and if we can really tap into what our body is doing, it can tell us a lot. [00:45:00] And I can just use myself for, as an example, and I do that in session with, with clients as well, but say, I get nervous or anxious or what have you, my chest lights up, I can feel it in my chest, and who knows what's gonna happen next, right?

Lots of different things depending on who's standing in front of me. And so if I notice that. That is when I pause, I take a breath and I regulate myself and I, and then I move forward. And so in one of the chapters I talk about the cycle of response and that physical sensation, that emotion that comes up is the first step.

And I go through the whole cycle of response of listen to your body. Now, what are your thoughts telling you? Because then next are your feelings, which are [00:46:00] saturated with your thoughts and where are you going in that cycle? Right. And so I work with, when we're talking about communication between parent and child as well, I use that cycle of response to help them slow things down, to find out what's actually happening for them or do they telling themselves how are they feeling?

And it really, it is just so powerful to watch families be able to communicate better when they can. Get a handle on that cycle of response for themselves, which starts with the body. Yeah. Beautiful. I love it. Yeah. I, I use Gestalt somatics in my own work and have similar conversations with couples.

Mm-hmm. Yeah. How do we slow down enough to pay attention? Slow down. Yeah. Then we have more choice in how we actually respond. Right. And [00:47:00] again, we have to remember parents are modeling. A kid will follow your lead. It may not feel that way all the time, but they will. And so if you stay regulated, it's contagious.

Your child's gonna stay regulated. .

Can you tell us more about where to find your book, how you're getting the word out? You told me a bit about schools adopting your book and building parent book clubs with it. I thought was such a brilliant idea, and as you were speaking about this somatic piece, I was wondering, is it enough for a parent to read this book and then teach their teens about these tools?

Is it better done in community? Is it better done in a therapist's office? What's your advice for a parent who's struggling with their teen, what's the next step? How do they get access to this? Where do they find your book? [00:48:00] So the book, I asked you a lot of questions there, so that's okay. The book is available on, wherever books are sold.

Amazon, Barnes Noble you mentioned book groups and it is something that's taking off, the local school district. Purchased a hundred books and gave them away to parents. It was unbelievable. We had an event at the Boulder Bookstore and parents came and then we gave them books. And then the Parent Engagement Network, which is an amazing organization they had a representative in almost all of the schools that were willing to lead the book group.

And then I showed up like either a, either as a surprise at the end, or just j jumped into one of their groups and answered a lot of questions and talked about the book and and what. I, the response we're getting is amazing and parents are so appreciative of the tools that they're gaining, [00:49:00] things that they can actually implement right away, but also that ability that they are building community and they are so appreciative.

And if you think about it, when our kids are younger, like. Son, you go to the playground, you go to play groups. Like there is that community. But when our

kids hit middle school. That community gets smaller and especially high school. 'cause high schools are usually bigger and we may not even know these other kids' parents.

And so parents are really craving that sense of community to talk about what's happening with teenagers. And it's been really wonderful to be able to pop into these book groups. Hmm. Yeah. What you just said about parents not having the parent community in high school as readily available for them.

That's not something I'd ever considered. [00:50:00] Yes. Build it now. Even if your kid's in high school, there are ways to connect and so grab the book. Yeah. Start a book club. Find other parents who wanna have these conversations with you. Be in dialogue with other families. Encourage them all to buy your book.

This is going to change the experience of parents, families, and ultimately the experience of our teenagers and the next generation stepping into leadership. Yeah, we're gonna create stronger families. That's the goal. Stronger families. This book is a gift to the world, Susan. Thank you, Sarah. Thank you.

Thank you. The world needs this. Thank you for writing it. Thank you. Thank you for taking time to talk about it with me.

Is there any, anything that feels really important that we didn't say [00:51:00] that you want to leave as a lasting tip or advice . What do you want people to take away from this conversation?

Yeah, I just want parents to know that I know parenting is hard. Especially if your experience growing up was difficult, it can make it even harder. I definitely understand that, and I'm sorry for that that you don't have to be a perfect parent. What's most important is building that connection with your child, that you're approachable, that they can reach to you when they're struggling, and that you're there to comfort and reassure them that that's the most important thing.

Yeah. And that feels delicious. It feels really tender to acknowledge that that's the most important thing and also what a relief that I can actually turn my attention toward things that feel good between us instead of the hard stuff. To me, that feels good, at least because it takes a level of [00:52:00] vulnerability that I'm sure is not easy for all parents, but yeah.

Yeah. Thank you, Susan. All right. Thank you Sarah. Thanks so much. How can people find you? What's your website? Where do people find you on social media? SusanCaso.com. Susan.caso is my Instagram and I'm new to Instagram.

I don't know what I'm doing, so, uh, perfect. I don't even wanna be on it, but I'm on it.

Perfect. Well, we'll put all those links in the show notes of this episode as well. All right. Thank you so much. Thank you.

[00:53:00] [00:54:00]