

Redefining Health & Wellness

#71

Featured this episode: Shohreh Davoodi

Shohreh Davoodi: Hello and welcome to episode #71 of the Redefining Health & Wellness podcast. If you're like most people I know right now, you're riding the mental health struggle bus. So today I'm offering you a solo episode with yours truly, where I'll be sharing five solid strategies you can try to help improve your mental health. To access the show notes and a full transcript of this episode, head to shohrehdavoodi.com/71. That's shohrehdavoodi.com/71.

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[Music plays]

Welcome to the Redefining Health & Wellness podcast. I'm your host and resident rainbow glitter bomb, Shohreh Davoodi. I started this project because I saw how black-and-white messaging about health harms everyone, and I wanted to paint a more honest and vibrant picture. This podcast is a space where we can reimagine health together by confronting limiting misconceptions, delving into aspects of well-being that are often

Redefining Health & Wellness

#71

Featured this episode: Shohreh Davoodi

ignored, and prioritizing conversations with marginalized individuals. I encourage you to take what you need and leave behind what you don't. Are you ready for this? Let's fucking go!

What is up, gorgeous listeners? When I was preparing my outline for this episode I realized that I have not done a solo episode since episode 50 where I did the behind the scenes look at the podcast. So it has been quite a while. Hello, how are you? I've missed you.

I absolutely love interviewing people. It's one of the main reasons I got into podcasting into the first place. But I also love doing solo episodes and just showing up as myself for y'all. It's a nice offshoot of my coaching practice where I get to share different tools, and skills, and mindset shifts with y'all that I hope are helpful.

In fact, I am actually going to be doing a three-episode solo series in December that you can look forward to. And I think in 2021 I'm planning to up the number of solo episodes that I do so that y'all get to hear from me at least every five to six episodes. I've been putting together a list of topics that I'm very excited about, so I'm stoked to start recording those soon and I'm just looking forward to spending more one-on-one time with y'all in the new year.

In the meantime, though, let's focus on today's episode. So let me first give some context for this episode's topic, and this will also be context for future listeners who are not listening to this episode in the year 2020. While this episode will be released on Tuesday, November 10th, I am recording it on Friday, November 6th. This is the Friday after the Tuesday that is Election Day 2020.

As of this moment on Friday night, even though the election took place on Tuesday, no one has been declared the winner of the election yet. Things

Redefining Health & Wellness

#71

Featured this episode: Shohreh Davoodi

are very much trending in Joe Biden's direction after things were looking a little bit dicey earlier in the week, but technically we still don't know who is going to be President of the United States for the next four years. So that has been just a delightful anxiety-inducing backdrop to this week.

And why do we not have a winner yet? Well, I'm also recording this in the middle of the coronavirus global pandemic. So many people used mail-in voting, which takes more time to arrive. It has more complications in general. And also, the race has been very, very close, which is absolutely disturbing, paints a horrifying—though not shocking—picture of people in country and their preference for white supremacy over human decency. So yeah, that's a lot going on just this week.

And then when you consider that we've been in this pandemic since March and the year is starting to move towards a close, that is just a lot on everyone's plates. That is so much that we are shouldering. And everyone's fighting their own individual battles as part of all of this too, you know? Depending on the color of your skin is gonna increase your stress levels right now. Depending on your employment situation, your health situation due to the pandemic, that's gonna increase your stress levels right now. We are all fighting battles. They may look different, but I don't know anyone who just feels rosy and wonderful right now.

Given all of that and all of the worry and fear that I've been hearing from my clients and my followers on social media, I thought that now would be a good time to do a mental health episode and try to provide some practical, actionable strategies for improving mental health. Especially when things are really tough. Before we do that, the lawyer in me lives on, and I just want to provide a couple of disclaimers.

Redefining Health & Wellness

#71

Featured this episode: Shohreh Davoodi

The first is that I want to remind everyone that I am not a therapist or a medical professional. So what I'm offering today is based on my own personal experiences, some of the experiences of my clients. It is not medical advice, it's not a replacement for therapy, so please, do not treat it as such.

Second, I also wanna say that mental health is different for everyone and it's affected by a lot of different factors. So, some or all of these strategies may not work for you or may need to be tweaked by you. And some of these strategies may not be accessible to everyone for a variety of different reasons. So just keep that in mind as we are going through them.

Lastly, any time that we're talking about health behaviors, I want to remind people that mental health, like all other areas of health, is not something that's fully within our control. Like all aspects of health, it's affected by things like genetics, childhood experiences, discrimination, socioeconomic status, and a whole lot more. So even though in this episode I'm gonna be talking about strategies to help you potentially improve your mental health, please don't take away that your mental health is 100% your responsibility, or that anything about you needs to be "fixed."

Individual solutions can be super helpful. I use different strategies to improve my mental health all the time, but we also need to have better mental health coverage. Better mental health policy. A more inclusive look at mental health as a whole since the mental health profession, like most professions, was built through a white, male lens. So even though systemic change isn't the focus of this particular episode of the podcast, I still wanna bring that up because people tend to have a lot of shame and self-blame around their mental health struggles, and I don't want you to think that the message of this podcast is that if these strategies or other strategies don't

Redefining Health & Wellness

#71

Featured this episode: Shohreh Davoodi

work for you to improve your mental health, that something is wrong with you. Because that could not be further from the truth.

Phew! Now that we all have the right mindset going into this episode, let's talk mental health, shall we?

So I feel like mental health is one of those terms that gets thrown around a lot, but the meaning of it can be a little vague. And mental health in general can encompass a lot of different stuff. So for purposes of this episode, when I'm talking about mental health, I'm referring to your cognitive, behavioral, and emotional wellbeing. So basically we're talking about your thoughts, your feelings, and your behaviors. Even with me laying down a definition to use for the podcast, that's still pretty vague and still encompasses a lot of things. So just know that mental health is a bit of an amorphous concept.

For our purposes, when we're talking about mental health, I want you to think about your mental health as being on a spectrum from worse to better, essentially. So it's not that you have good mental health or bad mental health. It's not that you are healthy or unhealthy in your mental health. Instead, we want to think of a spectrum that's unique to each person that has a lot of flexibility and a lot of nuance to it. So what is better mental health is going to be subjective, and it's going to be very individual for each person.

I can use myself as an example here. I have an ADHD diagnosis that affects every part of my life. As part of that ADHD diagnosis, I often experience comorbid anxiety and depression. Those things are not going anywhere. They're just better managed at some times and worse managed at some times. So for me, my idea of what better mental health looks like for me is going to be different from somebody who is neurotypical or

Redefining Health & Wellness

#71

Featured this episode: Shohreh Davoodi

doesn't experience anxiety and depression. So it doesn't do me any good to compare the state of my mental health to the state of somebody else's mental health because there's just no way to compare. We also have different life experiences and different trauma histories, so comparison is just not gonna help.

That being said, I think it would be helpful to give some general hallmarks of mental health so you have an idea of what you're looking at here. So those might be how well you're able to cope with life stressors, how well you're able to stabilize your mood, how you perceive yourself and the world around you, how you show up in and manage relationships with other people, and how present you're able to be in your own life.

So what I'm going to do in this episode is share five different strategies that might be able to help you improve your mental health. I like these five strategies. I think that they're great. And I also chose these five strategies out of potentially hundreds of other strategies that I could have chosen to share instead. So, I'm not saying these are like the *ultimate, best, most amazing* strategies for improving mental health. These are just ones that I use personally in my life and with my clients, and that I think could be helpful for you.

And remember, we're talking about mental health on a spectrum here. So when we're talking about improving mental health, that's on a spectrum as well. So my goal here isn't to provide a "fix" or a "cure," all I wanna do is give some options that may help you bump your mental health a notch or two in the direction of better, whatever better means for you. Because I can't define that for ya.

Alright, now we get to the part that is one of my favorite things to do as a coach, which is talkin' strategy.

Redefining Health & Wellness

#71

Featured this episode: Shohreh Davoodi

Strategy number one is giving yourself space to be creative. Now, when I said that, I know that some of you immediately thought something like, ugh, I'm not a creative person, or I'm not very good at art. I hear you and don't worry, because I've got you covered.

First of all, everyone, and I mean everyone, has the ability to be creative. If you think that you don't, it's probably because you're defining creativity too narrowly. This isn't about being Picasso. This isn't about opening an Etsy shop. Creativity is about using your imagination. It's about original ideas. It's about trying to think through things in new and different ways. Opportunities to be creative get you out of the mundane, get you out of your regularly scheduled programming, and that's what makes them so valuable for mental health.

So yeah, creativity, of course includes all the typical things that you think of when you think about creativity. So your music, and your art, and your crafting, and your poetry. But honestly, so many things can be turned into creative endeavors if you come at them with the right mindset. So building shit can be creative. Writing code can be creative. Baking can be creative. Taking the most perfect, nude or lewd that you can fathom can be creative.

Remember, this is about stretching your mind and tapping into parts of it that maybe you don't get to tap into that often, especially if you don't have a job that's particularly creative. Honestly, one of the main reasons that I found being an attorney so oppressive is that the job itself didn't really have opportunities for creative outlets. And the job was so demanding between the number of hours that I worked and the energy that it zapped from me, that I wasn't able to foster creativity in other areas in my life because I just didn't have the time for it. And there are many reasons that

Redefining Health & Wellness

#71

Featured this episode: Shohreh Davoodi

my mental health was shit when I was an attorney, but I've been able to pinpoint that that was one of them.

Now I have much more creative license in my work, which definitely helps, but I've still found that for me, personally, the level of creativity that I like to have means that I actually need additional creative outlets outside of my work, outside of the thing that I'm getting paid to do.

Y'all know that I love TikTok and that that has been a great creative outlet for me over the course of the pandemic. I have also rediscovered my love for baking over the course of the pandemic, though it has been a few months since I've baked something. But Christmas is coming up, so definitely gonna be getting into that a little bit more in the coming weeks. I also like to do general crafty shit around the house, which often involves taking something that's gotten a little worn down that I wanna add some new pizzazz to it. Which if you know me, usually mean, like, bright colors, and glitter, and cutesy shit. I have a couple of projects on the horizon that are just like that.

Creative outlets like these and other ones that I enjoy get me out of my head, they give me something to do outside of work, and for me, usually they involve working with my hands. I spend many, many hours in front of screens, whether that is my computer, or my iPad, or my phone, and it is a welcome relief when I get to do anything that's not in front of a screen. For you, maybe if you work with your hands for a living, doing creative things in front of a screen would actually be something that's more enjoyable for you because you're not in front of a screen that often. So this is coming back to that individuality aspect of this.

For my perfectionists out there, which I know is many of you, the whole thing about being creative is it is an opportunity to take some of that

Redefining Health & Wellness

#71

Featured this episode: Shohreh Davoodi

pressure off and to enjoy yourself and to lower expectations a little bit. If the goal of being creative is to use your imagination and try new things, then fucking up is just part of the process, right? So we don't have to get bogged down in doing things "wrong" because there isn't really a wrong here. I mean, I guess if you're following instructions to create a specific result, that's one thing, but honestly, is that actually a creative endeavor for you? Is that giving you what you need out of creative endeavors? Because it may not be if you're following step-by-step instructions or there are very specific rules for the thing that you need to do.

So just remember that when it comes to reaping the benefits of giving yourself space to be creative, that it really is more about the process than the outcome. You're gonna have those same benefits of being able to relax a little bit more, blow off some steam, get out of your thoughts for a little while, no matter what the final outcome is. And if you don't like the final outcome, honestly, it probably makes for a great story. That's why there is an entire TV show called Nailed It, that is about people fucking up crafting shit. Because it's funny! I have ruined plenty of baking and crafting projects in my life. Sometimes it just doesn't turn out the way that you think it is. But that doesn't mean that the experience was not valuable. And usually I learn something from it, and that's always great too.

So what I would recommend you do is that you assess what opportunities you have to use creative energy in your life right now and see if that is below an area that you think would be most helpful for you. Or, if in general you haven't found yourself drawn to creative outlets, this might be a great time to start exploring some of those and seeing how they help you.

Redefining Health & Wellness

#71

Featured this episode: Shohreh Davoodi

Again, you don't need to do anything that you don't like. If you fucking hate coloring books, then don't use a coloring book. Try to think about what you already enjoy doing and what brings you pleasure, and then you can adapt that into other creative opportunities. Plus, if you're learning something new, that's actually a two-for-one because studies show that learning new skills can actually boost our self-confidence and help us connect to others—win-win!

I have so much to say about creative shit. I could honestly probably do a whole episode about it. Maybe I will eventually if y'all are into that. But, for the time being, we've gotta move on to strategy two.

Okay, so strategy two has been game-changing in my own life, and it is learning to differentiate between your first thought and what comes next. And just to be clear, there are a lot of therapeutic modalities based in working with our thoughts. Those include cognitive behavioral therapy, dialectical behavioral therapy, and I'm sure many others. I will not be diving into those here, even though they can be very helpful for a lot of people because as a reminder, I am not a therapist.

However, while staying within my scope of practice as a coach, I do want to talk about thoughts as part of these mental health strategies because so much of our mental health *is* about our thoughts. I mean, we have so fucking many every day. And a lot of times they're really mean and negative, or they're just outright wrong. And we can really get stuck in spirals of those thoughts in our heads.

So I want to talk about one specific strategy that I've found has really helped with my cognitive flexibility, and that's putting less stock in my first thoughts.

Redefining Health & Wellness

#71

Featured this episode: Shohreh Davoodi

What do I mean by first thoughts? To explain this, I'm actually going to read to you from a Tumblr post that was shared with me, maybe two or three years ago now. And when I first read it, it absolutely stopped me in my tracks and I've thought about it a lot since as well.

So I have no idea what the original post or image was on Tumblr. This is an exchange of comments beneath whatever that post is. So first there's a user named @danosaurs-and-philions, and they wrote, "I'm a bad person who thinks bad thoughts like 'ew what is that girl wearing' and then remember that im supposed to be positive about all things and then think 'no she can wear what she wants, fuck what other people say damn girl u look fabulous' and im just a teeny bit hypocritical tbh."

In response to that, a user named @nicolaecuza wrote, "I was always taught by my mother, That the first thought that goes through your mind is what you have been conditioned to think. What you think next defines who you are." Like, I want to go give their mom a hug because fuck, that shit is deep!

Okay, so here's why this is a crucial mental health strategy. If you are anything like me and frankly, most of my clients and most of the people that I know, you probably get bogged down in your first thoughts a lot. And that's normal, there's no reason you wouldn't get bogged down in your first thoughts unless someone had taught you that there was something beyond them. So what happens is that we get this first thought about something and we think that that is the thought that defines us. And often that means we come to the conclusion that we are a bad person based on that thought.

The example from the Tumblr post is great about judging someone for what they're wearing, but let's take it a little deeper to something even

Redefining Health & Wellness

#71

Featured this episode: Shohreh Davoodi

more insidious. I'm actually gonna take an example from Sonya Renee Taylor's book, *The Body Is Not an Apology*.

Sonya tells a story about being on a flight to Morocco that had an all-male, all-Arab flight crew and feeling convinced that they were terrorists and that they were going to hijack the plane. And Sonya describes how she felt guilty and terrible for having these kinds of thoughts about this flight crew, literally for no other reason than that they were Arab men. But what she realized was that these thoughts weren't her own. They were taught to her. She learned those thoughts and ideas from the U.S. government which went on a massive Islamaphobia campaign after September 11th happened. They scared Americans into thinking that anyone who looked Arab, Middle Eastern, or Muslim was someone to be suspicious of because they might be a terrorist or be connected to a terrorist network.

And I experienced this personally because I am Middle Eastern. My dad had to shave off his beard after September 11th because my family was afraid that he would be attacked or even killed because of the way that he looked.

So for Sonya, realizing where those thoughts came from and how they were socialized into her allowed her to let some of that guilt and shame dissipate, and it also gave her an opportunity to see where she needed to do some more inner work. So instead of acting on that first thought, Sonya was able to pause, think it through and understand what was going on, and then have more information to be able to decide how to act. And that's exactly what you need to put into place for yourself to use this strategy.

So when you have a first thought that is not sitting well with you, you have to pause and remember that we have biases. We have automatic

Redefining Health & Wellness

#71

Featured this episode: Shohreh Davoodi

associations and assumptions. As humans, our brains really like to be able to put things into neat boxes because it allows us to respond faster out in the world. Sometimes that's really helpful. It can even be lifesaving. But other times it can be incredibly harmful.

Also, when I'm talking about first thoughts, I'm not only talking about first thoughts that you have about other people or about situations, I'm also talking about first thoughts that you have about yourself. We receive deep socialization about how to view ourselves, and most of the time it's in a negative way.

So, the key here is when we have one of those first thoughts that bubbles up from somewhere deep within us, we have to stop and examine where that first thought is coming from and whether we actually believe it. You need to ask yourself where you learned that thing, is that thing even true, and does that thing align with your values.

And I also want to acknowledge that while I'm explaining this process in a simple way, actually doing it can be quite difficult. Because what often happens when that first thought comes up is we so quickly get bogged down in guilt and shame that we're never actually able to get to the part where we pause and examine. So understand that this is something you're gonna have to work on in stages. You might need help to work on this such as from a coach, like myself, or a therapist, and that's okay.

Remember, you were conditioned to have these first thoughts. For however long you've been alive, you've been conditioned to have these thoughts. That is a long time. And so changing this and changing your natural reaction overnight is not going to happen. So, some of this is about patience and practice.

Redefining Health & Wellness

#71

Featured this episode: Shohreh Davoodi

At a minimum though, hopefully that was a good introduction to this idea, and maybe that's something that you can keep in mind when you're noticing some of these first thoughts.

Okay, so let's move on to strategy three. Our third strategy for improving mental health is getting more strategic about what you say yes and no to. Because boundaries are everything, bitches!

So something that has been super important for own mental health is being more discerning about what I can do and what I want to do. A lot of us were raised as people pleasers, especially those of us who were assigned female at birth. It's very common to be socialized to be agreeable and non-confrontational, but doing that comes at a cost.

If you put everyone else's needs before your own, it is going to be impossible for you to build the kind of life that you want to have. I'll also say that a lot of the times when people are doing this, it's because they have a deep fear of not being liked, and so they're bending themselves into motherfucking pretzels because they hate the idea that someone out there might not like them.

But here's a reality check for you. You have no control over whether or not other people like you. You can do anything they ask, and they still may fucking hate you. Also, there are billions of people on this planet. Do you really think that you can create a personality that every single person would like? No! Fuck no! That is not gonna happen. So instead, it's better to invest your time and energy into learning to be okay with some people not liking you. And when you do that, then you can get better about setting boundaries, including what you say yes and no to.

Redefining Health & Wellness

#71

Featured this episode: Shohreh Davoodi

And I want to be clear, yes can be a beautiful thing. Like, yes can open doors and bring opportunities. Sometimes it can get us outside of our comfort zones and trying things that we maybe weren't originally interested in, but turn out to be awesome. So there is a time and place for yes, but we tend to overdo it on the yesses and underdo it on the nos.

Now, some of you may find that you're the opposite and that you tend to say no when what you really wanted to do was say yes. Maybe that's because you're being guided by fear or you experience imposter syndrome. Either way, in both scenarios, you are answering requests in a way that is out of alignment with your actual needs and values. So of course, that begs the question, what can you do about it and how can you actually be more strategic in what you say yes and no to?

In a similar vein to strategy two, the key thing here is going to be to pause when somebody asks you to do something or offers you an opportunity. One nice thing is that thanks to the pandemic, right now, most of these requests or opportunities are probably coming through email or virtually, which makes it a little bit easier. But in person you can do this as well.

So if someone is making a request for your time in person—presumably from a distance of six feet and while wearing a mask—what you want to do is put some space between you and the request, unless this request for your time is something that you 100% know that you're into, that you wanna do it, that you have the time to do it. And honestly, that doesn't happen very often.

So to create that space you can say things like, "That sounds like a really interesting opportunity. I'd like to hear more about it. Would you mind shooting me an email with more details?" Or, "Thank you for thinking of me. I just need to check my calendar and see if I have the bandwidth for

Redefining Health & Wellness

#71

Featured this episode: Shohreh Davoodi

this right now.” Or, “Would you mind if I took some time to mull it over?”

These are just examples, there’s so many possibilities of things that you could say. The most important thing is to just say something that puts space between you and that request on your time so that you actually have an opportunity to consider all of the different things you need to before making a decision.

When it comes to virtual requests, just don’t respond to the dang email or message right away. And if the expectation is that you will respond right away, then you can send an email or a message back asking for more time to think about it. You’ve gotta resist that trained knee-jerk reaction of saying yes and responding automatically to everything.

Once you build in that pause, that’s when you can actually take the time to assess things like your calendar and how much is on your plate right now, whether this request or opportunity is something that you would actually be interested in or that would actually move you in the direction that you want to go. What are the pros and cons of this request? Is it something that will actually light you up and give you energy or is it something that’s gonna take energy away from you?

I also want to remind you that there’s often a middle ground between yes and no. Just to give some examples, if there is a request that isn’t time-sensitive, that you would be interested in but you just can’t do right now, you could say something like, “While I don’t have the time for this right now, could we look further out in the calendar and find a future day and time to make this happen?” There have been several times where I’ve invited someone to be a guest on my podcast and they’ve responded saying, “This looks awesome, I would love to be a guest. However, I just don’t have the time for this right now. Would you mind if we scheduled in

Redefining Health & Wellness

#71

Featured this episode: Shohreh Davoodi

two months?” Or, “Would you be okay with reaching back out to me at the beginning of next year?”

If it is a time-sensitive request that you're unable to do, you could say something like, “Unfortunately I don't have the bandwidth for this right now, but let me know if I can connect you with someone else who might be a good fit.” Assuming that you actually know someone who might be a good fit for this and you're interested in helping this person.

Another example of a middle-ground respond might be something like, “I'm not suited for that particular aspect of this project, but I'd love to hear other ways I could help or support your work.”

And I'm not sharing these because it's unacceptable or less acceptable for you to say no. If the answer is a no and it's just that simple, then say no. I mean, ideally don't be an asshole about it, but you can just say no in a kind way.

To wrap up this strategy, I also want to mention that in order to get more strategic about what you say yes and no to, you need to know yourself pretty well. And sometimes the best way to learn more about yourself is to make the wrong choice. So, to say yes when you should have said no, or to say no when you should have said yes. I can tell you that over the last four years as a business owner, I have learned the most about what I do want to do and what I don't want to do and how I want to spend my time by making the wrong choice. A lot! So don't beat yourself up when that happens, it is an amazing learning opportunity, and it's giving you data for the next time.

Moving right along to strategy four then. The fourth strategy for improving your mental health is developing stronger self-parenting skills. Obviously I

Redefining Health & Wellness

#71

Featured this episode: Shohreh Davoodi

could have just put self-care on this list as a strategy for you, but you and I both know that self-care is a complicated topic that encompasses a lot of different things within it. So instead, I am going to focus on a specific subset of self-care, which is self-parenting. This is a frequent topic of conversation with my clients and this is something that can make a really big difference for you on the mental health front.

As adults, there are plenty of reasons why we find ourselves making decisions that don't always make us feel our best. One of the reasons that happens is because as adults, we technically don't have to answer to anyone but ourselves. So we can do things just because we damn well want to, and sometimes we rebel against doing things if there's even a hint of being told what to do.

So think about back when you were a little kid and you wanted to stay up past your bedtime to do something fun. Maybe it was reading, or playing video games, or chatting with your cute crush on AOL Instant Messenger. I don't know. For many of y'all, you probably had a parent or caregiver who would come along and find you, and tell you, "Hey, it's time to go to bed." And you'd bitch and moan about it, but they'd say, "You're gonna be cranky tomorrow. You're gonna have a hard time getting out of bed. I don't want to deal with it, so let's go," and they'd scoot your butt up to bed.

And your parent or caregiver was playing a really important role in your development because as a kid, you didn't have the ability to make those connections, right? You didn't necessarily see how staying up way too late doing something fun was gonna have negative consequences for you the next day. And as you got a little older, maybe you were able to make that connection, but you just didn't care because you wanted to do your own thing and you didn't want to be told what to do. And this is part of the role

Redefining Health & Wellness

#71

Featured this episode: Shohreh Davoodi

of a parent and caregiver, right? In some ways they're there to save you from yourself because they have more wisdom and life experience than you do.

Now, some of you may not have had parents or caregivers who were able to play this role in your life. And that's not a dealbreaker here because now as an adult, you have the opportunity to step into that self-parenting role that you needed as a kid, but never got.

So self-parenting, really, is about having a good sense of what your needs are and how to respond to those needs. And this is another area where there are a lot of layers here. This is not something that you can just snap your fingers and figure it out overnight. People literally hire me to help them with this because if you've been taught your whole life not to trust your own body and its signals and not to prioritize your needs, it is not necessarily easy to then figure out what those are and be responsive to them. But let's talk about what self-parenting can look like in practice.

So, amusingly, self-parenting can be making sure that you're not staying up too late and that you're actually getting sleep. I actually have had a lot of clients who have struggled with putting themselves to bed at a decent time and prioritizing sleep. And there are a lot of reasons for that that I'm not going to get into, but I just wanna say this often doesn't stop in childhood and it continues into adulthood.

Self-parenting might be cutting off your drinking a little earlier than you would like to or not drinking at all, depending on the circumstances. Or it mean prioritizing getting some vegetables because you've eaten takeout every day for the last nine days. Or it could mean setting alarms to stand up and stretch during the work day because you've found yourself sitting for hours on end and it's starting to take a toll on your body.

Redefining Health & Wellness

#71

Featured this episode: Shohreh Davoodi

So self-parenting is really about figuring out what you need and trying to elevate that above what you want when those things don't perfectly correlate. So maybe you *want* to watch another episode of Great British Bake Off because it's one of the only things bringing you joy right now, but you also have to start work at 8:00 in the morning and it's already 2:00 AM. So you want to watch Great British Bake Off, but is watching Great British Bake Off what you *need* in that moment? Probably not. And so that's where self-parenting comes in to make that choice.

In order to actually make decisions based on what you need instead of what you want, you're going to have to learn to soothe that inner child who's throwing a temper tantrum because they don't like being told what to do and they would rather have that instant gratification. So it's not only about meeting adult you's needs, it's also about meeting your inner child's needs. And if you're meeting your inner child's needs, then you'll end up in less situations where that inner child is acting out and pushing you to do things that aren't in your best interest.

There's so much I could dive into with self-parenting, but let me leave you with this. Why don't you try to pick one area in your life that you need to do a little better self-parenting around. What is one area where your inner child is acting out and throwing temper tantrums so that you're doing things that aren't in your best interest? If you can pinpoint one area, then you can strategize some ideas for how to meet the needs of your inner child and adult you.

That brings us to our fifth and final strategy for improving your mental health. Strategy number five is recognizing when you need help and asking for it. I know that some of your brains just got really defensive and right now they're putting up their fists and they're saying, "I don't need any

Redefining Health & Wellness

#71

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help! I'm independent! I can do it all on my own, fuck you!" I get it. My brain gets like that too. Instead of reaching to turn off the episode, just remind your brain that it is from discomfort that we grow.

The reality is that we cannot do this life thing alone. All of us need help from time to time, but most of us hate asking for it. This is especially true when it comes to mental health struggles, in part because there is so much stigma around therapy, around medication, around being "weak" or "crazy" if you're having any issues with your mental health. I talked about mental health stigma a lot with therapist Tiffany Roe on her episode and I will link to that in the show notes in case you haven't had a chance to listen to it. It's a great episode.

But all of this stigma can make us feel like we have to bear the burden of our mental health struggles on our own. Plus, there's this added misconception that things need to be really bad in order for you to get outside help with your mental health or that only really fucked up people do that. So I just want to affirm for you that if your mental health has been trending in a downward direction and you haven't been able to improve it on your own, then it may be time to get outside help in whatever form that takes for you.

Asking for help is not weak at all, and in fact, asking for help takes a ton of courage and bravery, given the culture that we live in. If things aren't getting better on their own or if your mental health is starting to affect your quality of life and your relationships, those are signs that you may need some outside help.

And getting outside help can look like a lot of different things. It can absolutely look like therapy. I am a huge proponent of both individual and couples therapy. It's been transformative in my own life. If you need some

Redefining Health & Wellness

#71

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guidance on how to find a therapist that's the right fit for you, check out the episode that I did with Melody Li of Inclusive Therapists. I will link to it in the show notes.

Depending on your situation, maybe a therapist isn't the right fit. Maybe you would prefer to meet with an acupuncturist ,or maybe you need a registered dietitian because your mental health issues are actually linked to your relationship with food. There are so many different practitioners out there, both in the mental health field and mental health adjacent, which is what I would consider myself as. So, if therapy isn't feeling like the right fit, don't stop there. Check out what other options are out there for your needs.

Getting outside help could mean exploring medications as well.

Medication certainly isn't for everyone, and even for those who do benefit from medication as one of their tools, it may not be something that they need all of the time. But try not to let the stigma around medication deter you from exploring it if other things aren't working for you.

I can tell you right now that I take Methylphenidate, which is Ritalin, for my ADHD, and I also recently started taking Trazodone, which is technically an anxiety medication, but I'm taking it off label for sleep problems related to my ADHD. And both of these medications were prescribed by my psychiatrist who I have been seeing for the entirety of this year. But look, I needed to find a psychiatrist long before this year. I should have been exploring medication many years ago, but I let the stigma around medications stop me from doing so, even though it would have improved my life.

And I want to honor that it can be really difficult to find a psychiatrist. Tt can be really difficult to get diagnoses. It can be very expensive going

Redefining Health & Wellness

#71

Featured this episode: Shohreh Davoodi

through this whole process. It took me over a year to find a psychiatrist who took my insurance, was reliable, and was willing to treat me for my ADHD even though I didn't have an "official diagnosis." So there are many reasons why medication may not be accessible for you. It was barely accessible for me. But it has improved my life significantly, and I'm glad that I kept pushing to get to this point where I could have those medications even though I almost gave up like three or four times. So medication is a form of help that you can ask for, and you don't need to be ashamed about taking it.

You can also access help through things like books, workbooks, podcasts, online courses, that give tools and strategies for you to apply in your life. Using tools like those may be more affordable or accessible to you, or maybe it's just your preference to use those kinds of tools.

Another form of outside help might be sharing with friends and family what you're going through and asking for their assistance. Maybe that's emotional support, maybe it's helping you get through some tasks or other things on your to-do list that you're just struggling to do right now, maybe it's asking them for advice or to share resources that have been helpful for them. Don't discount that the people who truly love you want to support you and want to see you thriving. If they can go to bat for you, they will.

Those are just some of the ways you can get outside help when you need it. The reality is, getting help is not a one-size-fits-all process, and you may have to experiment with a few different things before you find the right option or options for you. Please remember that you don't have to do it alone. You absolutely deserve help when you need it. And there are people, and resources, and other things available to make sure that you get it.

Redefining Health & Wellness

#71

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And that concludes five different strategies for improving your mental health. I hope there were some helpful nuggets in there for you. As always, take what you need, leave behind the rest. I will not be offended. If you're struggling with your mental health right now or things feel worse than usual, I see you, I feel you. I'm experiencing the same thing. You're not broken.

Remember the circumstances that we're all living through right now. These are truly unprecedented times, which I know is a phrase that's getting old, but it's true. None of us have lived through anything like this before. It is putting a lot of stress on us and that is inevitably going to affect our mental health. Please know that I am sending all the love and hope your way that I can muster, and I look forward to chatting again real soon.

And that's our show for today! If this podcast has taught you anything or helped you in any way, I hope you'll consider supporting me in my effort to keep it going. You can join my Patreon community and receive members-only perks by going to shohrehdavoodi.com/Patreon, or you can tip me for my work through the payment links located at the bottom of the show notes for each episode. I would also encourage you to subscribe and submit a rating and review through your podcast provider of choice. I love hearing from listeners, so feel free to screenshot from your podcast player, post on social media, and tag me. Finally, if you're looking for more information on what I'm all about and how to work with me directly, head over to shohrehdavoodi.com. Hope to see you for the next episode.