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[00:00:05] **Cathy:** John, like I, so I want to go back to the feeling, feeling aliveness, and that is about yourself, about hope, all these things that you say that, boys, right now it seems flat, is that I really think in our what can we do in our families is having a culture of aliveness in our home and again, that's going to look different, but it's do we as parents have things we're hopeful about?

[00:00:29] **Cathy:** Do we have fun? Do we laugh? Do we see in every individual in the family the light that shines from them and the gifts they have? And that's, that sounds cheesy. Let me say that better. Do we recognize everybody's skill sets? Do we pay attention? Do we say, man, when you're at dinner, you are the best because you bring up the greatest, topics.

[00:00:46] **Cathy:** Or, it doesn't have to be about Perfect grades and you're the, this on the football team. It's about you as a human because that's the aliveness. Like when we talk about aliveness, sometimes parents go straight for the I'm going to put them in a club or a sport, which is fine. That's a whole nother thing, but this is deeper.

[00:01:02] **Cathy:** This is, what you're describing is they don't have a sense of inner worth. And so like, how do we do that as a culture, like in our families?

[00:01:13] **John:** First of all, what I think you said there wasn't cheesy. Actually I think that's actually exactly the point and I'm smiling because in the past couple of years during and post pandemic, I've done a lot of like parent coaching so literally like working with parents, not always working directly with kids.

[00:01:30] **John:** And and I found that. is a concept that parents dig and love and the idea that like, Oh we can model, a really fun energetic, active, alive life. And and there's One family I work with, I'm going to be a little cryptic here, but I don't think they'd mind me outing them a little bit.

[00:01:51] **John:** And mom and dad in particular they came in not that long ago and they said, he said, he in particular, he said [00:02:00] I forgot. My kids are awesome. Like I love, and he honestly had, I forgot. They weren't just a pain in the ass. But we started playing some games and we would just have some talks.

[00:02:14] **John:** And there's a game that my wife and I. And George, my son, and his fiancée Lauren play where the whole game is think of a person, anybody, it can be a real person, it can be a famous person, it can be somebody

we know, anybody, and so it's my way of getting out of playing board games because Lauren loves them and I don't but and then you just ask a bunch of questions until you figure out who it is and everyone like celebrates like, oh my god, like that that we figured out who it was.

[00:02:42] **John:** Yeah. But, and that generates all this discussion. So this family started playing that game and they would just laugh together. And the dad realized like, Oh, these kids have depth that I didn't know they had. And they know about famous people. I didn't know they knew about so he's learning about his kids who he has in this box, of I just have to like, Contain them and get them to this certain point and then I'm done, but this is an exercise this is and then I can check the box right like like retirement like I can call it instead of oh, this is joy this is a joyful process these people are amazing and they live with me like my roommates and we get to hang out and that changes everything because that changes a kid's whole demeanor because mom and dad not by virtue of some guy telling them light up for your kids but by virtue of like I'm hanging out with them I'm getting to know them in a really organic way and it's easy to light up for them because I'm realizing the truth of that they're amazing that they're thoughtful and smart and creative and incredible.

[00:03:50] **John:** And that is, that, that's one of my favorite things is I forgot my kids didn't suck. That's a great moment.

[00:03:57] **Todd:** In the second part of your book, The Boy Problem [00:04:00] Described you talk about a young man named Ryan and Ryan, I think he's a freshman at university. And he takes a gender studies course.

[00:04:08] **Todd:** And I'm just going to read this paragraph and then I want you to riff off of

[00:04:11] **Cathy:** it. Todd, before you do that, can I say something just because I know we're going to switch gears to something different? Sure. Is I just want to go off what John said and that basically, because I'm thinking of our friend Annie Burnside who wrote, Soul to Soul Parenting.

[00:04:23] **Cathy:** And again, people use this in many different ways, but I always like to give Annie credit. It's like when you get out of the role of parent and you're like, these kids I'm having relationships. Right now we're talking about teen boys and I talk about teen girls all the time. Like they're getting older.

[00:04:37] **Cathy:** You get to have a more pure relationship with them. Yes, you're still the parent. Everyone always jumps on me about that, but you get to have fun. And on that note, like the thing that Todd and I. Always do, or I do, I make sure we do, is this is awards season right now, John? I don't know if you know that.

[00:04:52] **Cathy:** Oh,

[00:04:52] **John:** I'm aware that you're aware, too. I'm very aware,

[00:04:55] **Cathy:** This is Critics Choice and Golden Globes and the Oscar nominations are coming out on Wednesday and, Emmys were in January. And that to me is important. That's not important to everybody. But I bring my kids in. We have a competition around it.

[00:05:08] **Cathy:** And just like you said, my younger daughter who's still home. She, when she fills it out, she's I'm only doing it from my heart. She's I know these people won't win, but I'm doing this from my heart. You get, not that I didn't already know that about her, but they bring their personality to your, to games, to things that you do.

[00:05:29] **Cathy:** For Lauren, it's board games. For you, it's let's have a conversation. For me, it's I bring in competition because then Todd will do it because he needs to compete with everything. Like we create it so everybody likes it. So I just wanted to riff off of that because I think we forget that we can be, and I, and this used to be so off limits when John and I first became therapists, but you can be friends with your kids.

[00:05:49] **Cathy:** You guys, you are still their parent, but you can be friendly with your children. Do you remember when everyone would be like Do not be your kid's friend.

[00:05:58] **John:** Oh, it still happens, doesn't it, Kathy? [00:06:00] So I still get that a lot. I'm the parent, I drive the hard line. And my point is a combination of what we're saying, because I totally agree with you.

[00:06:08] **John:** And the good news of parenting is something I think we forget. It's if we invest in that way, if we enjoy it and connect in that way, then we are parenting works, like that's the emotional bank account thing where it's okay you're investing and you're suddenly in the black because you're enjoying your time together instead of.

[00:06:29] **John:** Policing your time together. And so you can read all these books or come to these conferences and something's going to work actually, because you've made that investment. It's like a win. It's not. One dimensional, but it's not the reason that they get to do it. It's just a good

[00:06:44] **Cathy:** byproduct.

[00:06:45] **Cathy:** Exactly. Beautiful. Thank you. Good.

[00:06:47] **Todd:** Okay, Todd. Go ahead before we get into the gaps, which is part three. I just want to read you something that impacted me in part two. And it's about, I think one of your clients, John was a freshman at a university and he took a gender studies course, wanting to understand a different person's perspective.

[00:07:03] **Todd:** And so this is what you wrote. Ryan also told me that. Thank you. that in real time he sensed an undercurrent of sentiment against men in the class. The girls and women in the class were called on more most frequently for discussion and questions. He noted a lot of talk about toxic masculinity and the societal problems caused by men seeking to gain power, money, sex, or fame.

[00:07:25] **Todd:** Ryan actually had some points he wished to make and some questions to ask. He wanted to speak up frequently during the class, but every time he thought about raising his hand, he stopped himself. The risks of being called out, of being accused of not getting it or of being canceled in real time felt too great for him.

[00:07:41] **Todd:** Eventually Ryan, who had again, chosen to take his course in order to better understand, dropped the class altogether. To him, the risks outweighed any potential rewards, and he's just too anxious in there to continue. And that's just so heart wrenching to me because I felt like we were about to create an ally, right?

[00:07:59] **Todd:** And then he got [00:08:00] too scared. And I can look at that through both lenses. One is, okay, the girls are getting called on more frequently welcome to What it's like to be a woman, right? Oh yes, absolutely. Our female counterparts swim in that world. So now Ryan is also is swimming. And I love the fact that Ryan jumped in.

[00:08:19] **Todd:** And I'm just so sad that he jumped out because it's foreign to him. We're not used to not getting our needs met first. So I just wonder if you have any thoughts about that.

[00:08:27] **John:** Yeah. First of all that, that is he gave me permission to use his name and his story. That is, that story is basically comes from Ryan verbatim.

[00:08:36] **John:** And and it's like he, he wanted me to include that because he said I want there to be some cautionary tale to people out there that If we're not because he came into that course an ally, very much an ally, wanting to learn more, wanting to learn be part of the conversation, learn what he could do to be helpful.

[00:08:55] **John:** And that anxiety really did what was profound enough that he stepped away from the class. And He wanted me to send out a clarion call culturally that if we're going to have the conversation and move the ball forward for any group, we all have to have, everyone needs a mic. You know what I mean?

[00:09:17] **John:** Like everyone has to have a microphone. There has, we can't silence anyone and expect the ships to rise. You know what I mean? Because he said if he weren't a different, if he were a different guy, he would come out of that situation. And he would, and then suddenly he would be on this other team and there would be this division, right?

[00:09:38] **John:** And he thinks a lot of times there is that actually is happening in real time. And his point and encouraging me to include that was let this be a cautionary tale that there is some anxiety about saying the wrong thing. And if we're all. walking on needles and pins and being cautious about what we say.

[00:10:00]

[00:10:00] **John:** Some of us aren't going to say anything. And that negativity could be turned inward, as it often is, could be turned outward and make a headline one day, as it often does. So it's just the big point is just. All voices need to be heard. All voices need to be heard on, on, on all

[00:10:20] **Todd:** the issues.

[00:10:21] **Todd:** We have this binary thinking, like it's either, are we lifting up the girls or the boys? And I just, I shared this quote on the podcast last week, a friend of mine said it, I don't know where he heard it, but when one gender wins, both genders lose. And I think that could be really hard for certain, the idea that we're going to focus on boys.

[00:10:41] **Todd:** If you're a woman or if you're a girl, you're like, we've been focusing on boys. Since, I don't know, 4000 BC or whenever we started doing

that. In our lifetimes. And in our lifetimes. And now all of a sudden we're giving more attention to the boys?

[00:10:54] **Cathy:** It's interesting because that's a great, that's such an interesting story.

[00:10:57] **Cathy:** Like we could do a class on that story because like I'm picturing myself, I teach college kids and I have, because I teach social work, I have very few guys in my class. It's usually three guys and then 20 girls. And When I'm talking anything about gender specific and sometimes I have to say things like here's the statistic around, boys, tend to only show anger girls and but then I'll always stop and say, okay, guys, what do you think about that?

[00:11:21] **Cathy:** So they can say they usually agree. Like the research is not that far off from most people's experience. But to your point, as long as they can share it and not be told who they are, like, I think these are very nuanced things of it's not so much because I'm picturing the girls in this gender studies class of Ryan's and they're there to talk about their experience.

[00:11:44] **Cathy:** And if a guy is ooh, call on me, they're going to call him a mansplainer. They're going to or internally there's let us talk about, but it's gender studies. He is. a gender as well. So this is so it's a [00:12:00] I'm just going to throw the word compassion on it. We just have to be able to, first of all, as teachers, make sure we're getting both perspectives.

[00:12:07] **Cathy:** Like I wish that teacher could, I'm not going to blame the teacher, but it'd be nice to make sure we're going to hear from the guys. We're going to hear from the girls. Like we got to differentiate a little bit if we're talking about gender, if that's our topic, but we also have to be kind to each other about.

[00:12:22] **Cathy:** I don't even know how to say this because I tend to, Todd lives in a home with all these girls and women, and sometimes we say harsh things, and I have to back up and be like, Todd, this isn't about you. But we still need to share our experience, and sometimes it comes out with some rage.

[00:12:40] **Cathy:** Yeah.

[00:12:40] **John:** It does. It does. And so Ryan and I we talked about this because I was starting to write the book at this time. And I think I, I'm pretty sure I kept the story in, but I'm not sure. I was on a plane writing. Part of the book. And there was a woman next to me and I was thinking, was it in there?

[00:13:01] **John:** And she's looking over my shoulder and I'm thinking, and I am mortified. I'm thinking like, Oh, I'm putting. Here I am, I'm this white guy, middle aged white guy, and I'm writing about boys. And she's thinking, she, and I've got experience, life experience, right? I've got a leg to stand on.

[00:13:18] **John:** And I'm like, she's thinking what are you doing, man? This is not, you have the wrong place in the wrong time. And we are on a different topic now. And so I, we worked through the anxiety and he did agree, hey, man, my assumptions might've been wrong. I might, if I had spoken up, maybe that would have been the greatest thing that would have happened, even if the shit hit the fan, that might've been a good thing, so I think part of it is like loosening up everybody's thinking about this a little bit so that we can talk about gender and gender equality and what that means and what equality really means, and, and not make assumptions. I assumed something about this woman next to me.

[00:13:59] **John:** Ryan assumed [00:14:00] something about that whole classroom. And, his anxiety probably came from an honest place. And it's But he is conflicted about tapping out of that, and I think that's a good conflict to have. And it probably would have been a great conflict to bring up in class.

[00:14:14] **John:** And that's I love the idea, Kathy, that you actually turn to the guys and you say what do you think, I think the more we're what do you think, and we hear out what people have to say. The better off we're going to be, and it's a weird time to say this and mean it, but the more likely we are to find common ground.

[00:14:34] **John:** And I'm gut checking that as I say it, because I'm thinking like, politically, in the last seven or eight years how difficult a time have I personally had finding common ground with people I Thought I loved and respected and understood. And then once it came down to that 2016 election, I was like, I don't know if I can talk to you anymore, so I get where a division can feel like a permanent thing. We're done talking. Some part of me deep down believes that's not the right way. That's not our way forward. Yeah. We're

[00:15:08] **Todd:** wired for survival and we're also wired for connection and it's a contradiction. It's a paradox, but they're both true.

[00:15:14] **Cathy:** And Johnny, I know you saw this cause you said something about it on Instagram. I reposted a picture today cause seven years ago today was the women's March and I brought My girls and my friend Manisha brought her girls and we were all there. And, Amy Guth, she took a picture of us outside of the WGN studio.

[00:15:30] **Cathy:** She saw us walking by with our signs. It was so great.

[00:15:32] **John:** Amazing moment, by the way, look at Gabby's Instagram. That's so

[00:15:35] **Cathy:** cool. It's so cool. And I'm, we, and it was such a moment, but what's interesting about that seven years ago, you just said this is that when I was going to that. Many people were like, I get it.

[00:15:44] **Cathy:** And many people are like, now, why are you doing this? What are you angry about? Nothing has happened yet. What are you upset about? And there was a lot of foreseeing. What has occurred I knew what was [00:16:00] happening and it opened up all these conversations about race. It opened up all these conversations about gender, because I was going to say one of the things that I learned from talking more about race is the willingness to have a messy conversation, the willingness to make a mistake and repair for it and to learn and Be curious.

[00:16:15] **Cathy:** Like we have to be willing to, and this is what Ryan's learning and he's, it's not, his story is so great because he learned from that experience. Like, how do I want to do this different next time? And sometimes it's the willingness to say something and you make them, and I'm going to snare quotes a mistake where you piss people off, but you repair it and you say, now I get it.

[00:16:34] **Cathy:** Now. I totally didn't realize how. Short sighted that was, or now I get it. So it's this, I will say it again because I'm always boosting women in this way, but we knew what was coming. We knew what, and when I say coming, so many things, but we lost basic essential human rights in this last couple of years.

[00:16:53] **Cathy:** We knew that, and people told me, Kathy, you're crazy. That's not going to happen. That's not going to happen. And it's gone. Roe v. Wade is overturned. So these are, these are the things that we struggle with as women. I'm not, okay, sorry. This is about boys. It's so sidetracked, but we're all in it together.

[00:17:10] **John:** Yeah. Yeah. And in fairness, here I am talking over a woman. I'm so

[00:17:14] **Cathy:** sorry. You're Duffy.



[00:17:16] **John:** You don't do that. But the truth is this isn't just about boys, right? The truth is it's about everybody, like this is also about. Girls, and when I talk about like these boys, like we, we need them to understand what women are going through in a really honest and sincere and deep way because it's really hard to understand.

[00:17:37] **John:** Like when you talk about Roe v. Wade being overturned I'm thinking literally that I have to be reminded I, like I had this sinking gut feeling, but I don't think about that all the time. I think women do, and I and so I think we have to be reminded sometimes about how other people feel and, these boys and young men are going to be fathers and [00:18:00] partners and husbands.

[00:18:00] **John:** And, so this is about everybody. Winning, like every, we all, like Todd was saying this is about men and women and boys and girls and everybody in between, like this is everyone. And

[00:18:13] **Todd:** Who is the, one of the best beneficiaries of men growing up to be conscious, present grounded men is women is everybody.

[00:18:23] **Todd:** It's not, we're not, if we're conscious and our version of healthy masculinity. continues to grow and evolve. It's, of course it's going to help the guys, but it'll help any person who happens to be in partnership with a man, which would include romantic, which would include parenting. That's just the deal.

[00:18:40] **Todd:** So anyways, all so part three, the gaps you have, these are the gaps, emotional intelligence, loneliness, hopelessness, opting out, joylessness, and post pandemic. Is it a coincidence that you put emotional intelligence gap first or not?

[00:18:55] **John:** It is not a coincidence at all. That's the big one that's the if we can bridge that gap, yeah, most of the rest of the gaps get bridged pretty readily.

[00:19:03] **John:** So no not a coincidence. That's the big one. It's funny because sometimes I listening to us talking, this feels like a conversation that could have been had 30 years ago. It almost feels outdated. And I think part of my point in writing this book is In this post pandemic world this is not outdated, and we have backslid a little bit where that gap, that emotional intelligence gap, seems more prominent than ever to me, and It's super important because if you've spent 30 seconds studying emotional intelligence, and I think most of us have some feel for that now without some of that in your life the idea that you're going to be happy and you're going to thrive and you're going to be successful

in whatever that looks like to you is so unlikely, you might make a bunch of money, you might yeah.

[00:19:52] **John:** You get married and stay married for a long time, but you won't, it won't be satisfying and fulfilling and deep and rich and all the things that [00:20:00] we all know we want for our people. And no, it's the most important one, Todd, and it is, it's everything. If it was the only part of the book somebody read, I'd be

[00:20:09] **Todd:** happy.

[00:20:09] **Todd:** And I want to jump to the joylessness gap and you in that section, you talk about the Taylor Swift effect. And I'm wondering if you can share that, your experience, what that means. Yeah.

[00:20:19] **John:** Yeah. I've got an office in the city in Chicago and and Taylor Swift had a a concert this one Thursday night and I was heading into work and and I saw countless and I, my, my office is.

[00:20:33] **John:** Two miles from Soldier Field, where Taylor Swift's concert was. And I saw so many groups of moms and daughters decked out, like in and singing in the streets, in the city, and dancing, and just filled with joy together. It was It felt surreal. It felt like a movie that was absurd and yet it was really happening and it was visceral for me.

[00:21:01] **John:** I was, Kathy is holding up her phone right now and showing me a picture of her with her daughters doing this very thing of course, the best case in point ever. And. And I love that so much. And I remember like I was overjoyed experiencing that. Like that, that, that made my day and I did not see Taylor Swift on it, but I so wanted to be there.

[00:21:30] **John:** I and I saw that you guys were there and I'm like, damn, next time, man, next time I am, the next era is mine.

[00:21:37] **Todd:** She's coming to Indianapolis when, sweetie? Next year, two and a half hours away. Yeah, let's go. Let's

[00:21:43] **Cathy:** do it John. Not that tickets are available, they're also, but anyway, keep

[00:21:46] **Todd:** going.

[00:21:47] **Todd:** So one really quick thing regarding that, and then I want to get into school refusal. The difference between, 'cause if I'm a guy, I'm always being like, yeah, what about when I go to the Bears game and I'm hugging and I'm with my buddies? I [00:22:00] experienced the Taylor Swift thing. I went to the show in Denver with my wife and my three daughters.

[00:22:04] **Todd:** My daughters are crying because the lyrics mean so much, and I don't pretend to understand all of her songwriting ability, even though I think it's as good as anybody has ever done it, I will say that but there's real vulnerability there, whereas when I am hugging my buddy because the Bears just scored a touchdown what means most to me is vulnerability, And there's not much vulnerability at a sporting event.

[00:22:26] **Todd:** But at that Taylor Swift concert, it's, people are dropping into their hearts. When at a Bears game, the guys still have their armor up. So anyways, that's my experience.

[00:22:38] **John:** Yeah, and you're leading right to the point. That's my experience as well, that there's we can find shades of the Taylor Swift experience, right?

[00:22:46] **John:** As men, like we can and it can happen at a sporting event. I'm a big, I'm a big concert goer. And. And I know that we're collectively, when I'm at a Springsteen show, that we're all experiencing something, right? But it doesn't have that same, the depth, right? The depth of emotion and the joy, and the pain, right?

[00:23:09] **John:** That those lyrics speak to you, and collectively, everybody's feeling it. And moms are with their daughters, and I know that they're like, I wish an Ed Sheeran or somebody would like, would become that, that figure for dads and sons but we don't have that. And we need to embrace something like that.

[00:23:30] **John:** And maybe it's crossed my mind since writing that, that. It wouldn't be the worst thing for dads and sons to go see Taylor Swift. You know what I mean? That would be the thing. My, my son and I have talked about would we ever go to that? And I'm like, and then we're both like, hell yeah, we go and see Taylor Swift together.

[00:23:49] **Todd:** And when I was in Denver, when I was in Denver and I almost felt guilty because she acknowledged that the men that were in the crowd are [00:24:00] Not the men that need to listen to this message. It's the

ones who choose not to show up. And I almost felt this is not a place for me to feel elevated yet.

[00:24:08] **Todd:** Taylor Swift, because she's, a wonderful human being felt the need to acknowledge. The guys and the dads that were in the crowd.

[00:24:15] **Cathy:** So let me say this and I'm on Todd's case about this all the time, John. So he's going to be like, I know Kathy, I know, but women. Okay. I'll just speak for myself, my generation.

[00:24:25] **Cathy:** And I think this is true for my daughter, Sue. We grow up looking through men's eyes. Like we know how to look through men's eyes. I knew how to be Luke Skywalker. I knew how to be Batman. I knew how to be all of these people because I, all the books, all the history. Because that was how I had to learn what it was like to be a human.

[00:24:42] **Cathy:** I had to have that understanding. And what I struggle with is that I don't think men have an understanding of you can look through a woman's eyes and find yourself in there. And even if you don't find every aspect of yourself, you learn more about a human being and all because we are all these things.

[00:25:00] **Cathy:** And so that's I was just listening to, Dax's podcast and they have a bunch of different podcasts now on, Dax And Monica do. Monica has a podcast with Liz Plank. You may know her. She writes about men all the time. They have a podcast. It's just the two of them talking about their experience.

[00:25:15] **Cathy:** And Monica said last week that there's a guy who listens to every podcast on their channel. And he said, but the only one I don't listen to is you and Liz. And she's why? And he's because it's about girls. And this is a grown man. And I think what women want to say is we have learned to look through men's eyes, to look through children's eyes, to look through lots of, and when I say I'm looking through eyes, I'm not having the experience of men or having the experience of a different race, but we're willing to like, go there emotionally and, and at least try and understand and be curious.

[00:25:46] **Cathy:** And I think that's something boys and men struggle with. Would you

[00:25:49] **John:** agree? I would. That's such a, that's such a big, profound notion, Kathy, that you've nailed something really important there. Yeah, I think,

I, and Todd, I think you to some extent as [00:26:00] well we've you are surrounded by girls and women, right?

[00:26:03] **John:** And and I have the good fortune on my Wednesdays and some other days of the week to really engage with girls and young women about their experiences of the world. And and it's it's, it is so wildly different and so big and vibrant and and exciting to get to learn that, and that other point of view.

[00:26:25] **John:** And it makes me sincerely wish for the genders, for the boys and for everybody that we all had a lot more in common, or we allowed Some of the same characteristics to bubble up to the top. Like when I saw the girls and moms dancing with joy in the streets, like we guys, me, like dressing up for something.

[00:26:46] **John:** I'm like, I'm not much of a costume guy. And I don't know, like I'm not that great of a dancer, so I don't know. And yet the idea of doing it would probably be. Freaking amazing, and and I think for every guy I know to allow yourself to hug the people you love unabashedly for a while, and tell them you love them and give them a kiss on the cheek or the forehead and to cry with people, to cry openly.

[00:27:12] **John:** A lot, like to some of these stereotypically feminine qualities, if we all exhibited some of that, I just think our lives would be so much deeper and so much richer. And in the end, I don't know if I say that directly in the book, but that's part of the experience I want for our boys and our young men and me, like ourselves, part of this is a message to me.

[00:27:33]