



Nat Damon: Welcome back to another edition of Reach, Teach, Talk. Today's subject is the subject of health, mental health, physical health, emotional health. A lot of what we talk about on this podcast is thanks to close relationships, the connection between relationships and health and wellness. And how you can't go it alone. You need your tribe, you need your people, you need your teachers to believe in you, you to feel that sense of belief from your teachers in the classroom, and in the classroom of life. Wherever you work, one's mental health, one's emotional health are intertwined, and also with the physical health. And we've talked a lot about how learning is cognitive and emotional and very social. And we've talked in previous episodes as well about the loneliness epidemic and how we're trying to fight this medically defined term, loneliness now. And loneliness being this is the effect of disconnect on one's emotions and one's stress levels and one's mental health, anxiety, depression, all of that.

Nat Damon: It's interesting because yesterday I ran a retreat for teachers, a day long retreat where the focus was on rebooting. It was a middle of the year. All right. Right now we're recording late January. It's the mid-year of the school year, the midpoint, and this is a time where there's just a dip, right? The beginning of school, everything's great, but by now you've taken the first set of grades, your first holiday vacation, and you come back to school, it's January, it's dark, and the bloom is off the rose, right? You're facing your students and you're like, "Oh, God, okay, I love you guys, but I know you guys now and we've got some work to do." At the same time, as a teacher, your own wellness, your own energy levels, may be draining a bit. You may be feeling a sense of fatigue, feeling a sense of mundanity.

Nat Damon: And so you're looking for maybe some hope, some light, and you're anticipating the second half of the year at the end. All of this to do with this retreat that I had yesterday that was focused on rebooting. And what does it mean to reboot? What does it mean to spark up again, to relight the fires, to feel integrated once again with yourself? A lot of what we talked about yesterday was about authenticity, about how the way you

present yourself to your class, or to your team, to your organization, to your family, to your friends, all of these self presentations have only been enhanced in this day and age through social media, through other lenses of technology. Podcasts notwithstanding. Or included, actually. How you present yourself.

Nat Damon: And we have a generation growing up today, and this was brought up also in the retreat by these teachers, many of them were high school and middle school teachers, we have a generation growing up today where external validation is compounded. I remember being at school, I remember thinking, "Okay, I hope I look good to impress this person in high school or whatever." But my feedback would really come from my mirror. Maybe my friends joshing around with me, saying, "Nice pants. Nice jeans. Those acid wash really fit. It's 1987. Time to catch up with the times. It's not Whitesnake all the time." And knowing that that feedback was coming from people who I knew, or at least people who saw me and communicated that with me. Where today it's that feedback is Instagram culture, it's Tik Tok, it's Snapchat. It's how you appear, how you look, how funny you are, how you present yourself, has been exponentially built upon itself.

Nat Damon: And this part of what we're going to talk about today, my guests and I, is growing up today as an adolescent and how that external validation contributes to mental health, emotional health, wellness, and also contributes to physical health for girls, yeah, but also for boys. And we're going to talk about genders and we're going to talk about identification and identity as we also talk about one's sense of health, one sense of connection. How does my external presentation connect to how I truly am on the inside? One last thing I'll say that relates to yesterday's retreat with teachers, but also I think we can all benefit from whether we're teachers or not, is there is a master educator named Parker Palmer who wrote a book called *The Courage to Teach*, which came out about 28 years ago. He has since passed away, but before he passed away he created this institute, this institute for contemplation, and he also really introduced this idea of the internal versus the external self.

Nat Damon: And how important it is for teachers, but I would apply this to any leader or any anybody in the workforce as well, how important it is for them to live an undivided life. All right? You've got your inside, your true, kind of your, ya-yas, as we would call them. And you've got your sources of pride, the elements of yourself that you might not reveal so much but you know exist in you. It's your soulful self. And then you've got your external, the self you present, the onstage self versus the backstage self. And what Parker Palmer would always communicate is it's really important to, as best as you can, to live both selves, to live both sales undivided. And he even has this exercise, it's based on what's called the Mobius strip, which is when you take a strip of paper and you can put it together in a circle and make a circle with it and you have your external self, almost like a wall, protecting your internal self like this.

Nat Damon: But if you take your strip of paper and you twist it and then you connect it together, it's impossible to see where the internal on, offstage, behind stage self separates from the external onstage self. So all this to kind of wind up the pitch here and to introduce our guests for today on this episode of Reach, Teach, Talk to really discuss and to take a deep dive conversation into the lives of adolescents today, of boys and girls, and how this magnification of external presentation contributes to or de-contributes to one's sense of mental health, one's sense of wellness, one's sense of physical and emotional health.

Nat Damon: And I'm thrilled to have today our guest Oona Hanson, who is an educator and parent coach based here in Los Angeles, who I knew, true confession or true revelation here, I knew about 20 years ago. We taught at the same school. Oona was a high school teacher at the upper school, English teacher. And I was at the middle school teaching at the school. And then since then Oona has moved from teaching to launching her own tutoring company, and she's then gone from working with the classroom to working one on one with high school with teenagers. And then also now has launched her career, relaunched her career, as a parent coach. Oonahanson.com. O-O-N-A, hanson H-A-N-S-O-N .com is her website, and I absolutely encourage you to check it out, whether you're an educator or a parent, both. She, Oona, provides incredible wisdom, and will share some of this wisdom, we'll be fortunate to have on this episode today about adolescent growth and what it means to be truly healthy. So, Oona thank you for being here today.

Oona Hanson: Thank you so much. It's exciting to be here.

Nat Damon: It's wonderful to have you here. And I guess my first question is just how do you define health?

Oona Hanson: That's a really good question. I think the traditional definition of a sort of the absence of disease, but also the presence of wellbeing. But I think our culture's ideas about health can be a little confusing and counterproductive. There's sort of this wellness culture thing happening, especially in America, where the picture of wellness is, in general, kind of white, affluent, thin, a cisgender, able-bodied. And it's a very narrow definition, or picture, of health. And for all of us, health comes and goes. It's sort of a relative or contextual or sort of temporary state of being that throughout the lifespan we experience different kinds of health, or different levels of health. But there's this sort of mythic ideal that if you sort of ... if you follow the right celery juice detox and you do the right amount of cardio and you get the right macros and you do the right ... all the right things, so called, that you're sort of guaranteed an outcome.

Oona Hanson: And I think that can actually be really counterproductive for kids and parents and educators, because it's just a myth. And it sells a lot of products. There's a reason why the wellness industry is a multi-billion dollar industry. And part of it is that we all do want to seek health. We all want to feel better. And this industry tells us that if you don't feel good all

the time you're kind of doing it wrong, or you're doing something wrong. And we know, psychology has known for decades, that human beings aren't supposed to feel good all the time. And Lisa Damour, PhD, talks a lot about this in her new book *Under Pressure*, about how we've been kind of sold this idea that we should just feel awesome and always be pursuing some picture of health at all times.

Oona Hanson: And it actually can be detrimental to your health to be kind of seeking and striving for something that may be totally unattainable, and better to sort of sit with the sort of full range of human experience and know that our connection to other people really is the way to feel better. You're not going to feel good all the time, but the way to feel better. And you're probably going to have better mental and physical health as well through that connection, rather than this sort of independent striving for some kind of perfection.

Nat Damon: Wow. Wow. That's awesome. This idea of health and happiness, you said earlier that it's impossible to be happy all the time, but what is the goal then? If you can't be happy all the time, then what is the feeling we should be aspiring for, if there's such a thing as a should?

Oona Hanson: Yeah. I think, especially for kids and parents, again, kids, parents and educators, I think it's that idea of authenticity. Of really sort of feeling your feelings, really being aware of what you're feeling. As you were saying in the introduction, really having your outside be connected to your inside. That you're not always putting on the brave face, and you're able to identify your feelings and really feel them and maybe express them. It doesn't have to be out loud to someone. It could be in a diary, it could be talking to your dog or your cat, it can be in a private space. It doesn't have to be publicly announced on Instagram every time. Because I don't know that that's necessarily the healthiest thing. But that idea of just being aware, being connected to your actual feelings.

Nat Damon: That's wonderful. I want to get to Instagram and technology in a moment, but before that I was reminded in what you just shared about the expression a stiff upper lip. And I've lived in London for a while and that whole stiff upper lip, keep calm and carry on, is being challenged, actually, in the UK. In the past few years there's been a massive effort toward educating everybody about how important it is to do exactly what you just shared, as important, to not just keep everything inside, but to talk about it, to share with others, to connect with others when you're not feeling great, when you're not having an Instagram moment, which is basically our lives, right? A true authentic connection with somebody else, an ability to release. So I'd love for you to just speak a bit about that as well. Not about the UK necessarily, but what does it do to somebody when they are advised and they do share maybe just concerns or worries or parts of their, I guess you'd call it, a shadow side that they, society, stiff lip society, does not recommend doing.

Oona Hanson: I think from a parent's perspective, I'll start there, I think parents sometimes don't think they can handle their child's distress. And so I think parents need their resources. They need their downtime and their friends and connections to have sort of the strength or the stamina or the resilience to weather their kids' storms. I see this a lot with parents where a child has a meltdown. And when they're toddlers that can be challenging, but there's this cultural sense that, well, that's normal and it's something you can talk about with your friends. "Oh, you wouldn't believe the tantrum my three year old had last night." When it's your 13 year old having a 13 year old version of a tantrum, it can be really frightening. And parents sometimes try to sort of put out the fire rather than letting sort of the fire burn itself out.

Oona Hanson: And I think when we send the message to kids that we can't handle their distress, they're going to start putting on that stiff upper lip with us and sort of lose touch with that. And I think in terms of gender, we definitely tell boys more than girls that their emotions are not okay. Except for one, anger. That's the one emotion that our culture tells boys that's okay to express. And so a lot of boys bottle up, hold onto, kind of displace, some of that emotion, and it'll come out as anger. And we know boys get sent to the principal's office more, punching the hole in the wall is sort of like a rite of passage for a lot of adolescent boys. And parents think, "What is going on? My kid is having anger management issues," or something like that.

Oona Hanson: And really it's going back to, even the toddler years, the boy falls down on the playground and the parents say, "You're okay. Man up." And we have to let boys and girls cry and let their emotions out. And that's something that I know Michael Thompson writes a lot about. When a boy is crying, it's better not to say, "It's okay to cry." Because just by saying that you're kind of acknowledging the cultural message that maybe it's not really okay to cry. So better not to say anything, and not even to hand a boy a tissue. I know that's one thing that Michael Thompson says, "If you hand a boy a tissue as a teacher or parent or counselor, it's sort of the sense of like mop up those tears. I can't handle those." So really having teachers and parents be comfortable with the blubbering or the sort of out of control emotions at times.

Nat Damon: The ugly cry.

Oona Hanson: The ugly cry. Boys and girls. Let them let it out. And that storm will pass. And I think that also tells kids, "Oh, I'm safe. I can have these feelings and then I'm going to probably feel better when I've let them out, and someone's really heard me and been there for me." But as parents it's natural for us to want to make them feel better right away. So we try to rush in. And teachers too, I think, sometimes. It's sort of the pat on the shoulder. Okay, let's get you to your next class. But really having them feel heard and seen and known and have their feelings acknowledged is actually going to help them process those feelings in a good direction and help them grow.

Nat Damon: Wow. So many points of wisdom here, Oona. And I'd like to actually continue on the topic of boys, actually, for a bit. You reminded me of a conversation I had recently with a really excellent a psychologist, a family therapist, who was sharing her feelings when it was not an adolescent son, but when her son, who was probably three or four years old in pre-K, had a meltdown. Right? And it was at a parent picnic with kids. And the mom, who's a psychologist, was embarrassed. And she was embarrassed particularly because she's a psychologist, and her kid's having a meltdown, and she can't figure out what it is. And so she ran over and she's like, "What is wrong?" Basically kind of what you were just sharing. Not man up. She wouldn't say that to her young kid, but she certainly implied let's clean this up and let's be all proper again.

Nat Damon: But then she stopped, and she reminded herself, she's like, "Wait, this is about me here. This is my reaction and my embarrassment and my taking the external imagined judgment from all of these other parents who are looking at me, a psychologist, and my kid who's the one who's melting down." And she paused and she's like, "What's wrong? You can let it out." Then she did exactly what you just advised. And that's when he revealed the source of his crying. And it was a beautiful reason, actually, why he was crying. Completely understandable. And actually her connection with her son bonded because she was able to take that curious approach, that approach of inquiry versus judgment or shame. So maybe you can speak a little more to that too, about just how to respond when your teenager, or your preteen, is having emotions that you feel you can't control yourself, as a parent.

Oona Hanson: Yeah, it's hard. I mean, how do we break this sort of cycle? If you were raised in a house where you weren't really allowed to express a full range of emotions, how do you then learn to do that for your kids? And it takes time. And I think parents need to be compassionate with themselves. There's no such thing as a perfect parent. There isn't always one right way to handle a child situation, and we can always get a do-over the next day. And actually apologizing to a child, I think goes a long way toward rebuilding that connection. If you have maybe inadvertently given them the message that their feelings weren't okay, you can always go back in a moment of calm the next day and say, "Yesterday when you shared what happened at school, I think I was a nervous, or it reminded me of something I went through as a kid that was painful, and I wasn't thinking clearly. Now that I've had some time, I'd love to hear more about what that experience was like for you. I want to hear all about it."

Oona Hanson: And so I think there's always a chance to kind of correct if you do feel like you've maybe sent the wrong message in a moment of kind of heightened emotion yourself. I think the main approach that I tend to advise parents to use is come at your child's questions or concerns or tantrums with compassion and curiosity. Kind of like earnest curiosity. Like, "Oh, really? Tell me more about that." And I think that sometimes feels inauthentic to parents if they've never done that before. Maybe they've never had an adult do that with them before when they were teenagers or kids. So just

really taking a breath, pausing. I like Wendy Mogel's acronym WAIT. Why Am I Talking?

Oona Hanson: So taking a deep breath. And I think we, as parents, and especially if you're also an educator, it's very tempting, and I'm guilty of this many times, my children can attest, we tend to want to instruct or correct. If a child is saying things about themselves that aren't true, it's very tempting as a parent to say, "No, no. You're wonderful at basketball. Or you're a great friend. Or what do you mean? You're not bad at math." And we jump in and want to correct the content, but we've missed kind of the underlying emotion. And we really want to hear about the feeling first. And maybe 20 minutes into the conversation you might say, "Is there anything I can do that won't make it worse?"

Oona Hanson: This is from Lisa Damour. She has a great sort of multi-step way to handle a child's meltdown, where really just listening and acknowledging feelings. Saying, "Oh, that sounds really hard. Or, wow, that's frustrating." You're not taking sides. You're not saying, "Oh, yes, you're right and that teacher is wrong. Let's march into the administrator's office tomorrow and lodge a complaint." You're just acknowledging those feelings. And I think it's actually simpler than it seems. And if you have sort of a little script in your mind of just saying, "That sounds really hard. Or you sound really sad." Starting to give names to some of the feelings, especially for boys. We know they don't always have the vocabulary to name their emotions. So it's important for parents to kind of step in and say, "Oh, I'm wondering. I'm curious. I'm curious if you're feeling disappointed. Or I'm curious if you are feeling left out. Or I'm curious if you're feeling misunderstood by your teacher." And then stop talking for a while. Let them keep going.

Nat Damon: WAIT. Why Am I Talking? I love that so much because that combined with this focus on curiosity and inquiry, really helps to reframe our approach to a difficult emotion-driven interaction between parent and child. And I would say also between teacher and child. This finding power in the pause, this taking a breath, this reflect before you respond. But giving the child a chance to speak, or to even find his or her own words for their feelings, is a shared act of discovery. It kind of changes the game a little bit. It kind of changes from, whoa, I need to put out this fire with my adult fire hose, to I'm curious about the source of this storm. Let's try to find the eye of the hurricane together. Right? I love that. So I'm thinking about earlier what you were saying about anger and boys, and boys having a more limited vocabulary. Can you speak a little more about that?

Oona Hanson: Yeah, I think boys have the same, this is going to sound shocking to some people, boys have the same emotional needs as girls. So boys have a rich inner life. And this is not something that our culture tells parents and educators. A lot of parents are told, "Oh, you have a boy, they're going to be so easy." And there's a lot of cultural messages, even from birth, that parents get about what to expect when they have a boy. But boys have a rich inner life, and they have the same emotional needs

as girls. In fact, some research shows that infant boys actually have more emotion than infant girls. So I think it's really important for parents to help develop boys' emotional literacy. So you can even google ... there's some great handouts out there from different educators and psychologists of just names of emotions, different feelings.

Oona Hanson: And I've suggested parents tack it up on the fridge, and it's helpful to give boys different words for different kinds of feelings. Because we think about that empathy gap that we've seen some boys have, and part of it is that they have a hard time naming and recognizing their own emotions. So we wonder, "Well, why aren't they recognizing the emotion of their classmate or their girlfriend or their friend?" Well, if they can't recognize and name their own emotions, it's really hard for them to recognize their emotions of others. So it helps the boys in our life. It helps the boys' emotional and physical health, and it can have a sort of a community effect of helping the people the boys interact with as well.

Nat Damon: Yeah. I'm reminded of just the feeling ... you know that feeling. We were both English teachers and we both loved literature, but when you have a word that just you hadn't heard before, but it's the perfect word that sums up ... and sometimes, many times, for me now it's like in a different language, whether it's German or Mandarin or something. That's the word for when you're trying to get the automatic water faucet to work and it doesn't work. And there's this feeling of it's frustration as well as despair. It was a combination word, and it's usually not found in the English language, but it would be found like, as I said, in different language.

Nat Damon: But there's that feeling of, oh, then once you learn that word, you start using it all the time and you start integrating it into ... and you feel almost ... the feeling is, to your point, a sense of groundedness, actually. That there is a word for this. So having a word to define how this feeling is specifically authenticates that feeling, and then you can externalize it. So much of this conversation actually is about the importance of externalizing the internal, right? Of unlocking that stiff upper lip and authentically sharing what you truly feel. Which gets me now to the topic of external validation. What do you see in terms of with boys, with girls, is there a difference? What is the effect of social media today on external validation and mental health as a result, do you think, for adolescents?

Oona Hanson: That's a great question. I want to start by saying I think it's very tempting for every generation to blame the technology being used by the younger generation on all the problems that they see. So it's very tempting to blame the phone or the Xbox. But if you look back to when you know Gen X, when you and I were kids, it was, oh, MTV, or any TV in general, that we were spending way too much time in front of the TV. For our grandparents' generation it was the radio. You don't have to go with too far back. Even when books were more mass produced, there was hysteria that the younger generation with spending too much time reading books and this was going to ruin, especially boys, this is going to ruin

their masculinity because they would just be sort of in their rooms reading books.

Oona Hanson: So it's a common pattern that we see where we're anxious about adolescents because they're growing up in a different world and we want to blame the technology. I think I'm going to take another step back and say, I think as parents we go through a grieving process during adolescence, during our kids' adolescence, because they're not our little boy or girl anymore. They want all this independence. And they are supposed to push back. They're not supposed to want to spend every waking minute with us. They're not supposed to tell us every secret. And it can be very painful to parents. And so sometimes parents try to hold on even tighter, and this is going to create problems. And I think the social media aspect now as an easy thing for parents to latch onto and say, "Oh, they're spending all this time on Instagram." Well, they're supposed to be spending time doing things other than hanging out with mom and dad, or mom and mom or dad and dad or grandma or whoever the caregivers are. They're supposed to be asserting their independence. Spending a lot more time with peers.

Oona Hanson: And today's kids can spend time with peers on social media. They don't have the free range childhood that a lot of us had where we could just walk out the front door and go find a group of kids and play some pickup basketball or just, I don't know, hang out with skateboards somewhere. I mean, it's really hard for kids in most communities to have the freedom, and even the time. Even if they live in an area that is considered safe enough to do that, where you're not going to be judged by the parents in your neighborhood, those kids probably don't have a lot of free time. They're kind of programmed into a lot of activities.

Oona Hanson: So back to social media, I think it's not the device, it's not the social media, per se. It's obviously the behaviors that we need to keep an eye on. And it is true that kids are having increased body image concerns and they are linking this to social media. So there are some studies that are showing kids are very attuned to the images that they're seeing. And we used to think of body image and beauty standards as applying primarily to girls. But we're seeing a lot of boys-

Nat Damon: Let's explore that, please.

Oona Hanson: Yeah. This sort of hyper muscularity of a lot of celebrities and other male models and male athletes who are now ... athletes are celebrities in a way they never were before. And you're seeing so many probably Photoshopped images of male bodies. Obviously this also comes into play with pornography that kids have a lot of access to you, and there's this unrealistic view of what a male body should look like.

Oona Hanson: And they're showing that more boys want to just get bigger and bigger and bigger. And this is leading to disordered eating, to an unhealthy use of supplements. Not just the steroids of yesteryear. But there's so many

products out there that claim to build muscle that aren't necessarily the best thing for your child to be using. And then boys just feeling bad about themselves. And so there's a lot of pressure on eating a certain way to look a certain way, and it's just so unrealistic. And a lot of boys feel like if they are self conscious about their body that maybe they shouldn't be. So it comes back to that sort of those gender assumptions from a few decades ago that this is not something boys ... boys shouldn't be worried about how they look, but of course they are. And more so than ever now because of social media.

Nat Damon: And because of that seeking external validation for their physical selves, they are harming themselves. Some are harming themselves because they're going to a distance that is just unhealthy. Right? I'd like to move into now physical health, nutritional health, foods that are healthy for growing up, in a clean way, for lack of a better word. And this idea of diet and food and one's relationship with food, right? This podcast is all about relationships with ourselves, with others. But let's actually talk about our relationship with food and how adolescents today are growing up facing a relationship with food. Boys, girls, and how maybe that's changed or not in the past few decades.

Oona Hanson: Right? It's a really big hot topic right now in the culture, I think, the concept of diet culture, which is something we're all swimming in. It's an unfamiliar term to some people, because often what's taken for granted in a culture is sort of invisible when you're in it until you're aware of it. So when you do have a chance, if you have the opportunity to go abroad, you experience another culture, you have all these questions like why do you do it this way? What is this about? And the people who've been born and raised in that culture won't even be aware that it's a thing. Right? It just feels natural. So that's part of the challenge, or recognizing diet culture, is it can feel natural or innate. Of course we should always want to be dieting, or eating so-called healthy or clean. Or of course we should have to burn off our Thanksgiving dinner with a Turkey Trot in the morning. These thoughts start to feel normal and they're reinforced by media everywhere. And even in the doctor's office, it can get reinforced.

Nat Damon: Sorry, how in the doctor's office?

Oona Hanson: Well, doctors are trained to talk to people about their weight as a measure of health. And we know, we've known for a long time, that BMI is not a good measure of health. It was never designed to be a measure of individual health, but it is an easy number. It's like this concrete number that people kind of latch on to. And doctors are ... they're often beholden to insurance reimbursements and how things are coded and they have to order a certain lab to ... it's a complicated system. And doctors are obviously always doing the best for their patients, and they're kind of stuck, I think, in a way because they're being pulled in so many directions.

Oona Hanson: So kids are ... we know we've just talked about kids are worried about how their body looks to the outside world. And that's that's part of

adolescence. I mean, through millennia it's an age where you do become aware of how you look to other people. It's evolutionary, right? And that self-consciousness is part of our DNA. In those years you're going to be more self-conscious. I'm not going to say it's completely generated by media. But what's happened in recent years is sort of the dieting industry has kind of gone underground. I think we're all aware ... we've known since the '50s diets don't work in the sense that 95% of people who change their diet and exercise for intentional weight loss will gain a back, and two thirds of those people will gain even more weight back. And people talk about the failure rate of diets. And I actually have to think about it as rather than the diets failing, it's your body succeeding at keeping you alive.

Oona Hanson: So we have ... our biology is built to keep us at a certain predetermined, generally a predetermined, size for what's right for our body. But we've come to a place where we kind of want everyone to be sort of in a pretty narrow range of body size or body type. And that's where the problems come. So because diets have kind of gotten a bad name, now it's kind of gone underground as wellness. So I'll give you the perfect example. So the famous diet company, Weight Watchers has rebranded as WW, and they call it Wellness That Works. But wellness, if you look at their website and all their marketing materials, it's before and after photos of someone losing pretty large amount of weight in a pretty short period of time. They don't show you the photo of them five years later.

Nat Damon: Exactly. You never see that.

Oona Hanson: You don't. So to me, the rebranding of Weight Watchers is the perfect example of the way that dieting has gone underground as wellness. And even the concept of healthy eating and clean eating, this is all part of this diet culture, this wellness culture that says, "Certain foods are better than others." So one of the hallmarks of diet culture obviously is the idealization of thinness, but the other is the elevation of certain foods and the demonization of other foods. And this is really confusing for kids because they get the message often at school, and the media, at home, that some of the foods they want or the amounts they want, maybe something's wrong with that. So going back to that idea of external versus internal, when a kid is hungry for something and they get the message that they can't have it or they shouldn't have, it creates this disconnect. Can I trust my hunger? Can I trust my body?

Oona Hanson: And I think that has a whole host of problems that can come with it if kids kind of lose connection with what their body is really telling them. There's body wisdom, right? You can't find out ... no one else can know what your body's signals are more than you. So any kind of protocol or lifestyle change, this is a time of year where most people are kind of like coming off their Whole30 or their Dry January or whatever kind of cleanse or detox they might be doing. And it's an interesting time to be talking about all this, because this is sort of the classic moment when people realize it's not really sustainable to restrict myself in certain ways.

Oona Hanson: And for kids. And I want to going back to the boys and girls thing, I think our culture thinks of disordered eating or eating disorders as affecting, again, the stereotypical, the thin white, affluent, highly high achieving girl. But eating disorders do not discriminate. They affect people of all races, all genders, across the socioeconomic levels, and body sizes. So we think of the emaciated teenage girl as sort of what we think of in our mind when we hear the words eating disorder. But it can happen to anyone. And boys are getting diagnosed at much higher rates, and they're looking at things like social media and this sort of intense fitness pressure on boys to be super buff and super amazing athletes and that you should always be sort of training and kind of perfecting your body as contributing to some of these higher rates of diagnoses.

Nat Damon: And so you mentioned the BMI as not at not an accurate measurement of health, certainly. And you also ... I found a lot of hope in what you were sharing about the range of healthy body types being reflective of the individuality in us all. Right? And is there a measurement ... or is there ... what does accurately measure, then, one's health? Is there a measurement that works?

Oona Hanson: That's a great question. I think in a doctor's office they do have a lot of tools, whether it's blood pressure or heart rate there are a lot of other ways we can gauge sort of physical health. And pediatricians more and more are being asked to talk to their patients about mental health. They're not necessarily getting a lot of support for that in terms of training and time and reimbursement. So they keep being asked to do more and more in those very short appointments. But, yeah, that's a good question. I don't know that we have ... there's nothing that's going to be as simple as a number like BMI. Right? It's just not ... human beings are dynamic living organisms. And there's never going to be kind of one quick number we can point to to assess health.

Oona Hanson: But I think in terms of nutrition and exercise, it's really about the relationship to food. And in terms of family dynamics, connecting over food at the dinner table is so important. We know that for mental and physical health, for academic achievement, I mean, a lot of things we really care about, we can look to peaceful family dinners as a way to support those healthier outcomes. And it's not about what you're eating. This could be takeout, this could be frozen pizza. I think there's a lot of pressure on parents to create these sort of Pinterest worthy ... we look up social media pressures on parents. The sort of Pinterest worthy beautiful dinners that were made from ... like you know the farmer where you got the chicken and it kind of-

Nat Damon: You knew the chicken. You've named the chicken.

Oona Hanson: Yeah. Maybe you name the chicken. Maybe you picked the carrots from your backyard. And, I mean, that's great for people for whom that's part of their life and that's joyful, but when it's coming from that place of should or that place of fear ... we want to have joyful family meals. I mean,

connecting over food is built into our DNA. And celebrations around food. I think someone was saying, "Nobody eats a cupcake because they're hungry." A cupcake is joyful and celebration. But I've been to so many children's birthday parties where the child's reaching for the cupcake and it's as often the dad as his mom saying, "Don't eat that, that has food dye, that has too much sugar." Kind of sending the message that what the child wants isn't okay. And the parent is doing the best they can. They think they're protecting their child's health, because they've been told that sugar is the devil or toxic or addictive or whatever the kind of pseudoscience is telling people.

Oona Hanson: And I think let the child have the cupcake, assuming there's no allergy. I'm not talking about serious food allergies. But kind of being able to connect and celebrate around food is really, really important. And to separate food from kind of body size, that we've got a break ... that's a diet culture thing that what you eat determines your body size, because we actually know you could take 100 people and give them the exact same diet and fitness routine and people are still going to be all different sizes.

Nat Damon: Absolutely. Genetics, I mean, right? I mean, right there, metabolism. I love this concept of the dinner table, and this concept of food being the catalyst for connectivity and dopamine and receptors, dopamine receptors activated. We are social creatures and this whole podcast is about the importance of relationships through healthy connection and healthy bonding that comes. The brain grows through love, and love is exhibited through people. You can't receive love in isolation, as much as one might love themselves. And the Narcissus myth is true. You'll drown in self-love and you'll also wither away in isolation. This is all about connectivity. And the idea of food being a catalyst for connectivity reminds me of, in the classroom, the content is there to serve the learning. The content is the food, the content is the reason, the *raison d'être*, the reason for being is a content. But the learning is a corollary to the content, and the connection is a corollary to the food. So I just wanted to make that analogy.

Oona Hanson: Couldn't agree more. I mean, the relationship between the teacher and the student has to come first. You can be the most amazing content expert in the world on your subject matter. But if you don't connect with your students they're not going to learn as well from you. And that idea of sort of that kind of triad, or you have the content, and the teacher and the student and all those three need to be connected for there to be really powerful learning. And that goes for parents as well. We really have to put the relationship first, staying connected to our kids. Even as they push us away, we can find ways ... you could make family dinner sacred. And it may not be every night. I think that's the thing parents sometimes feel like, oh, I'm not getting this right.

Oona Hanson: There's a lot of parent-shaming out there. A lot of books are sold telling, especially American parents, like they're doing it better in France, or here's how-

Nat Damon: Bringing up bebe.

Oona Hanson: Yeah, I mean, and there's a lot to be learned from those books, but I think it's part of a cultural message to parents that they're somehow always getting it wrong. And that doesn't help anybody. It's just like with students, if they're always feeling criticized they aren't necessarily going to learn better. Shame doesn't motivate people. We think it does. I love the special ed teacher Rick Lavoie talking about boys. He says, "People always say, oh, if ..." Actually, you know what? Michael Thompson might echo this as well. So I might be combining two quotes. So I apologize.

Nat Damon: Two great educators.

Oona Hanson: Two great educators. But the idea that a lot of parents of boys will say, "Gosh, if only he'd try harder, he'd do better." But there's another way to look at it. You could say, "If only he'd do better, he'd try harder." This idea, if people feel like they're failing and being criticized, it's very unmotivating for most people. And so I think I want to tell parents that it's not so overwhelming and impossible. We've made it out to be very complicated, whether it's putting together the perfect dinner or that you have to, I don't know, get certain kind of balanced meals on the table every night and has to be homemade from scratch. No. We can keep it simple, and just being together and really the takeout pizza is fine.

Nat Damon: Yes. All of this, I'm thinking about this phrase that Robin Berman, who's a psychologist psychiatrist here in LA and just amazing herself, uses this expression, "Before you correct, connect." And I just love that because what we're talking about, this entire conversation truly is about, the importance of connecting with your child, with your students, and then you can correct them. And correct in a very nuanced definition of correct, right? Just nudge them toward perhaps a different way of viewing themselves or viewing a situation or it's an emotional meltdown or an anger manifestation storm. Make sure you've connected, make sure you've connected, before you try to correct. And anyhow, I just think that that's such a perfect kind of way to wrap up this conversation about health, is the idea that with balanced health comes a broader approach, or a broader perspective. In order to have a broader perspective, whether it's on one's body type, whether it's on one's mental health, whether it's on your child's anxiety or whatnot, to have a broader perspective requires taking a step back, taking a breath, and assessing and surveying from a broader lens. Correct?

Oona Hanson: Totally agree.

Nat Damon: And anyhow, I'm just thrilled to have had you on this episode, Oona. And is there anything that you want to share that we haven't covered today about health, wellness, in boys and girls and adolescents?

Oona Hanson: Wow. I guess, boy, that's a big ... I should have thought of what my final point should be.

Nat Damon: You've made so many points, there's no final. It's okay.

Oona Hanson: I guess, just like I don't have the answer right now, it's okay to not always have the answer. Parents can make mistakes, we can model for our kids that mistakes are human, we're human. And there isn't always one right answer to every question or problem, but just staying curious and connected is going to really go a long way toward healthy outcomes for parents and kids.

Nat Damon: Fabulous. Fabulous concluding statement. Oona Hanson, amazing educator, parent coach. Oonahanson.com. Check out her website. She's here in LA. And just thank you so much for being on the show today.

Oona Hanson: My pleasure.

Nat Damon: Wonderful.

Announcer: You've been listening to Reach, Teach, Talk with Nat Damon. If you'd like to recommend a guest for a future episode, you can send your suggestion or questions to nat@reachacademics.com.