



SpeakOnIt Podcast Season 2: Secrets of Well-Being  
Episode 2: Emotional Well-Being and Self Care

Dannie 0:00

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Kaelyn 0:12

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Jay 0:24

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Dannie 0:47

Hi, everyone! Welcome to SpeakOnIt Season 2: Secrets of Well-being. In today's episode, we will be discussing emotional well-being and self care.

Jay 0:56

Joining us today will be Gisela Ortega. Gisela is a current Masters of Biomedical Sciences student at the University of Incarnate Word, San Antonio. She is interested in addressing the healthcare needs of black and brown patients in her community, and her passions lie in activism and promoting racial equity in all walks of life. Gisela, Welcome!

Gisela 1:16

Hi y'all, thanks for having me!

Kaelyn 1:19

Okay! I guess to start us off, let's do our favorite check-in - "Rose, Bud, Thorn." As a reminder, a rose is something good that has happened this week. A bud is something you're hopeful for, and a thorn is just an irritant.

[Rose-Bud-Thorn Song]

Rose, bud and thorn

A rose is something beautiful  
A thorn is a pain and  
A bud is something you're looking forward to

Jay 1:46

So I think for me, a rose for this week would be that I am done with my summer semester [for] my masters program. I took a couple more hours than I anticipated - please don't comment, Gisela. I'm just glad and really excited to get about two to three weeks of a summer break before jumping into the fall. [I'm] hoping my vacation time is really relaxed. In terms of a thorn - I think with all this rain that's been happening, it's been very difficult to coordinate trips and social interactions with friends, of course, [with] social distancing and all. So [I'm] just kind of waiting till the weather is clear. Finally, a bud is [that] I've been gardening a lot. Apparently my plants have noticed that it is summer, and so they're starting to grow a lot. I'm really excited to potentially start propagating and making more baby plants and kind of overloading my parents with just a bunch of green plant grandchildren all over the home.

Dannie 2:59

I think a thorn is probably my yoga teacher training ending. I'm going to really miss all those people a lot, but we're figuring out ways to stay in touch. Maybe yoga classes, like monthly or the classes over Zoom together, or even like pen pals - somebody came up with that idea. That's a real throwback. I'm excited to do that again because I haven't done pen pals in a really long time. I guess that could be the rose - just like coming up with ways we're gonna stay in touch. The bud would probably be going to school next week. I'm moving into my dorm. I'm really excited for my first real in-person experience with classes and everything - so that's my bud.

Kaelyn 3:35

For me, my thorn this week is probably the fact that I have a lot of packing left to do. I thought I had a lot more time, but I move in two days - in the morning. I have to leave at 7 or 6 in the morning to get to my place on time. There's going to be a lot of packing today and tomorrow. My rose, something good that has happened this week would be the fact that I spent a lot more time with my good friend over the summer, or like this past week. We just haven't been able to hang out much during summer. Not sure why. They were just busy. But it's been really cool to hang out with him. Then a bud, something I'm looking forward to - I mean, I think I could say moving in for college and getting to start that, but meeting new people is always kind of fun.

Gisela 4:24

I think my thorn this week is work. I mean, I love my job. I love the people there at my hospital, but I just keep getting scheduled for too many hours. I don't know the schedule, and I might have to leave because of that. It just sucks that because of that one thing, I might have to leave the stuff I like. I think my rose is probably this monstera that I just got, that I showed Jay a little bit earlier. I got [it] for only \$17 at HUD and it's full grown and it's huge. Normally they run for like \$50 or \$60, so I'm really excited. I think my bud is that I start my masters program tomorrow that

I've been trying to get into for a while. Orientation was amazing! I met so many great people, the professors seem totally awesome. I'm super excited for tomorrow, and actually excited to really learn so it's gonna be fun.

Dannie 5:30

According to the National Wellness Institute and National Center for Emotional Wellness, emotional wellness, or as we're calling it well-being, can be summarized as how one recognizes their own awareness, understanding, and acceptance of emotions, and their ability to manage efficiently through challenges and change. Kaelyn, what are your initial thoughts when presented with this concept?

Kaelyn 5:50

To me, emotional well-being is kind of just - I think of it as including the ability to be in tune with your emotions, feelings, moods, and everything - to interact with those in a positive manner throughout your day or your life. For instance, if you have good emotional health or wellness, you're able to sort of take the challenges that life throws [at] you and cope with your emotions in a positive way that won't inhibit anything bad.

Jay 6:24

Yeah, I really agree. I think for me, I know it can be a little childish at times to kind of parallel *leave*. Whenever we started talking about emotional well-being I instantly thought of like *Inside Out*, and how they broke apart your emotions into little figurines. So for me, I think emotional well-being is really being able to address which of your emotions are driving at that point in time and either deciding what to do with those feelings. If it's an appropriate time to express those emotions, and you have the support and validation to do so, yay, and if not, maybe finding a way to redistribute that energy somewhere else so that you don't get caught up in ruining productivity, or whatever it is you're going about that day.

Dannie 7:15

Yeah, I totally agree with the two definitions put forth already. I think emotional wellness is being able to sit with your emotions and not sweeping them under the rug, but being able to confront them. I think [that] only then can you move forward in a positive way, because they're definitely there for a reason and they're an indication that something's going on that matters to you. I think emotions show that you care. When you're not emotional about something, when you're relatively unaffected, it's because something of little consequence to you has happened. But when emotions come up for you, when something brings those up, I think it means something significant is happening in your life. I think being able to be present to that can make you a more powerful and emotionally well person.

Gisela 7:57

Yeah, I think that's a great analogy. It really requires a lot of introspection just to figure out what exactly you're feeling, why you're feeling the way you are, what exactly you're reacting to - that way you can implement positive change in your life, based on those emotions and what caused those emotions.

Jay 8:16

What are y'all's experiences or experiences that you've heard or seen, when dealing with emotional management and emotional well being?

Kaelyn 8:26

I guess for me growing up, showing any signs of weakness with tears, or just having a sad face on, we would kind of be pulled away from our parents, like pulled to the side and [told], "Just get it together. We're almost through. Just put on a happy face and go back out there. People can tell when you're sad." Just showing emotions in general has always taken some sort of negative connotation in my family. Over the years it's been a little difficult to sort of work and change my mindset to kind of fix the idea that it's okay to show your emotions. I'm not sure - just in my family, any sadness, tears, frustration, or anger is a big No-No. You always have to be happy, focused, and just to the point with what you want and what you do. There's not really much leeway.

Gisela 9:29

I can kind of speak on this just because I was the kind of teenager that bottled everything up and then eventually I would just explode. I know Latinas are very often stereotyped as fiery or sassy. [The] "fiery Latina" is a trope that's often portrayed. In my opinion, brown women in general - similar to black women, but not nearly to the same extent - are usually seen as overly emotional and overly angry. I would contrast the "fiery Latina" trope to the "mad Black woman" trope in that while the stereotype against Black women is used by White people and other POC to villainize them, I think the "fiery Latina" trope is used as a way to infantilize. [As if] we're just pretty, little, loud things that can't control our own emotions. Not only does it invalidate what are probably logical reactions, but it's also a way society fetishizes us, in addition. What's sad is I see a lot of young Latina girls kind of playing into it as well, like saying, "Yeah, I'm a crazy Latina." You know what I mean? I think it's because our own heavily patriarchal culture has taught us, to an extent, that if we don't react in an extreme way, then we won't be able to elicit a reaction or change the negative circumstances that caused said emotion. It's something I've had to unlearn. As someone with ADHD and Rejection Sensitive Dysphoria, who's super sensitive to the smallest things, once I got fed up with something, I would feel that if I didn't yell or insult or give someone the silent treatment, then I wouldn't be heard. I had to really learn to take the time to interpret my own emotions. That became a necessary step for me so I can analyze them and communicate effectively. Again, just a lot of introspection to be like, "Hey, girl, what's really going on?" It's actually super cathartic, I think.

Dannie 11:38

Yeah, I think there are probably many instances when people of color feel like they need to tone down their emotions, or hold back in some way. I think we've talked about this before. It doesn't seem like that big of a deal in some ways, but then it gets to the point where sometimes it's a matter of life or death. For example, getting pulled over by the police and not being able to act scared or talk back. Yeah, I don't know if we can keep this in, but my mom recently told me today at brunch, she was sharing with her close friends how my brother got brought home by

the police like six months ago, because he decided to tell him off. He was walking home through the parking lot of New Rochelle High School from his friend's house and I guess the officer stopped him. He was kind of telling him like, "You have no right to stop me right now. I'm doing nothing wrong," and he wasn't doing anything wrong. We later realized [that] maybe when people walk through there at night they are up to no good and they might take something, but Philip had no intention of doing that. I think sometimes there's a difference between knowing your rights and being able to express yourself in the moment, but sometimes you have to not, and that can take a toll on your mental health. If you don't have an outlet for that, if you always have to hold things in, you will explode eventually or just feel a little bit more repressed.

Jay 12:54

To kind of piggyback on what Kaelyn was saying about the toxic masculinity, "Boys Don't Cry" thing, I just want to highlight that. Yes, I grew up in a family where we learned not to burden others with their emotions and become an issue for the community. You just bottled in everything that you wanted to express - your anger, your sadness, being upset - and then go home in your room quietly, with no one else present, and just vent it out. Or you just repress it until some catalyst makes you explode. Then people think that there's something wrong with you when in fact, there's a reason why you're exploding and having that reaction.

Kaelyn 13:41

As an Asian American growing up, I would often be stereotyped as being the quiet, innocent girl, where I wouldn't be allowed to really say much of anything. I grew up really shy, but now I am able to speak and say whatever I want to say. I was on this team, and these girls were sort of just saying, "Oh my gosh, you're so quiet. You're kind of like Hello Kitty," and I was like, "...is that just because..." I was just shocked. I was like, "Is it because she like..." They were just saying, "Oh, she doesn't talk and like you're Asian and she's like Asian." I'm like, "I guess." I just didn't say anything. I would have stood up if I knew that I could have, but I just felt pressured to not say anything because I just thought it was right.

Gisela 14:25

It is just so unhealthy to not be able to express your emotions because your life is at risk, but when your voice is silenced like that, it makes you feel so small, and that just further adds to the negative emotion or like the anger you feel.

Dannie 14:41

Emotions are part of being human. If you're conditioned to suppress them or not express them, or if you feel like it would be [wrong] to feel what you're feeling, it's almost like you're being conditioned to act or perform as less than human.

Jay 14:55

I think it also leads to belittling and also downplaying your emotions. For example, for the "fiery Latino" or the "angry Black woman" trope or perspective, if you do play into it and you do express your emotions, the stereotype is reinforced for those people. [Others might think], "Oh, yeah it's a very common thing. I don't know why I need to change my perspective on this when

you're a clear candidate and person that's expressing it." I think that in itself brings in a conversation of one individual, just because they're expressing their emotions, does not indicate that they are a representation for that whole community for everything. Again, it goes back to [the fact that] there's a reason why I am yelling at you, there's a reason why I'm like, upset with you, and by pulling up this trope or the stereotype, it kind of diminishes my feelings, emotions, and concerns at that point in time.

Dannie 16:03

Yes, but people have a right to ask for you to share your emotions in a more sensitive way or to not yell at them. I feel like people definitely have a right to be like, "Can you please not yell? Can you please say it in a normal tone?"

Gisela 16:14

Being able to analyze your emotions is such an important part of emotional well-being because feeling anger, and then immediately reacting with yelling is not a healthy coping mechanism. Anger is valid, but if you can't communicate your anger in an effective way - in a way that's not harmful to others or your loved ones - then that's not necessarily emotional well-being, and I think it indicates an issue of not being able to read your own emotions or process them. I think that's a further coping issue.

Dannie 16:51

There are two extremes, one is not expressing [anger] at all, being super quiet about it, and the other is kind of blowing up about it - being super loud. I think that both of them take you off your center. Maybe it would be healthier somewhere in the middle, where you can express anger and then you can move on from it.

Gisela 17:07

I think for me, because I feel I've struggled with both extremes of the spectrum of either blowing up immediately after or bottling everything up, I feel like the best indication of what the right choice was for me was how I felt the next day or later on after my emotions had time to kind of settle. If I feel like I didn't react the correct way, if I feel like I didn't speak up for myself properly, or if I feel like I might have crossed the line, then I'll still feel terrible the next day. It'll still nag at me. Time is really like the best thing for me to see if I processed my emotions well. Usually the next day, I'll go to that person and be like, "Hey, that really wasn't cool. I know, I didn't react at the time, but I just want to let you know how I feel," or I'll go back and apologize. It kind of seems like I'm being more reactive than anything, but for me, that's what works out the best when it comes to communicating my emotions.

Jay 18:22

We've kind of touched on a range of topics, from bottling emotions, to toxic masculinity, police brutality, "angry Black women", the "quiet Asian girl", the "fiery Latina," etc, etc. It kind of [leads] into our next segment of specifically discussing how these tropes, or how these ideas and concepts, affect the mental health of BIPOC people. How do they process it and how does it affect them beyond mental health.

Kaelyn 19:02

I feel like it affects people's mental health at the very beginning. I just think that when you're young and you're told that you're supposed to act this way, you sort of grow up [thinking] that's the only way to act. So for me, as a little girl I was told "Be quiet...just do whatever you're told to do. Be obedient, do whatever." I sort of grew up being a really shy girl, all the way up until like middle school, and I feel like that affected my mental health because I would have to tolerate a whole range of disrespect that wasn't okay. I think that's the main reason [that] being told to act a certain way [while] growing up, and [being told] that's the only way to act, doesn't do you any good. You want to have different perspectives, or more freedom, to act how you want or be who you want to be, without being told what you can and can't do.

Gisela 20:11

I agree, I think unlearning a lot of internalized biases about your own culture or ethnicity is a really annoying struggle to have to go through as a young person - especially for me. To this day I struggle with knowing whether or not my reactions or emotions to something are actually valid - to the point where I'm gaslighting myself - "That wasn't really like a big deal, or you're overreacting." It's uncool because then I get dismissive of my own emotions, the way the world around me tends to do. One thing I've [learned] to do to help myself with [this] is reaching out to friends and being like, "Am I wrong for feeling this way? Was this out of line? Am I crazy for being upset?" Having a community of people who actually care about my well-being who are able to judge. "No, that was messed up. You're right to be upset." Being told by society that you're overreacting can actually make you think, "Oh, I'm overreacting," you believe them. I think it's a process to unlearn it.

Dannie 21:41

I think it's a bit of a chain effect. One thing that I've observed is [that] people who feel like they have permission to express or share their feelings tend to be able to hold that same space for others. Whereas when people don't have an outlet, or they don't have a listening ear, they tend to not be able to receive things from other people. They don't know how to react. I think there's a chain effect there. It doesn't always have to come from - here's a disclaimer - it doesn't always have to come from someone else. It's not a good excuse to be like, "I don't have anyone to listen to me right now, therefore, I'm going to also choose to ignore other people when they try to share with me." I feel like you can journal or meditate or cultivate that space inside of yourself. Not that that's all you need, because we all need other people, friends, and family, but there are ways that we can show up for ourselves and be there for ourselves when we most need it. That will help us - being a better friend to others too, when they need it.

Jay 22:33

One hundred percent. I think it's really important to also be conscientious of others' emotional capacities in that moment. I know that we may be in distress from being in crises, but so too may your friends, or the people that you're reaching out to. I don't think it hurts at times to be like, "Hey Dannie, I'm going through something right now, do you have the capacity to listen to this?" Otherwise, sometimes it can seem like a burden for that other person to have to deal with

their own current issues and crises along with what you're presenting to them. For me, I don't think it necessarily means that you have a bad friendship when someone is setting those boundaries. "I love you, I want to be able to help, but right now I'm in a place where I really can't deal with another person's emotions, because I'm processing." I think it speaks volumes to be like, "Okay, I respect that. I respect your boundaries," and like, kind of navigating in that fashion.

Kaelyn 23:34

Yeah, I think it's good to ask if someone has the emotional availability to listen to what you have to say. I think that just setting boundaries in general with people is a great way to sort of have a healthy relationship with them. I think I read this somewhere, but it said that setting boundaries is a way to keep that person in your life rather than cutting them off completely.

Jay 23:57

I think it's also really important to highlight physiological impacts of emotions. Bottling them, or being too stressed out and not being able to process them, can also lead to increases in cortisol or cortisone, which, for those that aren't aware, are stress hormones. Which in result can impact your heart health, increase incidences of obesity, affect your sleep, and other factors. I think it's very important to consider that everything is a network, everything is a web. If you're not well, in one dimension, it can also impact another dimension.

Gisela 24:40

I'm glad you brought up cortisol levels because I read an article that [said] increased cortisol levels actually increases your body's tendency to create visceral fat. Visceral fat, compared to subcutaneous fat, is actually so much worse for your body. It causes so many comorbidities and while it's easier to lose, it's still more dangerous. I know in my community specifically, diabetes, hypertension, and cardiac disease, are things that are super common. It's probably not a coincidence that the immigrant community is under a huge amount of stress. [Many] are not allowed to rest often because they are paycheck to paycheck, or not protected by the rights that documented people are protected by. I think that stress in general can lead to so many health problems. It's so interesting to see the connections that your social group or SES can make with that and your health outcomes.

Dannie 25:56

With all these considerations in mind, what are ways in which we can cope and employ self-care?

Gisela 43:08

Back when I first started undergrad, I think self-care was kind of like a newer term. Nobody was really using it all that often. I think nowadays there's this perception in the media and on TV and on social media that self care is something that's luxurious, like, spa days, etc. I think it can be, but I feel that it's important to point out that it doesn't have to be so consumer based. I think my definition is that it's things we can do that [don't] necessarily make ourselves feel better, but things that are better for us as a whole. Actions that benefit our well being in a way that goes

past basic needs to live, but aren't necessarily expensive indulgences. Things that make us feel happier, but not in a fleeting way - lasting happiness and fulfillment.

Kaelyn 26:56

I sort of think of it as getting the quote-unquote, "emotionally heavy foods off your plate." Even if it's the small tasks, like going to the DMV to renew your license or something like that. It would be a self-care action to take care of whatever busy tasks that you don't want to do.

Dannie 27:17

The idea of self-care was created to combat the ideas of laziness or selfishness, because maybe self-care or self-care tasks aren't traditionally productive. I think it's [about] remembering that your emotional well-being isn't really a commodity. It's something you always need to maintain and it doesn't necessarily need to pay off in a surface-level kind of way. It's just important that you're alive and breathing and doing well. I think remembering to do things for reasons outside of being productive or like advancing your career [is important]. It's important to set aside time to take care of yourself, and I think that's why they came up with the idea for [self-care].

Gisela 27:57

That distinction reminds me of an old viral tweet of this girl saying that college was so busy and so stressful that she didn't even have time to cry. I think it's so indicative of what Jay was saying, where there's a point where you're just surviving, and another point where you actually have time to process your emotions. Like Kaelyn said, like, it's not easy. It's work. Self-care isn't easy sometimes. Processing your emotions isn't easy. It takes energy, it takes time. It doesn't have to be productive. It doesn't have to mean, "Oh, I got all this stuff done." It just can mean like, "Oh, I cried about it. I feel better. I figured out what I was feeling, and now I can move on. Now I don't have to feel that weight on me anymore."

Jay 28:48

How do we, within our panel, heal and deal with emotional well-being? How do we enforce or utilize our self-care techniques to cope with everything that's happening with the grand scheme of life?

Kaelyn 29:05

In my very busy life, and probably even more busy life when I go to college, I know that at times it will be tough to get away, especially since I'll be sharing a room with someone. It's not like I can just cry in my room like I usually do, there's gonna be someone else. What am I supposed to do? I want to make an effort, at least once a week, to sort of go on some random adventure or like alone, or just go grab lunch early in the morning by myself. Go somewhere quiet - like go on a mini hike nearby, since there's like a lot of hiking areas, and sort of just take the time by myself to reflect on what really happened that week. I don't know if I'd want to be emotional [while] outside in nature, outside of my room. Usually, I find my safe space to be in my own personal environment, but I feel like it's a change that I'm going to need to make in order to maintain my emotional well-being.

Dannie 30:10

That really brought up for me a coping mechanism that I use sometimes. Well, I don't do it often, but I like to go for a hike on this nature trail near my house. It kind of feels like I'm going out to the middle of the forest and meditating on a rock. I always come back feeling so much more clear-headed. I listen to a podcast, or even maybe call someone on the way back. It's like a reset.

Jay 30:31

I practice a lot of self-compassion in giving myself space to deal with my emotions, or consequences of burnout, or imposter syndrome, etc, etc. I may be too harsh on myself and be like, "Nope." - rewiring and reframing right? One of the ways that I do that is - I don't know if I've actually shared this with y'all before. I can get very intense with my calendaring, blocking off schedule times. I even include my sleeping time and my night and morning routines. I do that because one, it helps me do task management, but two, when I do have those concerns of imposter syndrome, or when I start getting down on myself and [think], "You definitely could have done more today," I look at my calendar and think, "You know what, I did a lot today. It wasn't as unproductive as I thought." If it does get too much, I do rely on my social network a lot. I have friends to talk with and help process my emotions. If that doesn't work, I just do a lot of journaling, and that's been very helpful. What I mean by journaling is I will write down everything that I'm feeling, and then go back and reread what I wrote and kind of make edits to myself and be like, "Okay, but like, is that really what happened?" and make commentary and do my own processing from there.

Gisela 32:13

I have access to Jay's calendar, so I can attest that this is true. For me personally, I just switched from working 16-hour shifts to working more humane hours. One huge thing I would do when I was working a lot is a lot of self anesthesia, which Jay described earlier. I'm huge on audiobooks, because I can multitask while being read to. I would just put on an audio book and literally shut my brain off and just listen and escape. Now that I have more time, and I can do that without having to multitask, I can actually do tasks, like quietly and chill. On my drive home instead of putting on an audio book, I'll actually put on music and have a little jam session in the car. When I'm home, I can get things done that I like doing, like finishing redecorating my new house, doing yard work, deep-conditioning my hair, things that I used to just completely neglect before or things that I used to need constant stimulation through. I would have to have some form of entertainment just to shut my brain off. Now I can just do it quietly.

Kaelyn 33:52

One of the main takeaways that I got from today's conversation was to sort of be unapologetically yourself. In the sense that, react how you want to react. Mindfully react and don't listen or tolerate any sort of disrespect in your life. Just - be you honestly. I know it sounds really cringe. I would always get so annoyed when people would tell me, "Oh, just, you know, do you. Be who you want to be," and everything of the sort. It just sounded so quote-unquote "hippie", almost. I would sort of roll my eyes at it whenever someone would tell me like, "Do

what you want. It's your life." Sometimes you can't always do that because there are so many things that you're supposed to do. You sort of just feel pressured to do that. It's important to remember to sort of forget about that, and just be unapologetically yourself. For me, I wish I told my younger self, "You don't have to be quiet. You don't have to feel sorry for taking up space." We're all humans, and we're meant to take up space, we're supposed to use our voice, we're supposed to stand out and do anything of the sort.

Gisela 35:04

I think for me, one of the main things I took away from all of y'all was just to be considerate of yourself and your own emotions, and in doing so you can be a more considerate person to your friends and those around you.

Dannie 35:18

Yeah, I completely agree. I think my main takeaway would be [that] your emotions are there for a reason, and being able to really tune into that and understand what they're telling you, and in turn acting accordingly [is important]. At Yoga Camp, we talked about the third eye. We did this meditation where we directed our attention to the third eye, and I felt like I could literally see more. It was the wildest thing ever because I'd never done that before. I think being able to have this dialogue with your emotions that's healthy, and allowing them to guide you in a healthy way, can allow you to do more. I guess that would be my takeaway. It looks like that's it for today's episode. I want to thank Gisela again for joining us today. For our audience, please stay tuned as we dive into other dimensions of well being for this season.