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**Lily:** I'm Lily Cornell Silver and welcome to Mind Wide Open, my mental health-focused interview series. This is part two of The Kids Are All Right, the second time I have brought together a group of my friends to talk about mental health from the perspective of our generation. We are going to talk about topics such as generational trauma, therapy and the impact of the election on our mental health. Thank you so much for watching and I hope you enjoy. Hi you guys. Thank you so much for being here.

**Daniel:** Hello.

**Nathan:** What it do?

**Lily:** I would love to start by-- You all can just go around, say your name, how old you are, anything you want to share relevant to your mental health journey, stuff that might be unique to you.

**Flora:** Hi, I'm Flora. I'm 19 years old, I'm from Seattle. I first experienced suicidal thoughts when I was in third grade, I think. Then I started therapy that year, was in and out of it for a year and then stopped. Then I was experiencing depression and anxiety symptoms once I started high school, then I started going back to therapy on and off in sophomore year. I lost a friend to suicide in the middle of my junior year and I started going to therapy a little bit more seriously after that. I was hospitalized later that year and then in my senior year of high school, I went into a partial hospitalization program for six weeks.

**Nathan:** My name is Nathan Nzanga and I am 22 years old. I reside in Seattle, Washington and I would consider myself a professional storyteller. My medium through doing that a lot of the time is hip-hop or R&B, or folk, or whatever, but I guess I deal with my mental health just being able to convince myself with writing that everything's going to be okay.

**Tyra:** Hi. My name is Tyra. I'm 21 years old. I'm from Morro Bay, California. Mental illness has definitely been a thing in my family. I lost my dad to suicide when I was nine and I went to therapy for a little bit after that but stopped within the year after it happened. Then just two years ago, in November of 2018, I started therapy at my college and I've been with the same therapist ever since. She's my homie. Shout out to Dana.

[chuckles]

**Daniel:** My name is Daniel Nzanga. I'm 19. I'm currently enrolled at Seattle University. My mental health currently at 8 out of 10, but I like to describe my mental health as something that's going. Even though it goes up or down, either has good



season or bad season, it's still happening, so that's a plus. I like making music because it's something that helps me describe how I'm feeling when I'm just by myself and literally have no way to say it. Just that and friends.

**Mewael:** My name is Mewael Habtai. Mewael, it's like Noel but with M in the beginning. I'm 19 years old. Student that goes to UCLA. Lots of ups and downs. Still learning about how to cope with certain things in my mass community and all that. I'm an aspiring actor and writer, so I write poems, write scripts for little short films I'm going to make in the future.

**Julia:** Hi guys, or hi everyone. My name is Julia Kong and my pronouns are she, her. I'm 21 years old and I'm from Los Angeles, California. I just started therapy the summer of 2019 and have been doing it on and off for almost a year now. I'm currently a lot better and still in therapy.

**Lily:** I appreciate the emphasis that all of you put on therapy and how important it's been in different facets and would love to maybe even go more in-depth just about your guys' experiences with therapy, what the outcomes have been, negative, positive, anything like that.

**Tyra:** I remember being in high school, I had a couple friends who were going to therapy and I was like-- I always remember just, any time they'd be like, "Oh, I just got back from my therapist appointment." I can't tell you what, but it's similar to how I'm like, "Oh, I love Dana." My friends would be talking about their therapist, I'm like, "Therapy." I'm like, "Whatever. That's for rich folk. That's for the rich folk." But then I started warming up to it more and more and more just hearing their experiences with it and I was like, "Okay, maybe this is something that I'll look into later on."

Then I just remember, it was my sophomore year of college, I had gone through a big transition because I just decided to quit swimming after swimming-- I have been swimming since I was three years old. That brought up all these really hard emotions that I didn't know how to navigate or deal with and I was like, "I'm not an athlete anymore. Who am I?" I was just going through this crisis, but I was also working multiple jobs while being a full-time student, while trying to have a social life. I was just really having a hard time learning time management and then also just emotionally checking in with myself and being there for myself.

So much stress is just caused by not having a name to describe what it is that you're feeling and what it is that you're going through, but I've been rambling, so.

[laughter]

Say it to the world, therapy is great. It should be more accessible. Make it happen people.

**Julia:** I started therapy pretty recently. In high school, I only had one other friend and we bonded a lot because we both-- I don't know if this is weird, but we bonded over having a mental illness and he was the only person I ever talk to about it. He would



just tell me, "Julia, try therapy. Therapy just changed my life. Try therapy." And I was like, "No, it's weird." The usual response. It took me a year to just, "Okay, I want therapy." Then it took me another year of, should I tell my mom? She could just very well laugh in my face and be like, "You don't need that." And that could just be the end of the conversation and I know that would make me feel terrible. That is what happened. Just like, "For what? Why do you need therapy?"

I was at a point where I was so tired of being alone with the way that I felt that I was willing to try anything. So when I was 15, I went to a therapist I found, just the first one that popped up on Google near me and I was so ready to just share everything. I just let everything out in that hour and bawled. I just hated seeing the exchange of my mom writing a check and then handing it to the therapist right in front of me and I was like, "Therapy's not right for me. I tried it, it's bad."

Then maybe four years later, when I was 19, I was in an abusive relationship and that relationship triggered so much. I felt suicidal thoughts and I felt way more anxious than I had ever been in college. I was just like, "Oh, I don't know what's going on." I saw online therapy that I found out through social media influencers or people who talk about mental health online and my life dramatically changed. I feel like dialogue with my family and my relationship with my family has never been more open or healed as it is now. Yeah, I still see my therapist.

**Flora:** When I started therapy in third grade, I thought that therapy was for crazy people, so I was like, "No, don't send me there." I hated it and I didn't know how to talk about my feelings or emotions, or anything like that, so I basically convinced my parents to let me stop after a couple months. I think when I got a little bit older, I was very lucky to be around a lot of people that were relatively comfortable talking about their mental health and knew a fair amount people that were very open about being in therapy.

Then in high school, I was like, "Maybe I should go to therapy again. Try it out." It was definitely still a very unnatural feeling and took me a couple therapists to find the one that I really liked and worked well with. By the end of my junior year, I think I had a better understanding of how to use therapy to actually help me work through things and cope with whatever was going on.

**Lily:** That's so funny that you'd say that about being in third grade and being, "No, I don't want to tell anyone I go to therapy." Because Flora and I, we went to school together from four or five, or something until eighth grade. I remember saying to my therapist like, "No one I know goes to therapy. I'm embarrassed because none of my friends go through therapy." And she was like, "Are you sure?" Now that I'm older, I found that we were all in therapy-

[laughter] -and none of us talked about it because we were all like, especially as a little kid, you're like, you don't want to--

**Tyra:** Normalize therapy for children. I want to see a bunch of third graders like, "Yo, let me tell you what went down at my therapy appointment."

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**Lily:** I can't imagine how different my experience would have been. Like I said, I have been in therapy since I was seven. That was such an important part of me building a vocabulary around my emotions, understanding what it was that I was feeling. I know something that I've talked about with some of you guys and that I've talked about with others is the lack of mental health conversation in the black community specifically. I'm wondering if that's something that you guys have experienced and if so, what that looks like.

**Daniel:** I feel like we're taught at a very young age throughout and throughout with all the pain that we've been through as black America that we just had to toughen up and always had to be strong. Racism now looks like paradise compared to back then, like tough it up. I feel like that's what we're dealing with, but just looking around, especially this summer, just seeing a lot of these traumas just happening to see killings online and just a bunch of deaths, to me, it's not normal to see that. I feel like the black community in itself can get very quiet about mental health issues.

**Lily:** Is that something that you guys talked about in your families growing up because I know everyone has different experiences with that?

**Nathan:** Growing up, it was just frowned upon to talk about what you had going on, unless it was good. If you got something good going on, tell us, but if not, fix it and fix it fast before somebody hears about it so we can shame you.

**Mewael:** My dad, I remember, I was going through it and my dad came in room, I think he knew I was going through it, but he just didn't know how to deal with this. He just knocks down the door open and he's like, "Hey, are you depressed?" I can't just straight up and be like, "Yes, I'm depressed."

[laughter]

I'm like, "No, I'm not. I'm fine." He's like, "Good. Good." I was like, "Why?" He's like, "Don't be depressed." I was like, "We can't really just control that." And he's like, "Depression is not good for you." I'm like, "Oh, all right. I won't be depressed." It's like even if they knew about-- Except that they know, I bet they know that your mental health can get bad. It's just they don't know how to deal with it, how to help their child get through it because they had no one to help them. Same thing as Nathan, I was just blessed to have good friends and good teachers and mentors to help me out and really be like see where my traumas and problems stem from and where they are at because you can't fix a problem if you don't know where it starts.

**Nathan:** I don't think we really talked about, but growing up around the house, we didn't really talk very much about mental health issues. It was like a taboo thing for sure, growing up. Being first gen, it's not-- I don't know, but my parents just work super hard and then come home and vibe and work, work, work, work. Mewael, did your parents ever hit you with, "Am I your friend? I'm not one of your little friends."

[laughter]

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**Mewael:** Yes.

**Nathan:** I don't know, I get it on the standpoint of there's a parent-child aspect to this and all, but why can't we-- [chuckles] I don't know. I don't feel like I told my parents that much about who I really, really was type of thing because the idea of, I'm not necessarily your friend.

**Mewael:** 100%. Our parents, and this is probably everybody, their parents don't truly know who you are and it's because one, there's that barrier, especially when your parents are constantly like, "Oh, I'm not your friend. I'm your mom. I'm your dad." Treating you like, I'm your mom or your dad. That's a huge barrier that prevents you to be able to talk to your parents about serious stuff. That itself is a very traumatic thing because it is like, you will grow up in a household where you can't be yourself and speak your own mind.

**Lily:** That's something that I've been researching a lot in doing this is how familial origin dictates your mental health a little bit. That's something that I'm super fascinated by is that balance in parenting, because I can't imagine as parents, it's easy at all, like you were saying, Daniel. I think most parents would wish the best for their children in that regard, but where is that boundary between still being an authority figure and maintain the boundary between parent and child, but then also opening a space where you can talk about mental health?

The idea of intergenerational trauma, that's something that is becoming more and more talked about and more and more studied, especially within the black community, but just intergenerational trauma in general is something that I think we're having a deeper understanding about. So, similar vein, just curious if that's something that you feel like has affected your own mental health journeys?

**Flora:** Honestly, I feel like the biggest theme I hear people talk about intergenerational trauma is just how much they wish that they had heard about it sooner. I have always considered myself to be a very driven and motivated person. Like Tyra said, I very much dealt with things by like, "I'm going to fill up my schedule and I'm going to do something all the time so that I never have to stop, I never have to rest, I don't have to think about it." All of that has to do with my dad's experiences and my grandparents' experiences, moving to America, being high school students that went to school all day and then worked two different jobs all night and didn't speak the language that they were being taught in and worked so hard to get things for my dad and my aunt so that my dad could give me all the great things that he's been able to give me.

It's like there's so much for me to unpack to be able to let myself take a break and learn how to rest and relax a little bit more and understand that that's healthy for me and that it's okay and that I deserve to be able to take a step back and take a break for a little bit.

**Nathan:** My parents were just on something like, "We worked our butts off to get over here, you better work your butt off to be somebody over here." That brings a lot



of pressure just on someone. You've got to, I don't know. You're always trying to be the perfect idea of what they want, type of thing. In a perfect world, my parents would have had four doctors. You know what I'm saying?

[laughter]

**Daniel:** Like the first generation just coming here and being new to America, they're new to talking about mental health so they don't know how to speak on it. I'm sure they probably want to and it's not like they wake up every day and be like, "Yes, I hope my kids' mental health is bad." They probably do want to help, but it's not having the resources and that can be frustrating for them, so they just don't know how to act on it.

**Julia:** In my DNA, I'm Chinese, but my family were born, raised-- My great-great-grandparents were born and raised in Myanmar or Burma, which is in south-east Asia. In a bunch of Asian countries in general, there's a huge weird identity shift where people look Chinese, but they don't identify with being Chinese at all. My last name is Chinese, my parents look Chinese, but they don't speak Mandarin or any Chinese language. They only know Burma and Burmese. I had a complete erasure of being Burmese and never tried to learn the language. My parents sent me to a Chinese school, I hung out with other East Asian kids. Depending on my environment as I grew up, it was more accepted to be one than the other or have to turn on the switch to be the other culture.

**Tyra:** For me, I grew up with a black mom and a white dad. My parents had a strained relationship and then I lost my dad young. I know for me, there's already so much just growing up in a predominantly white beach town and being non-white [laughs] that's traumatic in and of itself. Often times being the only brown person, period, non-white person in the classroom, but especially being black, growing up was really hard. So many times I've been in predominantly black spaces and one of the first things they say is, "Okay, but you're mixed, right?" Then I'm like, "Ahhh! We've got to do that?"

**Flora:** I'm like the white kid in the Filipino space. I'm like, "Mm." [chuckles]

**Tyra:** You couldn't give me five minutes to feel like a part of some community?

**Daniel:** I don't know. I feel like something that resonated with me solving us out from first episode and that's when I started to just learn to research more and think about it more. It is like how everyone around you could just sit there and just act like everything's fine because you always act like things are fine, but it's in the moments where you're alone where you think and you have that time to process and you don't have friends to distract you where you had to deal with these problems. I think that's something quarantine has forced me a lot to deal with said problems because you can't really go out that much and try to distract yourself.

I know it's really been a lot and definitely had those moments where I could have crossed a line, but I think that's when I had people I was able to talk to and finally

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released the weight off my shoulders. Shout out to Mewael because Mewael was definitely someone I talked to and he helps me a lot. Late night conversations driving and just really helped me get that stress. It felt like I was finally able to say it and once I said I'm not okay, it just felt so easy to say. For some reason for 18 years, it just felt like a secret where everyone could tell, but no one could know that I'm not okay. I had to be this, I had to be happy all the time, everyone has to look at me to get a laugh. I want to be that bright light for people, but I was never able to tell people that I wasn't okay.

**Lily:** That's something that I think is so huge is that, I felt similar Daniel, in that feeling of like I want to be a light in people's lives, I want to be positive energy, I want to continue to uplift people. It took time to learn that struggling and being a bright light in people's lives is not mutually exclusive. You're completely entitled to those feelings and that's something that everybody experiences and that doesn't negate your ability to be a positive force in other people's lives.

**Mewael:** I could always feel that I wasn't a 100% okay, but nobody has taught me how to be okay. I just got to try figuring it out on my own. After the whole thing with my dad when I was younger, I thought putting my emotions and stuff away was the best option. Then I lost my uncle, more like a father figure, freshman year to cancer. Then also, I'm a middle child, but technically seen as the oldest in my family because my other older sister, she's a year older but she is autistic so I grew up taking care of her. The whole like, older sibling, that was all up on my shoulder.

When my uncle passed away and my older sister had to move into a group home because we financially couldn't take care of her because it's expensive because she needs extra attention and extra help. Losing her and my uncle, it was in the same month, really messed with me. Then I talked to Daniel. Daniel has grew a lot too because first time I talked to Daniel, he giggled when I was talking to him and this is the first time I'm ever opening up to anyone. It's not like, oh, ha, it's like, we're on to these funny issues. He was also uncomfortable, so I was like, "Dang, I can't even open up to my best friend without him making a joke."

We all became mature and talked about it and we really understood where we're coming from. It's all about communication, but the thing is, I don't need to be okay with Daniel. And having a person where you just don't need to be okay with is much needed. It's much needed.

**Lily:** I think that really directly speaks to the way that men are taught to deal with mental health in society as well, which is something that I would love to talk about with you guys because I think that's so fascinating and that you guys both were probably taught similar lessons around masculinity and mental health. Like you said Daniel chuckling it off, but learning to be vulnerable with each other and having someone that you can learn how to do that with is so beautiful and so, so, so important.

**Daniel:** It looks like toxic masculinity I guess is just like a don't ask, don't tell. You're just always supposed to be "brave" and just being down is a weakness. I feel like

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once you figure out just being down makes you human instead of being a robot all the time and always being happy, that's when you have better your friendships, when you have better relationships because you're more genuine.

**Lily:** Agreed. I feel like our generation is disproportionately affected by mental health issues because we have a lot on our shoulders, worried about stuff like socioeconomically, worried about stuff politically, climate related, social justice related, racial justice related. In this new post-election world, how are we feeling mental health-wise?

**Nathan:** The world has been wild all year and it's been dope. As terrible as things have been, it's been dope to see how many of my friends care and how many of my friends were trying to check up on me and how many of my friends were out there signing petitions and stuff like that. Because it's just hard watching people get murdered on tape every other day, but it was just-- I don't know, it was dope that we got Donny out of office and that was a big up and up for everybody. I know politicians have been gas-lighting us for centuries upon centuries, so it's kind of hard to immediately be like, "Yeah, Biden's won. Our problems are over. My mental health is at a 10."

**Lily:** I wanted to clarify something too. I have had a lot of people comment on my videos because the topic of politics has come up a lot in my conversations about mental health through this series and I've had a lot of people say, "Mental health is something for everybody. Why do you have to bring politics into it?" I understand why that is said because ideally politics and mental health would not be something that have to coexist as closely as they do now, but especially if you're a part of a marginalized community in the United States, the result of this election and just politics in general have such a direct effect on mental health.

**Flora:** I definitely relate to that. I've been feeling very nihilistic, honestly, in regards to the election because I was like, regardless of who wins we need more change. [chuckles] I'm not satisfied necessarily with anyone that was running I guess. With the election, I was very much like, I need to just realize that I don't have control over that right now and sit with that and find ways to distract myself. I was watching Marvel movies the day of the election. Like, I need to just not deal with that right now.

**Tyra:** Yes, stress, anxiety, that whole week was-- I don't think I realized until the end of the week how much tension I was just holding in my body. That was stressful too. It's like stuff like that where you realized later it's like, "Oh, this was really affecting me." Then that brings on stress because it's depressing. It's just more and more depressing, it's like how much bad news can we get? And two, also juggling, I don't know, going to a liberal arts college. For my school, specifically, we're like social justice warriors, so it's constant critical-thinking which is great, but also it was hard to be on social media Saturday of that week.

The reality is, we didn't have great options, period. We didn't have great options, having to balance that, but also what's challenging Saturday because there was so much on social media that was really negative about the outcome. I've found it

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challenging to stay caught up on current events and stay informed on what's happening and also maintaining my mental well-being. I found that really challenging.

**Mewael:** The whole election week was draining, so draining. This thing just like, it wasn't even like a blowout, it was still close. Don't get me wrong, Joe Biden, I would not be like, "Yo, this is my guy. This is my candidate." It's just, "Yo, I really just don't want Trump to win." It's not even the lesser of two evils because you can't compare it. One's clearly way worse than the other. For someone to say that, to be like, "Oh, either one can win. It'll be fine, my life won't change." That's a privilege. That doesn't mean your life is easy, it's just a privilege to be able to even say, "Oh yes, the election can go either way and I'm fine." Usually, the people who would say that are people who are white, or straight and a man.

**Daniel:** Last year, this year, whenever I see an American flag, I'll just check my surroundings. What am I doing wrong? Is my hoodie on? Take the hoodie off, hands out. I was born here. I'm as American as someone else. The fact that I see my own flag as caution sign, this really shows a lot of where we were, no matter what side you are on, this is how divided we were. That takes a toll on you mentally for sure.

**Lily:** What are some things that help you with your mental health?

**Julia:** Just doing solo mental stuff. I haven't picked up a book to just read for pleasure all year until last week.

**Flora:** I think one of the biggest ones for me is just being outside.

**Nathan:** We got runs, runs are nice. Jump roping, jump roping is fun. Any sport in particular, dope.

**Tyra:** Fuzzy blankets, great way to cope. It's just like wrapping myself up like a little burrito baby.

**Mewael:** A cool thing that just helps is, even if it's just like a self-care day.

**Daniel:** I started setting alarm clocks for myself. I have an alarm clock at 8:00 A.M to pick up my hair.

[laughter]

I feel like I am doing something with my, I'm just like looking in the mirror and just, "Oh, look at you."

**Nathan:** You've got to find little things to celebrate yourself with every day. Every day, you want to go to sleep you should be able to say, "My hair was nice this morning, I went on my run, sweat, I went to work earlier today that's a W, I got paid." You just got to look for all of the good in the madness of the world.



**Lily:** It's huge. We're talking about these things, we're talking about these things that are so important. Thank you guys so much. I love you. That was awesome.

**Julia:** Thank you so much, Lily.

**Lily:** of course. Thank you.

**Nathan:** Swag.

**Lily:** [laughs] I love you guys.

[music]

**[00:32:14] [END OF AUDIO]**