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Lily Cornell Silver: I'm Lily Cornell Silver and welcome to *Mind Wide Open*, my mental health-focused interview series. Today is my last episode of *Mind Wide Open* for now and I am so, so, so excited to be talking to my incredible mother, Susan Silver. Her and I are going to be talking today about what mental health looks like in a parent-child relationship, the intersection between mental health and addiction, and what kind of tools she uses, what kind of tools she instilled in me. Just such an incredible conversation. I am so, so, so happy to have her here. Truly, the series could not have happened without her and her expertise and her vulnerability. Thank you all so much for watching. Thank you for all of the support over the last year. I can't even believe it. Thank you so much for watching and I hope you enjoy.

Hi, mommy. Thank you so much for being here.

Susan: Hello, honey. How are you today?

Lily: I am good. That's a question out of Marc Brackett's book, Dr. Marc Brackett. How are you really? Today, I am good. We're filming my last episode, our last episode of *Mind Wide Open*, which is crazy.

Susan: It really has been an amazing year, Lily, an amazing journey, an amazing experience, and what an incredible growth period for you. That's what I've witnessed more than anything. I'm just so happy to be here to commemorate this one-year anniversary of *Mind Wide Open* and your papa's birthday and how proud I am of you, my darling. So, so proud of you.

Lily: Thank you, mama. I just feel so excited to have you here because I think every single episode I've done, I've mentioned you in some capacity, but I've said over and over again how much I attribute my ability to be able to talk about mental health, my own mental health, to be vulnerable, to be in conversation with others about mental health is because of you, because you laid the groundwork for me and created a home environment where I always felt safe talking about my emotions and I always felt listened to. What did conversations around mental health look like in your family growing up?

Susan: I was raised by a generation that was known as the greatest generation and they really didn't talk about feelings. I think both my parents had a lot of childhood wounding and young adult wounding that they never dealt with that ended up manifesting with self-medicating or they were both very- there was a lot of arguing and fighting. There's a lot of externalization of undealt-with feelings.



My dad's perspective was children should be seen and not heard. He was in his 40s already before he started having us, his second family, and the way that he parented was very hands-off. My mom was an amazing, amazing woman, but she carried a lot of her own wounding and didn't take care of what was probably depression that she carried. She just powered through. She was amazing. As you know, she was a Martha Stewart before Martha Stewart was even born. She just powered through. She was on the go all the time.

By the time my brothers came along, my dad was pretty disillusioned with the whole idea of parenthood. There was a lot of chaos, a lot of insensitivity I noticed towards my brothers, especially, and it really had a huge impact on them, and my youngest brother with whom we're very close, very kindred spirits, he was so sensitive, the first in a long line of very sensitive people in my life, he started to demonstrate depression, which he started self-medicating from a very young age. That was something that my parents didn't know how to deal with at all.

His drug use escalated and that became the identified problem instead of what is underneath it, what can we do to help him? That's the problem. Then he started to identify as the problem, and it kept layering in on itself. He had a very gentle, beautiful soul that had a really hard time being on this planet.

Lily: We've talked about that just with addiction, mental health, and how intrinsically intertwined those two things are and that you can't really talk about addiction without talking about mental health. It's so interesting to hear that example about how addiction became the identified problem versus looking at what he was self-medicating for.

Susan: Right. I think that it's really been within your lifetime that the conversation has started to change to a point where there is not only encouragement but a ton of science and a ton of programs to help people get underneath what it is that is compelling them to self-medicate and to use.

Lily: With all that being said, with you being raised in a family and really within a generation and a society where mental health wasn't at the forefront of the conversation, what inspired you to make mental health such a priority in your parenting style and in our parent-child relationship?

Susan: By the time you were born in 2000, I had dealt with a lot of people who had substance abuse and addiction, and there had been a fair amount of losses. The losses, of course, have a profound, profound impact. I was in my early 40s when I had you, so I had a lot of life experience to look back on. I had participated in a lot of programs with people and different rehabs, I would go as a supportive family member or spouse or in a professional capacity with clients. Certainly, I learned that there's something underneath the addiction component and the conversation about mental health started to become more and more prevalent.



Then in 1996, I lost my little brother to addiction. That had, as you can imagine, a profound, profound effect on my life and not only the way I dealt with people with substance abuse issues, but it also made me really re-examine my life. Your dad and I always wanted to bring a family into the world. We were so busy with our careers, but it was the heart-shattering loss of my little brother that made me stop and really look at bringing you into the world first and foremost, and then really think about how did I want that to be for you? What did I want for you that I didn't have in my growing up? What did I want for you that I had witnessed in the journey of so many sensitive people who had struggled with addiction, who had struggled with mental health issues? What did I want for you to lead you on a path that would demonstrate wellness? That was really, really important to me.

Lily: It was so, so, so important for me to have a parent who really listened to me, no matter what my age was, no matter what I was going through, no matter what I was trying to convey, having someone like you to truly listen to what I was saying and to validate it was so important. Having you be so validating and truly listen to my experiences and listen to what I was telling you, and currently, you still do that, was so important for me in being someone who can be vulnerable and emotionally intelligent.

Susan: Yes. One of the most, if not the most important value that a parent can demonstrate to their kids is patience, to be patient. Hear the kids out, watch, listen, encourage. One of the theories of parenting called attachment parenting is for the parent to remember that they're the bigger, stronger of the dynamic, and within that, to always demonstrate kindness, to make sure that there's not a fear dynamic going on.

Within the whole umbrella of patience and tolerance and kindness, the goal for me was for you to feel safe and for you to feel physically and mentally safe and the importance of you listening to yourself. There was something- I don't know if you remember, I said it enough, you probably do, but when kids are young and they're testing boundaries and seeing if they can get away with sneaking, whatever, that little extra piece of candy, I would ask you, how does that feel? "Lil, how does that feel in your heart?" We had that discussion a lot. How does that feel in your heart? It will always tell you what is right or what doesn't feel congruent or in integrity.

One of the things I see happen a lot that surprises me is not necessarily the parent-child, but just the adult-child, where kids get laughed at a lot. They'll do something not meaning to be funny and then that may be they don't know quite what they've said or what their action is, and-

Lily: It's funny you bring that up because you know that that's my biggest pet peeve [laughs] from the age- from so young is when I would say things and adults would laugh, like truly, not being taken- I don't know if you remember that, but that from a super young age, for me, was not being taken seriously was such a thing for me.



Something else that I've talked about a lot on the series is the fact that you put me in therapy at a really young age at seven, I think, and I felt that it really was truly so helpful. Maybe at the time, I didn't really realize that, but now that I'm older, having grown up, learning this vocabulary about how to talk about my own emotions has been so so so vital. I'm wondering if you could speak to your thought process behind wanting me to be in therapy from a young age.

Susan: You bet. Yes, I wanted you to have tools and the value that I experienced in starting therapy as an adolescent, and going on and off throughout my life has been incredibly valuable. I don't think I was going to start you in therapy so young. I think it's important, especially children of divorce, to have an outside adult to speak to. What happened that prompted your starting consistently is that you started self-harming, and it's really incredibly scary for a parent, incredibly-- It's terrifying. It's absolutely terrifying to see your baby in that much pain. I was very aware that it was beyond my skill set to help you in that situation and that you needed professional guidance. We found someone to help you with that.

Lily: Right.

Susan: Things that can never be undervalued is the importance of our village. It takes a village. That African proverb is absolutely true. We were so blessed to have healthy, loving people around us. It does take a village to raise a child. We have been privileged to have a lot of different experiments with experiences with your mental health journey.

One of the things that was so potent for you, that was so visceral, I think I've told you that story before, I reminded you that after your dad passed away, I saw you really starting to embody the grief and really hold onto it. You were just, at the end, 16, and the gravity of grief is profound on the human body. We're laying in bed one night, and I said, "Honey, let's find something for you to do. Let's find an activity." Part of my healing journey for the last 25 years has been dance and that is in the form NIA or other types of dance. It was a game-changer for me, saying I would dance. Not interested. There was no-- That's a mom thing. How about running? How about weightlifting? How about yoga? How about boxing? I said, "Boxing," and you just jolted up. "Boxing. I want to do boxing."

There is an incredible boxing coach who you've also had on *Mind Wide Open* that we connected with and she is really a healer as well as a boxing coach. That was a profound turning point in your healing journey to be able to get that grief out of your body.

Lily: Absolutely. That's something that we've talked about a lot on you between you and me, but also talked about a lot on this series is how important externalization has been, not only being able to sit with your feelings and quiet your mind enough to listen to yourself and be comfortable in the uncomfortable for lack of a better term, but also giving yourself that space to externalize whether it is through moving your body or doing something creative or writing or whatever that looks like.

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Susan: Those tools are vital to mental well-being. They're vital. There's an importance in, like you said, stilling your mind and being quiet and learning meditation. We were so blessed to go through The Chopra Method when you were 15. You had these more tools to add to your toolbox, but when your mind is on fire, you need to do something. You really need to do something. As Dr. Whiteside said on *Mind Wide Open* last year- how did she say? You had an emotional fire?

Lily: Right. The way that she talks about it is so profound because it is like an emotional fire, the same way that you may be physically on fire, and it requires a stop, drop, and roll method and to directly assess the situation you're in. I had another therapist say to me recently, "You can't teach yourself to swim when you're drowning." That also resonated with me so deeply. Learning those- for Dr. Whiteside specifically, DBT tools that when you're in emotional crisis or on emotional fire, to find someone you can make prolonged eye contact with, or to find a way to submerge yourself in cold water, put an ice pack on the back of your neck, different tools like that are so important.

As you've talked about, you've really instilled in me my whole life the importance of having a toolbox. You as a parent, I've had a lot of people in response to this series talk about mental health within the parent-child relationship, whether that's from the child's side or from the parent's side. I'm wondering if you had any words of advice for parents who are trying to address their children's mental health or their future potential children's mental health in the best way possible, and especially with you being a single mom, what would you say to somebody who wants to do that to the best of their ability?

Susan: Cultivate patience, so important as a parent to be patient, that is I think the key to keeping your kid or your kids feeling safe. Listen, practice tolerance, practice patience, practice kindness, all of those important skills. They're tough sometimes because kids' jobs are to push boundaries and to see how far they can go before they're met up with a safe boundary. Really important to create boundaries for kids, and within that boundary, patience, tolerance, kindness, listening, and a firm no. When it's no, it's a firm no. When y'all get into adolescence, that's a whole another set of practices that parents have to do.

There was a really incredible book that was really helpful for us, I think, written by Dr. Daniel Siegel, called *Brainstorm*, it's a 25-year study of the adolescent brain and what happens chemically within adolescents, and where it so often is miscategorized as bad behavior, it's really a chemical-driven experience for a young person to--

Lily: Which brings me to my other pet peeve of being told as a teenager that I'm just a moody teen. [chuckles] That was like my biggest thing.

Susan: Damn straight, you're a moody teen. That's your job to ride the rollercoaster.

Lily: That kind of invalidation of what you're feeling is-- Right.



Susan: That book came out, oh, gosh, I think in 2012-ish, and incredible information, and again, another reminder that that is really the time to reinforce healthy boundaries, but also immense patience because there's a storm in those brains that really can take kids-- At least all the adults know stories of the kids that the chemicals took them and the risky behaviors took them into a place that they maybe didn't recover from or ended up having a life experience that really changed the trajectory of their lives because of just the hormones and the chemicals are very-- It's a very real and intense time in somebody's life. I think we forget- once we've had a few decades behind us, we forget how intense that period was. We all went through it.

Lily: I wanted to bring up too something that we've talked about, which is the idea of validation. You've told me that I, I think, was the one that taught you at least that phrase, "I don't feel validated right now." That's something you and I have talked about. I'm wondering maybe if you could share your experience with that.

Susan: I have learned so much from you about your life experience because you're so articulate, and you, as I said, listened in therapy so well that you have reflected back to me what it feels like to be heard and you put a language to it and called it feeling validated. I look back, I think that was always something in my own life that I struggled with. I guess, I referred to it as feeling heard, but it really is about feeling validated. Thank you for teaching me that.

Lily: Through this intense period of loss that you've been through in your life, how did you take care of yourself? What kind of tools did you use in your toolbox? How did you go about feeling validated in your own grief and your own mental health?

Susan: What I learned along the way, I think probably, just in the years before you were born, was that self-care is not self-indulgence. It's so important that we take responsibility for ourselves individually, so we can help take care of the collective. For me, one of the most important aspects of self-care is movement. Dance has really been a life-changer for me for the last 25 years, to have found something that not only helps me physically feel better but lifts me emotionally in a profound way.

I started meditating when I was in high school. I got lucky enough to get introduced to TM when I was in high school. That's really important. The value-

Lily: Transcendental meditation, for those-

Susan: Transcendental meditation, TM. Then learning The Chopra Method, which is based on TM, but more adaptable to the Western mind, which is so helpful because we chatter a lot in our minds. Therapy definitely on and off at times has been really valuable for me and getting out in nature, but that for me is gardening. I love gardening. Those are the pillars for me. Having a spiritual practice as well is really important for me, it has been for decades and decades.



Lily: That takes us back to the idea of not being able to learn to swim when you're drowning. Those are things that you've implemented and that you practice every day, regardless of how you're feeling or what your mental health is.

Susan: It's so important. I don't know if you remember me nagging you really when you were learning-

Lily: Oh, what do you mean remember?. [laughs]

Susan: You were learning biofeedback about six years ago. "All right, you feeling good today? Go practice." Wait till a crisis to find it. Things like meditation, certainly tapping, as we've talked about, emotional freedom technique, EFT, tapping, there's different spots where nerve endings are gathered and that people can take classes even online. There's a lot of really simple, effective, valuable tools, especially for kids.

You remember, I would have you do bilateral stimulation and that can be as simple as just tapping on either leg, or for kids, it's fun to do butterfly tapping, and that can help break the stress cycle in a mind. Lily, this is an amazing anniversary. You've been doing *Mind Wide Open* for an entire year, and I want to know from you, what are some of the things you learned during this year?

Lily: That's going to have to be a whole separate show [laughs] or two. I talked about this a little bit in my last episode with Dr. Christine Moutier, and we talked about it here, the importance of listening to oneself and that it's okay to ask for help. I think that's something that I've been saying for a long time to many other people and wanting to always be a support to my friends and family, but I haven't really internalized that. That's something I'm still working on, is that it truly-- It's easy to say, but then when the time comes where I do feel like I need help, I can kind of not want to put that on other people. It's just something we've talked about so much on the series, that that's not always the healthiest mindset and that most people are feeling that same way and they want other people to reach out to them and they want to be of service and that whole thing. You have to stop me because I'll just keep talking. [laughs]

Susan: You're going to be heading back to school on campus in the fall.

Lily: Hopefully.

Susan: You have also simultaneously been doing a show on the Quilt platform. What kind of platform is Quilt? What do they call those Clubhouse-y type?

Lily: An audio-only platform, but the tagline of Quilt is "Where conversation is self-care". Anyone who follows me on Instagram probably knows all about Quilt already because I talk about it all the time, but truly, the next two big things that I'm doing, since this is my last show, I better freaking plug it, is having this weekly show that I'm doing on Quilt, which is the audio-only social platform, but it's really wellness-



oriented and live, in a Clubhouse-esque way, live conversations about so many different topics, mental health, wellness, spirituality, love and relationships, career.

We talked about this a little bit, being in a new age of technology and having all these different- where you can have conversations with people that you wouldn't necessarily be connected to, or when it comes to asking for help, to be able to go on Quilt and start a room or find like-minded people that are there to be of support that you can have immediate access to, that's been an incredible thing.

Then the other thing is that I am on the team for this amazing new podcast called *New Day*, which is produced by Lemonada, that's all about what making or cultivating a life that feels worth living to you looks like and what that's all about. That's launching in September and I'm so excited for that one. I'm so excited to be part of that. The host is Claire Bidwell Smith. There's exciting things happening, and obviously would not have happened if it wasn't for *Mind Wide Open*, which wouldn't have happened if it wasn't for you. Really it's all about Susan.

[laughter]

Susan: Oh, thank you, my darling.

Lily: Oh my God, crazy. This is my last question for a while anyway. Mom, I'd like to know what is something that's giving you hope right now?

Susan: What is giving me hope right now is you and your generation. It gives me so much hope that you guys are inheriting the earth, that you care about the earth. You care about what's going on with the environment. You care about what's going on with each other. You care about equality. I'm immensely hopeful that some of the concerns that we're facing as a planet will be in good hands to find solutions with your generation.

Lily: Thank you. On that beautiful hopeful message, thank you so much for being here, mom.

Susan: I love you, love you, love you, baby.

Lily: I love you too. [chuckles] Thank you, mama.

[music]