

MERYL: Hey, everyone. Welcome back to the Rebel Nutritionist podcast today. It is my privilege to be interviewing David Kreskey. He has his own private practice. He is a licensed school psychologist, and I have known Dave, gosh, Dave, how many years have we've known each other a long time since Jason was young,

the kids were young.

Yes. Yes. And so so Dave has worked, we we've collaborated with a many, many clients, and Dave has worked actually with my children as well. And I hold him in such high regard because he is really a master at his craft. And so thank you for being here. I am excited to have this conversation. I it was interesting because the other day I read an article that the title was something like **44% of teens and young adults now claiming they have some kind of mental disorder, whether it's anxiety, whether it's panic attacks or something like that you know, post pandemic.**

And so I don't think either of us are surprised by that number, but gosh, that is, is almost half, crazy.

DAVE: I always talk about this with parents. And I talk about those with kids as well, that it was your perfect storm the last few years. You know, if we had a pandemic maybe 40 years ago, when most kids would probably be outdoors with other kids, have a little more independence and freedom, school demands weren't as much online learning wasn't there.

You probably wouldn't see the rates as high, but with all the other contributing factors, when you kind of look at the patterns of the kids that are struggling the most, you see a lot of those same red flags. So it makes sense that the numbers are that high.

MERYL: Yeah. And when you say red flags, what do you mean?

DAVE: So with a lot of kids. You know, and some of the questions I know you had, you asked about the differences in boys and girls and who opens up and what they share. You see a lot of these kinds of starting at the bottom. If you think of your hierarchy of needs and Maslow **were not the healthiest to begin with.**

So not taking care of their bodies, thinking of a nutritional point of view, not eating well, not exercising, not sleeping well that in itself were red flags. Then on top of that, you have an **over-reliance on technology**, whether it's being on their phone all the time or iPad or video gaming more socialized collation, avoidance of activities and stressors.

So a lot of kids I've seen in the last year, one of the main issues they bring up is their motivation. **They just can't motivate they want to do well, but they're just overwhelmed** and they can't find. That one thing, like, well, what's going to work. So we really look at it. You know, you take that holistic approach.

Like we've talked about where we work backwards and we're like, well, let's see, are you doing all the things to promote wellness versus what's going on? That's creating illness or mental health difficulties.

MERYL: Yeah. And so I probably should have you know, introduced, I should, I'll backtrack a little because I introduced you, but I didn't say what we're going to be talking about, although I'm sure we're going to run the gamut of what we're talking about.

You know, so I, and I don't even know that there's honestly one topic. I think the anxiety piece and you know, the kids now it's probably going to be, well you're, you're a child psychologist. Right? So our school site young adults. Right. So that's what we're going to be focusing on. And we're going to talk about all genders, but I kind of want to address also, like you mentioned the difference between boys and girls and I, and so it's, again, not that there's one overriding theme here.

But I think from my point of view, it was really addressing what we're seeing in, in mental health and young people now post pandemic and just the staggering rates like you had just mentioned and all these co co-founding factors, but. Take a step up, take us a step back for a second. Because yeah, it's funny, man.

We're, we're talking April, we're devoting April to sort of men's health because we started out with testicular awareness and, and so forth and have interviewed a number of whether it's male physicians, male clients relating back to how men and women take care of them or themselves, or don't take care of themselves differently or similarly.

So to that end, and again, we're not limiting it necessarily to males, but have you S do you **see a difference with gender in terms of how they handle, how they cope?** I mean, I'm fascinated by that.

DAVE: I, I see it. It's more, **there's more differences when they're younger. So the older they get, you, you see, they kind of start merging with the ways they cope with these things, how they communicate with these things.**

I think generationally it's, it's one of the nice things that's happened out of this, or we'll see in the future that this generation is a little bit more open about sharing and about

saying I need help where my generation growing up it was very rare for us kind of gods under this macho culture of saying, wow, I'm really anxious about blank, or I'm having a tough time with blank.

I'm feeling weak. I need help where it's, it's great. I'm, **I'm seeing in the teenage population that 13 and above, just as many boys as girls say to their parents, I need help.** I need to talk to someone. I need to see someone. When they're younger, you see the differences a little more. And, and that's been for hundreds of years where a lot of the times, and it's part of it's brain development, right?

Like the kind of joke is like an eight year old boy brain is like a six year old girl brain they, they just developed a little bit slower that frontal lobe and the emotional reasoning and functioning. So **with the boys, you might see more of the acting out more of the externalized behaviors**, so stuff you can observe the voice tone and the reactions and all of that.

When **the girls a little bit more and might be more of the introversion.** So more like, yeah, they're a little quieter and they're a little, they seem a little sadder or. They're not making as much noise. That's why **we've seen for years in the schools, the huge disparity between like boys and girls who get like specialized services**, the boys are the ones that are like throwing something at the teacher calling out, and the girl might just be sitting quiet doodling and her chair, but they both need help.

Right. And the ways they cope a lot of kids nowadays, and there was just an article. I can't remember if it was in time in Newsweek, where they were showing that **most of these kids are coping with, by using technology.** Right. It's tech talk, YouTube gaming, social media. So it's distractions. More of my boys, it's like the gaming YouTube more.

My girls it's been Netflix, Tik TOK, not overall. That's not like a main generalization. I got plenty of boys who watch tech talk and I got girls I'd work with that game, but you kind of see that's kind of the trend, but regardless there it's **both the same coping skill. Let's not deal. Let's avoid, let's distract until I feel better.**

MERYL: Yeah. And that, I, I definitely want to come back to that, but I can tell you, yes, I see it in my house. Ashley's on Tik TOK all the time and Jason is gaming. So there you go, true to form. Although Jason will come back and say, he does go on tick-tock, but not nearly as much time as Ashley spends on Tik TOK.

So but you know, but that being said, so like you said, well, their, their outlet is gaming. Their outlet is tic talk. Their outlet is some kind of technology. You can't tell me that that's healthy.

DAVE: So I can't wait until they do research on this. Cause they, well, we don't have the data yet. I just have what I see.

And I think of it very from an evolutionary lens. And I tell the teens, this and the kids, I work with them like for thousands of years, this is what kids have done for hundreds of years.

MERYL: Oh, wait, I just

lost you

that you just went out for a second. So say yeah. Yeah. Now I can. So for a hundred years, yeah.

DAVE: So I try to convince the kids, like, when you talk about like that can't be too healthy. We talk about the opposite. Like **doesn't it make sense that kids have evolved and brains have evolved to be social, to be outdoors, to be active?** You know, I kind of joke with my teenage boys at my homework for a lot of them is you need to go to the mall with another group of kids and hang out, not on your phone, see some other kids from the other school and start talking with them and hang out and make plans and go out.

And we talk a lot about again, like kind of the opposite of, okay, that's not healthy, but what is, and then balanced. So let's say like, yeah, you want to go on Tik Tok for an hour? Sure. But just an hour, because if you're on Tik TOK for six hours, That's because you're missing out on all these other things that are good for you.

MERYL: Right. So wait,

take us back. You said a hundred years, the evolutionary thing I cut out. So take us back a hundred years ago, or what were you just saying about,

DAVE: so the way the brain is and I, I try to really convince the kids. I'm like our brains. **Like we talk for a reason. We have eyes and ears for a reason we're ambulatory for a reason.**

And the reason is we're, we're nomadic social creatures, our brain craves it, it's healthy, it's nourishment and fuel. So the more you are interacting with others, the more you are engaged, not just through a screen passively, you're going to see that it helps everything. It's helping your mental health and wellness, your physical abilities, social, emotional skills.

So that, that's the way I kind of like, that's my shtick, right? My kind of like my, my sales pitch to them. And especially for the kids that are very science and very concrete and literal minded because the younger ones usually are right. They're not as abstract and thinking yet. And don't see the like, well, what's the big deal everyone's gaming till like four in the morning everyone's doing this.

So we talk about it a lot from science and from data. Great.

And so, yeah, I mean, what is it is, look, I think there's plenty of information out there that shows the detriment of technology right on, on kids' psyche, on the in, in increasing anxiety and depression, there was a study out, oh God, not long ago about **social media and how girls felt about their body image and the rates of depression the rates of depression in girls.**

So. How do we buck the system here? I mean, technology is clearly not going away and yet these kids are, are reluctant to give up technology. And the funny thing is, is even in my house, like my kids will disconnect and they're like, oh, I feel so good that I disconnected, but you know, then they're right back to it.

Right. And so

how

do we, what is the balance? **Is there a balance, like how do we deal with this?** How do we help

DAVE: our children? I think it's a couple of factors. **I think it obviously starts young.** Most things start young, right? You, you start when they're young with those boundaries and those very clear lines.

And, and I say a lot over and over to kids and families. I'm like, this is a health issue. Your parents are not letting you drink two liters of mountain Dew a day, or smoke a pack of cigarettes or drive 150 miles an hour because that's health and safety. This is also health and safety. I know you don't want to think of it that way, but it is so.

Limits are good boundaries are good. You know, I tell the kids all the time, I need that speed limit on the Flamingo drive because without it I'm going 90, but I need it. And that works for me because I know that it's best for me. And if I break it, I lose money. I like money. I want to keep my money. So I think starting young, that's good.

But I think also **teaching the kids to have their own healthy boundaries and their own limits.** And then as they get older, **making sure that they're engaged and involved in things that are kind of like contradictive of that screen technology piece.** So not overdoing it like with some families and kids.

And I think generationally the pendulum swung too much. So I get kids they're in six AP classes, four clubs, Sports, tutoring, all these that that's too much. Like they don't have time for anything. So then when they do have an hour, all it is is I just want to go on Instagram or Snapchat or Tik TOK. Right.

But I think, like you said, like striking that balance of, well, if you're out with your friends and you're playing and you're going to the gym, or you're going to a party, you're not by yourself on Tik TOK. Right. Right. Kind of like **what the pandemic did for a lot of these kids who were locked inside, they didn't have the opportunity to build these kinds of social, emotional behavioral skills.**

So a lot of teachers tell me when kids got back to class, they have to teach them how to just behave in a classroom. Wow.

MERYL: Yeah. That's, that's insane. So, so let's go back to what you said. Cause I find it really interesting that whole pendulum swing, I think you're totally accurate. Right. And I think.

Parents that are the, the parents now that are of the generation, like my age, our age, I think I'm definitely way older than you, but like the, the, the let's call it. I don't know what were our kids generation whatever they were. Okay. I'm 50. So our kids generation, pendulum swinging we, the generation, cause it wasn't necessarily me.

Not that I'm a perfect parent, but it is that in oh, we're going to give our kids everything. There's going to be no limits. There's going to be no boundaries. No we'll have, right. Because we felt maybe we were a little bit too restricted. I don't know. But and those kids are just can't cope.

Can't do anything without their parents, but. But how much of this because when we talk, when I talk to young kids you know, teens, adolescents, whatever it may be and

their food situations and all of that, it has to involve the parents because it starts with the parents. Right. I think much of what you're doing also has to start with the parents and, and there are some amazing parents out there who are proactive and really part of the solution.

And then there are those, I guess, like in any situation that are just like, eh, no big deal, I'm going to let the kids do whatever they want. And I'm too busy. I can't, I can't police them. How do we you know, how do you deal with that in your practice? I mean I just feel like we really need to engage the parents

more.

DAVE: And I, I do that as much as possible and **I tell the kids. You know, we're a team, we're all sitting at this table together. This is not me, mom and dad telling you what to do** and shaking a finger in your face. You're part of the team, mom and dad are part of the team. They have a job to do too. And I'm going to expect a, B and C, just like from you.

I'm going to expect D, E and F. And for me, this is what my job is and **what I try to really sell the parents on it's that prevention piece.** It's even thinking from that a nutritional point of view, like let's prevent obesity, heart disease, diabetes, eating disorder, unhealthy habits by putting most of our eggs in this prevention basket, building those healthy habits, routines wellness.

Self-care. So that when they go off to college and med school and they work, you're good. You don't have to worry that, oh my God, they can't take care of themselves and survive. Right. I put a lot of emphasis on that and I don't, I don't want to use scare tactics, but I tell them the data I'm like, this is percentage wise, if your child has this, or is dealing with that, their odds of these things happening later on significantly increase.

So we need to take this seriously when it comes to like your set, like setting boundaries, having limits, not just wanting your kids to be happy, but knowing, and **being able to teach your kids how to deal with any emotion, whether it's delaying gratification, what to do when they're frustrated or on motivated or upset, how to work hard when something's hard, how to communicate effectively** and starts young and then builds as they get older.

MERYL: And what are you seeing trending? Let's say, like you say, communicate effectively, motivation work hard. I feel like there's a whole generation that just feels like

they should be entitled to this because I don't know they should. You know, I don't know. I find that sense of entitlement and the desire and the motivation out there to be really lacking.

What do you see?

DAVE: I see it a lot with kids where they haven't found that right balance where I think in sports, they talk about that stress level. Like **if you're too stressed, you can't perform. If you're not stressed enough, you can't perform because you don't care. You want to be in the middle.** So a lot of these kids, they hit walls.

I see most of them hitting the wall somewhere around high school. I've seen a lot of 10th and 11th graders just they're pushing, pushing, pushing expectations are high, schools are more demanding, getting into college is harder than ever, and they just, they burn out. And I've seen a lot of that. I've seen a lot of this social anxiety more than I've seen in years where part of it was probably the pandemic.

And I haven't been in a classroom in two years and now I'm in middle school and I've got kids that look like they're 17 in the same room with me. And this is intimidating. I'm not used to this, right? So it's a lot of avoidance. It's a lot of shutting down where we have to kind of start from the basics again and figure out, well, what's worked in the past.

What are your goals? And we start small. And with **a lot of these kids that get these are ninth graders worried about college.** Where, I don't know if you're in the same boat as me, but like, I didn't think about college till I think the beginning of 12th grade when people start saying, so do you want to go to college?

Oh yeah. I guess I want to go to college. Yeah. That's a good idea. Yeah. Where ninth graders are told day one. This counts. This is your future. If you don't perform or you don't do well, if you don't take this many APS, you're not getting here and you won't get this. So I've seen **a lot of kids worried where they catastrophize, where I'm in ninth grade, but I'm worried I won't get into a good school.**

Won't make money. And then I'll be homeless. Oh, wow. Right. It goes that far. Or I I'm like, you kind of said, **I'm not independent. I don't know how I'm going to do this on my own.** My mom wakes me. She helps me with my homework. She drives me places. I can't order my own food. So how am I going to survive on my own?

Yeah.

MERYL: : And so what are some of the strategies that you're working with with these kids? I guess, especially, let's say the young, high schoolers and whatnot, like what are, what are just some strategies that you suggest that are easy enough, obviously therapy is therapy and that requires much more, but are there strategies overall that people can do to really whether it's parents or the kids themselves

DAVE: So I get these kids that come in, they're like 10, 11, 12, and like, oh, do you know why you're here? I'm just working on my mental health. It's like little kids. I'm like, what do you know what that means? Like, what do you mean you're working on your mental health? And then we talk a lot about that and we talk about, and we kind of go over the education of, well, **what is mental wellness?**

Like what leads to the opposite of the mental illness, right? Like what do we need? So we talk a lot about the kids when it comes to strategies and. **Hitting all the checks on all those healthy boxes.** That's why I love collaborating with nutritionist and personal trainers and other professionals that make sure, oh yeah.

We'll make sure that you're sleeping well, you're eating well. You're getting some movement exercise like that. That's a no brainer that needs to be done. For a lot of kids, it's also **making sure that they recognize and teaching them to recognize their own red flags and warning signs.** So when kids come in and they say, well, I'm not motivated, or I'm having difficulty with this.

And they're, they're kind of freaking out. We say, this is okay, this is you're now recognizing this as a red flag. Something's wrong. We need to do something different. So let's problem solve, that approach works well. Even as a parent, it works really well because there's no blaming, you know? Well, you're just lazy.

Or what you can like play video games for six hours, but you can't open a book. Like I know it's not that. So because **it's less of the finger pointing and it's more focused on, well, let's find solutions.** What do we need to do? That's been working really well with a lot of kids because **when they feel like they have a say in what the solution is, they're more apt to do it.**

So if you get a kid that comes in and says straight up and you tell them are, you're doing keto, that's it 1300 calories a day, no choice. Here's your meal plan. This is exactly how much in what you eat each hour. You're probably not going to get compliance. But when you sit with them, be like, listen, you've got some choices.

Would you do A, B or C? That really works well. And that's, I think a really good, actionable thing. A lot of parents can do. **I love giving kids those kinds of choices. Even when probing and asking questions** and saying like you look, you sound nervous. Is it that you're nervous? Or you're like, upset that mom's upset.

And kind of, again, trying to put on that detective hat that in a scientist hat and they really, most of the kids, I work with response to that. And then a lot of the times the parents would be like, I didn't know that. Why didn't you say, well, you should know that how come you didn't know that? So it's **opening those lines of communication and being able to be honest and upfront**, and then for the parents to know how to kind of get it sometimes, especially as, I mean, you already, I have a preteen, so it's already happening.

You know, I have to try to get the info cause it's all I don't want to talk about it. Like, okay, that's fine. I think that's a very big part of it. I think also **not being judgmental and just listing. And not trying to solve the problem yourself by telling**, right. Well, you should just do this.

You need to turn off your phone at 10 and that'll solve the problem. Right? So I love that team approach. And as time goes on, you can kind of wean yourself off. Like I, I look at it again, very macro big picture view of **our job as parents is to make sure our kids could survive without us**. That's in the grand scheme of things, that's it a well adjusted solve problems, communicate, take care of their own physical, mental, and social health all without us.

So we could sleep at night when they're not home. Not worry that, oh my God, who knows what's going to happen. That's our, that's our job. So I try to remind the parents too. If we think of it in that way, then we think of it as we're teaching. We're making sure you have these skills. If you need anything, we're here, we could work on it together.

You can become independent and learn these things. So you feel more kind of like that stronger sense of ego and self and better about yourself. Like, yeah, you're going to get anxious. It's it's normal. You're going to feel sad. Sometimes it's normal. I want to make sure it's not the end of the world and you can deal with it.

MERYL: Right.

Yeah. And I, and I love that. You know, it's interesting as you were talking, there's a couple of things I wrote down that came up. Yeah, I think that one of the things for me

that has come to light in dealing with the kids that I work with with the parents that I work with and just where we have gone, let's say from a let's call it evolutionary perspective.

You know, we used to, and for me, food is, is a sense of, well for a lot of people, right? We, we gather like special occasions are revolve around food and, and meal time, right dinners. One of the things that my kids will always talk about, and I think one of the reasons they are so, or as well adjusted as they are, is because we sat down most nights to a family meal after school, like we all ate together, regardless of whatever sports somebody was in.

And I really tried hard not to over-schedule the kids, but you know, you have three kids they're in three different activities and they're all busy, but it was really important for me to have the kids sit down together with us at the family table. And they, we would literally go around the table and talk about their day and you know, how was their day, the good points, the bad points.

And I think that level of communication. Was so important because it's indelible in their mind to this day, they'll say, yeah, they all come home from school or wherever they are. And they'll be like, I mean, from school, like colleges we'll get together on a Shabbat Friday night and they'll all be like, no, we don't want to go out.

We want you to cook. So we can all sit around the table and reconnect. And I think the the disintegration of the family table and the family connectedness is we really have become, and I say this often a very disconnected society. Would you agree? Forget about technology, but just communicating with each other.

DAVE: I work with kids who eat dinner alone in their room, and these are middle and high school kids. And the parents, somebody like everyone just eats their own thing on their own time by themselves. And I look at again, it's structure, right? Like I need that speed limit. There needs to be, hard lines like, no, we're a family.

We eat dinner Monday through Friday or whatever it is. We eat dinner at home around the table, no phones, no, whatever that is. 99.9% of the time that's worth the digging your heels in. That's very important. Just I got to tell parents **your kid needs to sleep. There needs to be a hard time. Like this is lights out, no phones in room, whatever this is your health.**

This is what's good for you **eating dinner with your family, us connecting. It's it's healthy. It's good for you**, right? Absolutely.

MERYL: So, yeah, I guess it's one thing to say it, it's another thing to get people to actually do it because I feel like the kids are running around frenetic. Their brains are frenetic and the parents are frenetic.

How do you get people to take a step back and take a breath and like, okay, let's look at the big picture here.

DAVE: I try first where we look at it again, very data where like you can measure it because it's really easy to see if we write down, like I'm literally writing on a whiteboard or a dry erase board on my computer. Like, here's all these kinds of symptoms, right? Just like almost you go to a medical office, like you have A, B, C, D E and this points to blank.

We know these are the things that really help with this. When they see it in the light of that, it's really effective. And then I try to use the baby step approach, almost like thinking of it like a diet it's very hard to just, I'm going to start eating no carbs, no sugar, no whatever tomorrow, changing my diet.

180. Versus for a lot of people might be this I'm just going to cut out soda. That's the first thing I'm going to do. And then after I got out soda then I'll just try to have dessert every other night instead of every night. Or I use more of that approach because it's easier for the parents to do and then to do it with pretty good integrity, like, all right, we're eating dinner now.

Like four nights a week. We got that down, like, great. Right. And you see like, that'll solve a lot of other things like, oh, and since we started doing that, we learned that we both like this and then we watch this together. So it kind of has like this positive after effect too. That's a lot what I try to do.

I try to find again, like, **as a team, let's find something that we could work on first. That's important.** So we'll

MERYL: start there. Do you talk about family meals? Like what are the things like some of the. You know, I don't want to say strategies, but some of the concepts like that, that you do try to get the family.

What are the core concepts for you to get the family to come together?

DAVE: So it's a lot of looking at it from holistic and like **a family dynamics thing of this is good for the family unit**, right? Like in the family psychology world, you have all these different entities and relationships. So you have like, mom, mom, and dad is one dad and kid, mom, and kid, mom, dad and kid get all four.

So, and we talk about like, **you have to make sure you foster each of those relationships**. So like add in daughter should have like a daddy daughter date or they go out or you pick her up from wherever dance and you talk and mom and son should do this. And mom and dad should have this. And then the family unit itself needs to be taken care of.

So those concepts I talk a lot about. So even it's as simple as you know, well, he's great at nighttime. He always opens up right before bed. Great. So you're going to go in his room. And for 10 minutes before he goes to bed, just like lay next to him, sit there and just like talk because you know, that works versus when he gets in the car, when you pick them up from school, he doesn't feel like talking about his day, which we find out a lot, which is why he's quiet with his AirPods and looking at his phone.

That's his cue. Don't talk to me. I'm not in the mood. I had a long day. **So we find very specific things like that, that work for families** family meals. That's another one, right? Like, **I know mornings are tough because they're rushed and you're getting to school, but we try to find time throughout the week where this is important.**

And I, I try to sell it to the kids more than the parents their kids are like, ah, I don't want to talk to them. Like they're annoying. They're embarrassing, blah, blah, blah. I get that, but this will actually help you in the long run so that when you do ask mom and dad for this. So when you do want to touch base on that or whatever, there'll be more comfortable.

They'll trust you more. When you ask to do this, they're like, yeah, I got a sense of what his friends are like, because he opens up to me and I hear about his friends. So I feel comfortable with him going to this party. I met his friends. So I'm not going to say no, I'm not. I don't know where your two of these people are.

With the older kids. It's, it's funny. I've gotten really hard when it comes to wanting them to get part-time jobs. **I think I want every kid over the age of 15 working at least 10 hours a week.** Right? Like, and if you think about, again, it adds structure while you're working. You're not on your phone.

You're not on Tik TOK. You're not doing God knows what else. You're building all these great skills. You're connecting with people. You're making money. And for a lot of these kids, I very rarely hear kids get jobs and then say, oh God, it's the worst. It's horrible. That made my life worse for a lot of them.

It's they almost look at their life as it's made the other things less stressful, because my perspective has changed. Yeah. I'm not so focused on school and school. Isn't this thousand pound weight on my shoulders. There's there's life outside of a classroom. So that's another concept that I talk a lot about what these kids were when I asked, well, what are you going to do this summer?

You know, it's April just hanging out. I'm like nah, you're 16. You're not just hanging out this isn't 1988 where you could just be at the mall, go to friend's houses, go to parties, go bowling, go skating. Like those times are gone. So you need to get a job. And it's been great. I really don't see many downsides to that.

Right. So that's one of the things, even for the mental health aspect of it, like for your kids that are maybe a little bit more like socially anxious have more social deficits. That's a perfect place, place to practice. Now you get 10 to 20 hours a week of real life practice. So when you have to go for a real job interview at Ernst and young in 10 years, you'll be great.