

Sunday, Oct 22nd 2023

Julie Ferguson on Mental Health Sunday

I have a story to share... This beautiful gal here with me was born on 9/11/2001. I was 8 days from turning 40 yrs old. I was told I could never have children, however, there I was, on that day at Rose Medical Center, giving birth, a few short hours after the towers fell. I remember looking at the television and my brain saw, not the actual news but a "batman episode",. That is what our brains do when we are traumatized. We turn what we cannot tolerate into something we can tolerate. Even though my entire family and everyone in the room was watching the television and gasping and crying.

I remember after she was born that I could not let go of this child . I did not let go of her for months. I became so depressed and anxious that I could not leave the house or allow anyone to touch her. . I could not watch the news without being in terror. I lived like that for about 6 weeks until my mother said " you need help".---and — I went to the doctor. Within 3 days of taking an anti anxiety/ anti depressant medication, I was— better I was myself again. I had never experienced anything like that in my life. Prior to this time, I was the happiest person you could ever meet. Much like I am now. But, That threw me. That just about took me. I did not want to raise a child in this world after that horrible tragedy.

The issue now is that we have all had our 911 experiences, We've all had collective trauma over and over since that time. And I've learned a few things since then about how to manage this collective trauma. Neuroscience has taught us that trauma does affect our brains. . There is even research that was done after 9/11 on how people tolerated it. It turns out that the people who watched the towers fall live on TV were so deeply affected that they had a worse time recovering than those who lived in NYC at that time. So, I have learned that what we see on TV can affect us dramatically. Our brains release cortisol, a hormone, into our systems when we are in an anxious state. Normally this is used to help us run from prey or get out of the dark alley. So it is useful, However, if we experience trauma over and over again like we do on our TV's, something else happens. The scary part is that too much of this anxiety, trauma, panic, actually shrinks our brains. Yikes. This we must combat.

There are many things that cause anxiety and depression, Cortisol overload is just one. So, our entire body is affected, not just our brains. That is the only way we get our minds back. Mental health issues are body health issues. So we need to take very good care of ourselves. We must exercise, eat healthy foods, drink lots of water and get up and do something productive- be in gratitude, stay in touch with the people that you love, talk to each other.

So thinking that our brain is going to power through the wars in Israel and Ukraine and not be affected by these and many other tragedies in our world today, is ignoring reality. We are all deeply affected. I can tell you that I was so deeply affected by this issue that I had to call all of my friends after I was well and apologize to them all! LOL! I do have a genetic predisposition for depression as many of us do. That genetic predisposition was triggered by 9/11/01 and there I was, a royal mess. I was 40 yrs old before I was told that my father and his father both suffered from depression and anxiety .I had NO idea due to the pervasive stigma at the time of sweeping all mental health issues under the rug as if they would simply go away if ignored. It

would have helped a lot to know this information. I could have been prepared, educated and aware of tools to help me manage. But, Nope. Sad. So talk, talk, talk. One more thing....The research shows that the greatest protective factor in our quest for mental wellness is having a sense of belonging, that you belong and are part of a wider community. We have this right here... and I brought Macy along to express her thoughts on why this is so important.