



# Episode 89. Mental Health Series Part 3 | Kids and Depressio...

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## SUMMARY KEYWORDS

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## SPEAKERS

Deana Thayer, Future Focused Parenting, Kira Dorrian, Elizabeth Vu

- E** Elizabeth Vu 00:00  
Depression is extreme sadness or despair that lasts for more than a few days. It interferes with typical functioning and it can even cause physical pain like headaches or stomachaches. As a therapist, I think of depression as an emotional state in which a person is pulling away from external life, from engaged life. They're kind of like going inward and it can feel very alone, isolating, shame-filled, and stuck.
- K** Kira Dorrian 00:36  
Welcome to Raising Adults, the groundbreaking parenting podcast that starts with the end in mind.
- D** Deana Thayer 00:41  
We're your co hosts, Deana Thayer
- K** Kira Dorrian 00:43  
and Kira Dorrian. We created Future Focused Parenting to take families from surviving to thriving.

D

Deana Thayer 00:48

So join us as we help you stop raising kids and start Raising Adults.

K

Kira Dorrian 01:00

Well, hi, everyone, and welcome back to Raising Adults Podcast. And thank you for joining us for our mental health series. We're running four weeks of talking about kids and mental health, and some of the specific stuff that you may or may not come across in your parenting journey with your kids. We really wanted to take an opportunity to talk about these things to help parents figure out, you know, what am I looking for? And if I do think I'm seeing something, what do I do? And also super importantly, what don't I do? What should I not do? And so we've got experts on the show every single week talking about these different topics, and it has been really great so far, Deana don't you think?

D

Deana Thayer 01:40

Oh, so helpful. I think we're not only seeing some really great themes emerge, but we're also getting some really practical strategies, which you and I love. So it's been really nice. I've learned a lot as well. And I think what you said is key about some of you might encounter these issues in your own family and some of you might not, but you likely at least know someone who's dealt with this and maybe can send the episode their way or point to this as a resource for friends or family that you know who might be dealing with it. So super helpful, even if it doesn't happen in your exact family.

K

Kira Dorrian 02:18

And I think too, you know, parents so often, especially when they have littles, it's something that's like, in the back of your mind, a lot of these topics like, well, what if that happens, or what if I see that? And so for our parents with younger listeners, you know, we're Future Focused Parenting, like to be thinking forward and going, hey, if I see that, I want to be prepared for that. And I really hope that we're able to do that for our listeners with this little series. So today, we are going to tackle depression, which is a much bigger issue than 30 minutes worth of discussion. So we're going to scratch the surface of that today and we have a fabulous guest with us. I'm so excited, she's here. We have Elizabeth Vu on the show today. Liz, you want to say hi.?

E

Elizabeth Vu 02:57

Yes, hello. Thank you so much for having me.



Kira Dorrian 03:00

Oh my goodness, thank you for joining us. I'm going to read your awesome bio here and then we'll dive right in. Does that sound okay?



Elizabeth Vu 03:08

Sounds great.



Kira Dorrian 03:09

Okay, so Elizabeth Vu received her master's degree in clinical social work from the University of St. Thomas/St. Catherine University, and received postgraduate training in psychodynamic psychotherapy, where she explored the intersections of attachment theory, human development, and the healing process of therapy, which sounds oh my gosh, that sounds so interesting. She integrates trauma, healing methods, neurobiology, and depth oriented psychotherapy into her work with children, adolescents and adults in her private practice here in Washington State. She's in Bellevue, Washington. So Liz, thank you for being with us. Can you start by just introducing yourself a little bit more and maybe tell our listeners how you came to this work?



Elizabeth Vu 03:52

Yeah, absolutely. Well, so again, thank you so much for having me and for providing the space to talk about some difficult topics that parents may be facing. So my educational background, like you said, is in clinical social work. And for the first part of my career, I did home and community-based services work, which meant visiting lots of families in their homes, listening to understand their needs, and connecting them to resources. And then I spent several years in school-based mental health when I worked at an elementary school, providing therapy to students there. And then now, of course, as you said I'm a therapist in private practice. My first exposure to social work, though, happened when I was much younger, as my family cared for foster children during most of my childhood. I learned a lot through those experiences and that really helped develop in me a curiosity about others and their stories. So that ultimately became my profession. And I just kept getting more and more fascinated by our emotions, our relationships, and helping people make meaning in their lives.



Deana Thayer 05:00

That's really special. I appreciate how often it's so true that we sometimes come to our

path maybe professionally because of something we experienced personally. So your family having foster children doing that for you, that is a, an interesting angle. Thanks for sharing that. So as we, as we start the conversation about depression itself, it's really helpful to get a clear foundation and definition of terms and even what we really are talking about. So, from your perspective, as a professional, would you be willing to just start with how you define depression?

E

Elizabeth Vu 05:37

Yeah, absolutely. So depression is different from the feeling of sadness, which everyone experiences from time to time. Depression is extreme sadness or despair that lasts for more than a few days. It interferes with typical functioning and it can even cause physical pain like headaches or stomachaches. As a therapist, I think of depression as an emotional state in which a person is pulling away from external life, from engaged life. They're kind of like going inward. And it can feel very alone, isolating, shame-filled, and stuck.

K

Kira Dorrian 06:20

Hmm, that's a really powerful definition. I really like that, the idea that we're pulling away from living when we're depressed, I think that's really, I've not heard it that way before. And I really like that.

D

Deana Thayer 06:35

Liz, something I really appreciated -and we've been kind of talking about this throughout the mental health series, but it's so important so I just wanted to thank you for doing it - is giving us also the distinction between depression and just feeling sad for a few days. I think that's really important for parents to know too. Because just like we do, as adults, kids will sometimes have a sad day or two or have a hard time here and there and so I'm appreciative to you that you created that distinction for us of how is depression set apart from that, so thank you for doing that.

K

Kira Dorrian 07:05

So could you talk to our listeners and to us about what are some of the common causes or triggers for depression? And also what symptoms or behaviors should parents be looking for? And how do they know then when to seek help? And I think actually, even your definition started to talk about this, which is great. But can you just flesh that out a little bit?



Elizabeth Vu 07:26

Yeah, absolutely. So the clinical diagnosis of depression, which is what we're talking about, right, as we said, is distinct from sadness. Depression can be caused by a combination of genetic, biological, environmental, social and psychological factors. So sometimes we see depression showing up as a response after a difficult experience, event or relationship. For example, after loss, trauma or a social rejection. And so there are typical symptoms that a therapist or doctor would be looking out for. And we should keep in mind that these symptoms are coming from kind of a Western medical model. So may differ depending on kind of cultural background and environmental situation. So, these symptoms. It's a long list, but these symptoms are prolonged sadness or feelings of emptiness, feelings of helplessness or hopelessness, feelings of guilt or worthlessness, anger and irritability, restlessness, difficulty concentrating, fatigue, changes in sleep patterns and appetite changes, chronic pain, headaches or stomachaches, loss of interest in activities, withdrawal from friends and family, and thoughts of death or suicide. So we're assessing for depression, we're looking for changes from their typical functioning. So it could be a slow and gradual shift or it might appear abruptly. And sometimes the developmental changes, like what we see in adolescence, can parallel depression symptoms, like spending a whole lot more time alone in your room. But this time alone is important and can be necessary for development. So the concern, or that distinction, would be are they missing out on other aspects of their life? Are they completely disengaging from social contacts? Or if it's combined with other signals that something's up. So in depression, we're looking for several of these symptoms happening at the same time.



Kira Dorrian 09:48

It's really, I love, love this because I feel like you set this up so beautifully at the start, that idea of withdrawing from life and kind of bearing that in mind and using that as a gauge. Even with the symptoms that you're talking about, you know, there's a big difference between a kid who's like spending a lot of time in their room, but still going out with their friends and still doing their sports and all of that. That's a really helpful way to distinguish between a kid who's just being a developmentally appropriate kid and a kid who's maybe struggling with some big feelings. Right?



Elizabeth Vu 10:20

Absolutely.



Deana Thayer 10:21

So, say a parent has seen some of what you've just described with how, and they've decided, you know, I maybe need to seek some help. This might be beyond just a sad day or two or something that is in my wheelhouse as a parent. So what, can you maybe talk about what quality help for this issue would look like - what it should include? How does a parent make sure they're not just getting slapped with a quick diagnosis and not getting long term support for depression for their child? Can you just talk a little bit about that?

E

Elizabeth Vu 10:53

Yeah, that sounds like a very uncomfortable situation to be slapped with a diagnosis and then what do you do right? So, getting that diagnosis is just a first step of getting help. And parents who are concerned about their child having depression are probably really nervous and scared for their child's well being. Maybe it's a new experience or they've been through depression themselves. They're concerned about this happening to a child. So we can try to see it as an opportunity to empower the child or adolescent to pay attention to their feelings and symptoms, and to the systems that are at work. Many parents' first step is to talk to the doctor about what's going on, the potential causes, and their treatment recommendations. School counselors and school social workers are really excellent resources in the community as well and they might also be picking up on something not going well for that child. Good quality care might look like a lot of different things. It might look like psychotherapy, cognitive behavior therapy. Play therapy if it's a younger child, trauma treatment or groups, depending on the symptoms and causes. Good quality care from the therapist or the kind of treatment provider will feel attuned, it will feel caring and curious. Now, sometimes medication is recommended. In certain cases, medication might be necessary to help stabilize the child's functioning and make the other interventions more effective. If you're able to work with a child psychiatrist, they may be really supportive if you're concerned about your child being on medication. And because medication for depression has an increased risk of causing suicidal thoughts, many professionals prefer to start with psychotherapy first, but this depends on individual factors.

K

Kira Dorrian 12:49

Wow. I like that you said caring, attentive and curious. Is that right?

E

Elizabeth Vu 12:55

Attuned.

D Deana Thayer 12:59  
I thought you might like curious!

K Kira Dorrian 13:00  
Yeah, I did I, of course I did. I love curiosity. I'm very curious myself. And I think, I love that curiosity needs to be a part of the treatment, right? Because figuring out what's going on, right, and having a support system, including the therapist, also being curious instead of, you know, laying down diagnosis and this, that and the other, and getting really rigid about it, that curiosity is also going to make the child feel so seen and heard, as well.

E Elizabeth Vu 13:28  
Right.

K Kira Dorrian 13:29  
I love that. All right, well, we're going to take a quick break. And then when we come back, Liz is going to share with us how parents can best support a child or a teen dealing with depression and what are the things you should absolutely not be doing? What are the biggest mistakes that parents make? So we will be right back. So we just wanted to take a moment to talk about an incredible photographer that we had a chance to work with. Her name is Kristi Tamcsin, and she does a pretty unique style of photography. And we are really excited to just share with you a little bit about our experience, Deana and I had our professional photos done with her and a lot of what you see on social media she did. And then we also in our family had our family photos done with her before COVID hit and had the most amazing experience. So Deana, why don't you tell everyone a little bit about what it was like to work with her because it was pretty special.

D Deana Thayer 14:21  
It was and it was a lot of fun, too. I would say Kristi really makes the photo time fun. And here's what I think really sets her apart is that she did not have us pose or stand in certain ways, she actually just documented our work day essentially. And so what we ended up with were these beautiful array of pictures that just really captured what we do on a day-to-day basis at Future Focused Parenting and, and she does the same for families, which is so nice. So you're going to get to see your family actually living and you got to do that with her, right?

K

Kira Dorrian 14:58

Oh my gosh, it was amazing. Like, I literally cried when I saw these photos, because, you know, you think of a family photo is like this beautiful posed family photo, and you all look perfect, and you never look like that. And even in just preparing for her to come, I didn't clean the house. Like we didn't put on special clothes. She said, just be yourselves. I want to capture your family. And these photos are beautiful, like we read as a family on the couch together all the time. So we just read and she took pictures of us and they are so intimate and so real and so personal. We went to a park and played and she just captured us like playing with our kids, and especially as the mom like, I'm never in the photo ever, you know? So she captured our family as a whole. It was absolutely spectacular. We can't recommend her enough.

D

Deana Thayer 15:42

And here's what's so great too. For those of you who might be concerned about photography during this unique time, Kristi really cares about keeping her clients safe and is taking all the precautions to protect clients. So right now she's coming to photograph wearing a mask and she's only doing backyard or outdoor sessions. So for those of you who might have been a little wary, I think that can really help just knowing how much Kristi cares about her clients and wants to take care of you.

K

Kira Dorrian 16:06

Yeah, and I really can't say enough about being captured as you are. And she said something in the session that I thought was so great. She said, there's something really special about sending a message to your kids that I don't have to pretty you up to make you worthy of being photographed. And I thought that was really cool. And that's definitely what we experienced. So if you're interested in working with Kristi, she's fab, you can follow the link on our social media. Pretty much any picture you see of Deana and I she has photographed, and there's a link there, or you can go to [kristitamcsinphotography.com](http://kristitamcsinphotography.com). And we'll put a link in our show notes. Okay, Liz, so can you share with our listeners because I think in some ways, this is the question that most parents want the answer to... if my child is dealing with depression, if we see these signs, we realize that it's time to get help. What do I do? How do I support my little person who's dealing with this, and what are the things that I shouldn't do? What are the common mistakes that parents make that if, if you as a therapist were like, if I could just tell parents not to do this, they would just make such a huge difference in their child's you know, process through this experience of depression.

E

Elizabeth Vu 17:14

Right. So every child and adolescent needs to feel loved for who they're becoming. It's so important that parents stay present and receptive, rather than reactive. This can be done by trying to understand that interior experience of the child, that's curiosity, and by keeping the lines of communication open. If this is happening in your family, it can be very helpful to take a moment to reflect on what comes up for you, how this relates to your own experiences with emotional struggles, and explore whether you're being reactive to their feelings. Teens are especially very good at picking up on these sometimes negative unspoken feelings. Even if we think we're doing a really good job, kind of keeping it under wraps, and parents and loved ones can also support that child or teen by just engaging in activities that might help provide a distraction, like doing a puzzle, cooking together, or doing something physical like basketball, going for a walk or doing some gentle yoga together. And then some common missteps might be trying to get your child out of their sad feelings quickly by trying to be super positive, or by shaming, like saying, oh, look at all the great things you have or so many kids have it worse. Having perspective is really great, and it can be helpful, but that's where sadness, disappointment and depression differ. So I encourage parents to be curious with their child about their feelings, to accept and reflect them. And that allows feelings to cycle through and perhaps resolve on their own, rather than expressing that the feelings should be different or be over with quickly, which minimizes or rejects the child's experience.

K

Kira Dorrian 19:08

So can you, can you give some examples of what that would look like on both sides, right? So let's pretend we have Jack and Jack is 12. And Jack is struggling with depression. Give us an example of an interaction between Jack and a parent that you feel is doing those things like accepting and validating. And an example of what it would look like if a parent didn't do that. Because I think it gets really muddy in this for a lot of parents. And, and I love, I remember when we spoke on the phone, you were saying, you know, so much of this is actually also what's happening for the parent, and how they feel about their child being sad. And so I'd just love for you to expand on that a little bit.

E

Elizabeth Vu 19:48

Yeah, so, so I think about kind of how these two scenarios might go. Right. So if there's a parent who's maybe, maybe they went through depression when they were a teenager, but they didn't have anyone to talk to or, or they were really shamed or had to kind of hide away their feelings for some other purpose. They might see, you know, their 12 year old son looking sad, looking like they might have depression and maybe try to get them to kind of get out of those feelings quickly because that brings up a whole kind of, maybe

flood of emotions that they don't know necessarily how to, how to sit with or how to kind of tolerate, right? So a lot of this is being able to tolerate this range of feelings. Rather than kind of making them go away, right, there's, there's no such thing as a bad feeling. They're just feelings and they come and go. Depression is a little bit different. Like I was saying before about kind of sadness as a feeling and depression as a diagnosis or a disorder. So a parent who's maybe a little bit more self-aware or able to regulate themselves, they can join their child. So being able to just kind of sit with them and slow down. Ask a lot of questions, you know, or just share stories. It's really about kind of listening and, and just like the good quality care from the therapist who would feel attuned. It's the same kind of thing, right? Can the parent slow down and pay attention and just kind of wonder with the child. I wonder if you're feeling really sad that we have to move, you know, or that you haven't seen your friends because of, you know, we're in the middle of this pandemic, and that's a lot of stress. I think that can be scary for some parents to approach the negative feelings, but it shows the child of the adolescent that they are not feelings to be feared. Does that make sense?

K

Kira Dorrian 22:11

Mm hmm.

E

Elizabeth Vu 22:13

Yeah. So if we can approach it, we can understand it, and work through it. But if we try to push it away and say, no, no, no, that's bad, or just thinking about teaching children that, that all feelings can be tolerated, and they're, and they are trying to communicate something to us. So it's that curiosity, how do we approach it with curiosity?

K

Kira Dorrian 22:34

Yeah. And you, and you gave that great example of, you know, saying, look at all the wonderful things you have, you know, trying to approach it with positivity. Are there other phrases that parents use that are dismissive without intending to be?

E

Elizabeth Vu 22:47

Mm Hmm, yeah, like things like yeah, kind of trying to be positive or looking at the bright side. Or shaming comments might sound something like, so many kids have it worse, or don't you appreciate all that we do for you? Don't you appreciate all that you have? Those are not particularly helpful because, again, it's trying to pull that child out of what they're feeling. And that can feel kind of dismissive.

K Kira Dorrian 23:16  
Yeah, that makes sense.

D Deana Thayer 23:18  
It does. It makes a ton of sense. And I think probably many of those phrases really come from a well meaning place. The parents aren't, aren't meaning to be dismissive. They, they genuinely want to be helpful. I'm sure it's quite stressful for the parent as well to be walking alongside a child who's dealing with depression. So it's really tricky when sometimes our, our best well intentioned things maybe are the pitfall that we're trying to avoid. That's, that's tricky. So thanks for highlighting some of those that we can watch out for.

K Kira Dorrian 23:52  
Well, and I think it must, it must feel very counterintuitive if you've got a child who's down to actually lean into that, right? I would think as a parent the fear is like, oh, I don't want to make it worse. I don't want to let them go deeper down the spiral or wallow more. But as we have found with everyone we've talked to in this mental health series, everyone's saying exactly that. You got to lean in, you got to listen, you got it, you know, don't try and make it go away, that actually makes it so much worse. So I think for parents to hear that again, and to, especially with this topic, no, you're not going to make them more depressed. By walking alongside them or letting them feel it, you're actually more likely to pull them out of it. If you do that, but it does feel uncomfortable.

D Deana Thayer 24:33  
Yeah, I think that's probably a pretty normal, normal isn't even the word I'm looking for. I think it's an understandable fear to think, well, what if I end up being the person who made a mountain out of a molehill? Right, like, and that, that's a tricky thing to kind of push against, I think as a parent.

E Elizabeth Vu 24:51  
Yeah, I mean, this is it's not an easy path, if you know, raising children and when you're seeing these signs of depression. It can be really scary. And I think you're right, there's you know, parents want to be really protective of their children and protect them from these difficult feelings or difficult experiences. And it's a lot of stress, it's a lot of pressure. And so that's another thing too, like, I recommend, and I'm sure you've kind of heard this from

other speakers is, you know, if your child is getting treatment for depression, you know, it's, it could be really helpful to ask, you know, yourself, what kind of support do I need? You know, would it be through a parenting group or just having a close friend or your own therapist to talk to, because so many things can get stirred up when, you know, when children are going through this, getting your own help or getting family support also sends a message to your child, that they're not a problem, and it's a family concern that you're willing to work on together. The good news is that most kids recover from depression. And the experience of asking for help, getting support and feeling cared for by their family is a resource they can return to many times over in their life.

K

Kira Dorrian 26:11

And I love that idea that it sends the message that you're not a problem, that we're trying to deal with that, we love you and we want to work with you. And I think that's, I think that's really it. I mean, that is, that's a very powerful perspective.

D

Deana Thayer 26:26

Mm hmm. Well, and here's the other thing with that, with that parent support side that I was thinking about, as you were talking, Liz is, it's also great modeling for them to see, look, I'm an adult, and I'm also going to get some support right now. So it's not like you're the, you're the "problem child," right? Everyone sometimes has hard times and they get support for them. And that's how we work through them rather than just trying to push it aside. We're working through something and not it's a problem to solve. I'm a person who needs some support right now. So the modeling piece is really nice, too. I was thinking about that, as you talked about it. I'm thankful that you did that, like highlighted, like as a parent, you get, you get some support to take good care of yourself.

K

Kira Dorrian 27:05

Yeah. And that last piece about if you, if you walk this well, if you send that message to your child like, hey, we're in this together, we're going to work on this together. They return to you for years and years to come. Because you've set the tone for when things are hard. I'm here, I've got you. I'm a safe place.

D

Deana Thayer 27:23

They'll want to come to you instead of, I'm not going to tell my mom or dad about this. Yeah. So if our listeners hearing this have found this helpful and might have follow up questions, or maybe are even interested in working with you, how can they find you? Can

you tell us how our listeners can connect with you? If they want to learn more?



Elizabeth Vu 27:44

Yeah, absolutely. So anyone can find me at my website, which is [innerrootscounseling.com](http://innerrootscounseling.com).



Kira Dorrian 27:53

Awesome. Thank you so much, Liz. We really appreciate your insight and that beautiful definition. I will, I will personally carry that with me as a, as a compass. I think it's just really great. And everything you brought to the table today is just so helpful for our listeners. So thank you so much for being with us.



Elizabeth Vu 28:09

Thank you so much for having me.



Kira Dorrian 28:11

Well, everyone, we hope that you found Liz's thoughts on this topic helpful. I know that I did. Deana, I'm sure you did, too.



Deana Thayer 28:19

Absolutely. And it's a heavy one and an important one. So I really appreciate her thoughts.



Kira Dorrian 28:24

Yeah, absolutely. And we just want to remind you as listeners that if you are looking for some extra support in your parenting journey, feel free to join the FFP family and become a member. We have membership options available. If you go to [futurefocusedparenting.com](http://futurefocusedparenting.com) and click on membership, you can see all the different ways to engage with us and support the show. We thank you so much for listening. We're so grateful to our listeners. If you haven't yet subscribed to the show, we really recommend hitting that subscribe button so those episodes just pop up in your feed every single week. And if this episode was helpful, do share it with a friend. As Deana and I talked about at the top of the show this particular series is one that we hope is going to reach outside of the FFP community, because there are a lot of parents who would benefit from hearing all

the wonderful thoughts that our experts have brought to bear. For this particular series next week we finish our final episode of the mental health series, we're going to be talking about self harm. It's a heavy one, but really, really important. So do be sure to join us for that. Thank you so much for listening, and we'll be back with you next week. Raising Adults is produced by Kira Dorrian and Deana Thayer and recorded partially in my laundry room and partially in Deana's office. Music by Seattle band Hannalee. Thanks for listening.



### Future Focused Parenting 29:37

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