

BLF Episode 30

Kristin [00:00:04] Big little bestie, welcome back to After Bedtime with Big Little Feelings, your safe space at the end of a long, hard day of parenting. Or maybe you're listening to this midday parenting. Today's episode is one that you're not going to want to miss. We have the world's leading brain health expert on the show, doctor Amen. He is on a mission to revolutionize brain health and eradicate mental health disorders. If that sounds kind of big and crazy, well, it's because it is. This episode is one of the most impactful episodes we have done to date. You will gain so much from this interview, not only for your child, because I know that's why you're here. We all love our kids so, so much. So we're voraciously reading and eating up all of the parenting advice because we just don't want to mess this up. So yes, you are going to learn how to create the healthiest brain for your child, how to instill the best practices so that your child grows up with the strongest mental health possible. And you're also going to be able to do this for yourself. I am so excited for you big little bestie. You are going to walk away feeling amazing after this episode.

Deena [00:01:37] Okay, besties we are truly in are that we get to hang with the doctor Daniel Amen today. This is a dream come true for Kris and I. We will dive into that shortly. But Doctor Amen is on a bold mission to end mental illness by creating a revolution in brain health. So he's scan over 250,000 brains. Everyone from celebs like Miley Cyrus and Justin Bieber to murderers to pro athletes. On top of being a 12 time New York Times bestselling author, including books like Change Your Brain, Change Your Life and his new book coming out this week, actually, Raising Mentally Strong Kids. He's also the founder of Amen Clinics, 11 clinics across the US that empower patients to understand their brain and create a unique plan for optimal brain health with the world's largest database of brain scans for psychiatry. Doctor Amen, welcome to After Bedtime. We are thrilled to be here with you.

Dr. Daniel Amen [00:02:35] Thank you so much. Yes.

Deena [00:02:37] I know this is great.

Kristin [00:02:38] This is great. The parents, we need help. We need help. We need help with ourselves. And we need help with our kids. You know? And brain health is something that I think is kind of missing from the equation when we're talking about good behavior, when we're talking about not messing our kids up, which is probably the number one thing that everybody is always worried about. So we're really, really excited to have you on the show.

Dr. Daniel Amen [00:03:01] Thank you so much.

Kristin [00:03:03] So I want to first ask about this sort of like obsession that you have with brains, because it's different, I think, than anything we all think of when we think of mental health, when we think of psychiatry, we just kind of think of the disorder, the diagnosis. Some medication talked to me about where this the scan and the obsession with the brain came from.

Dr. Daniel Amen [00:03:27] So when I was 18, Vietnam was still going on and I became an infantry medic, or my love of medicine was born. But about a year into it, I realized I didn't like being shot at. And it was like, okay, this is not my thing. And some people like it. And I got myself retrained as an X-ray technician and developed a passion for medical imaging, as our professors used to say, how do you know unless you walk? And that really

stuck with me. And then fast forward six years to 1979. I'm a second year medical student. I just get married to my childhood sweetheart who took a break from me, married somebody else, and she has a two year old and I love this two year old who I end up adopted two months into our new marriage. She tries to kill herself and, horrified. And I have no idea. I'd never lived with someone that had a serious mental health issue, and I took her to see a wonderful psychiatrist, and I came to realize if he helped her, which he did, it wouldn't just help her, help me, help our child, even help our grandchildren. His day would be shaped by someone who was happier and more still fell in love with psychiatry 45 years ago. I loved it every day since, but it's the only medical specialty that never looks at the organ it treats and I knew it was wrong. I hated the term mental illness even back in 1979. It's shaming. It's demeaning. Call someone mental. That's not a good thing. Call my brain, you elevate them and I and I knew back then I was the top neuroscience student and medical student. I knew these were brain health issues. And so I would agitate my professors. It's like, why are you looking at the brain? And then I had this anchor moment that I accidentally to think, but I told my team this. I had this anchor moment when I'm a fourth year medical student and a baby on the unit was cognitively impaired. We could just tell he was cognitively impaired. I'm like, why aren't, you going to scan him. I told my attending neurologist you should scan him. And he's like, I'm going to teach you not to waste money on tests you don't need. And I'm like, how do you know what's going on? Because you didn't look. And anyway, this is going to teach me a lesson. And that night that baby had a stroke because that baby had a tumor in one of the ventricles of his brain. And the doctor actually taught me the opposite. How do you know, unless you look right. And then fast forward to 1991. I'm a double board certified psychiatrist and board certified in general psychiatry in child and adolescent psychiatry. I'm the director of the dual diagnosis unit. That's a psychiatric hospital unit that takes care of drug addicts. And I went to a lecture on brain Spect imaging rocked my world. Everything in my world changes at that moment because okay, I look at the brains, it gives me more information. And so you realize things like depression are like chest pain. It's like, stop giving people the diagnosis of depression because doctors don't give people the diagnosis of chest pain because it doesn't tell you what causes it and it doesn't tell you what to do for it. And I realize depression is the same thing. There are many different causes, and giving everybody an SSRI is insanity. Yet that still goes on. And then I'm going oh, healthy brain, healthy life. And when you think of children because I'm a child psychiatrist, get their brains healthy, their behaviors better. But I think of it's sort of like hardware and software to get their brain right and then never give in to a tantrum. Right? If you give in to a tantrum. You've just taught the child. They can flip out and you'll give them their way. So the rule in my house is if you have a tantrum or an anxiety attack to get your way, the answer is no. It's always going to be no. Go ahead, have a tantrum. And so I didn't have very many tantrums in my house. And I was always and this is another thing to be with your children curious, not furious. And so I'm like, well, that's really interesting behavior. You know, I'm not giving in, but have at it, So think of it like hardware and software. But of all the parenting books and parenting teachers you probably ever interviewed. Nobody's talking about the physical functioning of their brain, you know? How are they sleeping? What are they eating? Have they perhaps had a concussion? And that's why they're acting the way they did. And so in raising mentally strong kids, which I wrote with Charles Fay, who I just dearly love, is the president, beloved Logic Institute. We mix neuroscience with love and logic.

Kristin [00:09:08] And so you mentioned creating a healthy brain in children. And I think we want to get there because I do think everybody sitting at this table kind of agrees that before you get there, we're also transfixed on our children, our children, our children. How do I make them better? How do I stop tantrums? How do I do this? And I think we all agree it starts actually with the parents and the parents brain health. And can we can we kind of

start there in terms of what is the number one thing you would tell a parent to do to raise a mentally strong child just within themselves first.

Dr. Daniel Amen [00:09:45] Then we'll get you mentally stronger, right? If you're not mentally strong, if you don't model the message, you suck as a messenger. I mean, I don't know how else to say that, but, you know, we're a brain health organization. If I didn't model brain health, I would sort of suck as a messenger. So what is mental strength? It's knowing what you want. Being able to act consistently to get what you want and it's definition, action and then managing your mind. Right. And all of us have crazy thoughts. I mean, we just like put it out there. All of us have weird, crazy, stupid, sexual, violent thoughts that nobody should ever hear. The brain is a sneaky organ, and if you can gain psychological distance from the noise, you're going to be much more mentally strong. One of the strategies I talk about in my work, is give your mind a name, because when you give your mind a name, you gain psychological distance from the chatter, from the noise. Too often people believe what they think. And I was 28 years old in my psychiatric residency at the Walter Reed Army Medical Center, when one of the professors said, you have to teach your patients not to believe every stupid thing they think. And unlike I believe every stupid thing, I think, right? Whether it's being jealous or being fearful, predicting the worst or blaming other people for what's happening in my life, and I'm like, oh, I don't have to do that. I coined the term ANTS. Many years ago, used with kids all the time. Automatic negative thoughts that if you're depressed, you're probably invested. If way too many negative thoughts that you believe. And as I teach my patients, it's not the thought you have the make you suffer. It's the thoughts you attach to that make you suffer. So the exercise is whenever you're feeling sad, bad, nervous, or out of control, write down what you're thinking and then just ask yourself whether or not it's true. We have nine different types of ANTS, or nine different ways we distort things to make them out to be worse than they really are. Like fortune telling or mind reading. Guilt, labeling. Blame all or nothing. Thinking. Focusing on the negative. And so write it down. My wife never listens to me. Got that right. It's all or nothing thinking. Whenever you use words like always, never. Every one, every time, it's almost always wrong. Right? My wife never listens to me. All or nothing thinking is that truth. I am like, no, I've written 19 national public television scripts. My share of shows have aired like 160,000 times across North America. She's listened to everyone now, maybe not seven times, but she's of. So it's just the lies my brain generates and people say, well, what did that come from? And your thoughts may not even be your thoughts, right? Then if you have trauma, if your mom or dad or grandma or grandpa had trauma that actually changed their genes. You probably heard this term epigenetics, that what happens in the generations before you change their genes, which means change their eggs and their sperm. And you may have anxious thoughts that have nothing to do with you. My grandfather, when he was 19 years old, his brother got a car from his sister and he didn't know how to drive, in California and got killed by a train. And my grandfather was so traumatized by that. So angry that if I have anxiety, it may not be mine. It may be his.

Deena [00:14:02] My mind was blown when I first learned about epigenetics. I'm like, you're saying that my grandmother, who was a highly traumatized, anxious person, she was she went through so much like that impacted me now. And it's just wild to realize that.

Kristin [00:14:18] And so you're saying the way to reprogram that one easy way? I would say one of the easiest ways is what you just mentioned, even just naming it. And then, of course, probably the myriad of other things you would recommend therapies. But even the act, especially in parenting, I love this example because how many times are we just triggered out of our minds and the thought comes in, I'm the worst mom on earth. How are

you going to show up as a parent? You're just kind of perpetuating the cycle. Now you're going to show up as the worst mom on earth. My kid is out of control and going through that exercise. Is this true? Is like, okay, wait, stop. Is my kid out of control or are they having a hard time? And then you just kind of keep going with that? What a game changer in the moment of parenting.

Dr. Daniel Amen [00:15:02] Well, and that is such a common thought. I'm the worst mom or I'm the worst dad and nobody questions it. So if you don't question your thoughts, you believe them, and then you act as if they're true, I'm the worst mom. Which then means the guilt causes you to not be firm. And there's this vicious cycle of you overreact. I'm the worst mom. You then let them get away with bad behavior, and then you let them get away with bad behavior, and then you let them get away with that behavior. And then the tension has built up so much exploding them. And then you let them get away with bad behavior and then you. So it's this cycle of guilt that perpetuates difficult behavior. And it's like you explode. Probably shouldn't have done that. Not the most helpful thing. All of us have done it right. I'm not telling you, I, I have six, I'm way better now than I used to be. But the idea to break that guilt cycle. But even if you explode, though, you still can't act like that. And if you act like that, they're consequences. Can I just sort of go through the process that I've created in my head? Step number one got to know what you want, what kind of parent you want to be. I want to be firm. I want to be kind. I want to be present. Right. My dad was gone all the time. We were not bonding. Right? 1972 was first time I can vote. He tells me if I vote for Senator McGovern, the country is going to go to hell. And I voted for Senator McGovern because we had no relationship. Country did go to hell. But it was because of Richard Nixon and Watergate. But you have no influence without connection. So I want to be present. I want to be firm. I want to be kind. I want to be good. Kind of child do I want to raise? I want to raise kids that are independent, that are responsible, that are competent, that feel good about themselves. I do not want to raise entitled children. I want them to be competent. I even think after the age of five, it's good to do that with kids. What do you want? What do you want in your relationships? What do you want at school? What do you want for your money? What do you want for your physical, emotional, spiritual health? Like, why are you on the planet? What do you want? And then when they act up, it's like, your behavior getting you what you want. That second part is bonding, right? You have no influence without connection. And we are the least bonded that we have been centuries. Why? Cell phones. And we have three generations now of tired women. Because here in California, 90% of moms work outside the house as well. So their primary caretakers for children. So they are the primary caretakers of children. Both of you know this because you have children, their primary caretakers for the house, and they're working often full time outside of the house. So how do you put all of that together without being a bit worn out?

Deena [00:18:34] This is something we've talked a lot about on this podcast.

Kristin [00:18:38] But, you know, one part, if I may, also because I think some people listening might feel instantly guilty. I might argue that by the time the next generation comes, the male partner, if we're talking about her, the male partner is still lacking sort of right now in our present generation. I think the statistic is even if the woman is the primary breadwinner, she's doing 90% of the household tasks, which is kind of exactly what you're saying. So she is completely burnt out. Maybe by the time we keep going and we get a 50/50, maybe mom's not so burnt out. Maybe both parents

Dr. Daniel Amen [00:19:15] They're ways around. Yeah, because relationships require two things time, actual physical time and a willingness to listen.

Kristin [00:19:25] What is the one thing if we had to let everything go? Because, again, there's so much on social media and our generation is obsessed with our kids and getting it just right and, and do it this way, but don't do it that way and feed them this way and just that. If you would break it down and just say, okay, let everything else go and do one thing with your child to ensure their mental health and their brain development later on. What would the one thing be.

Dr. Daniel Amen [00:19:49] 20 minutes a day? Do something with your child your child wants to do and during that time, no commands, no questions, no direction. So even if you're working full time and I want you to get the kids to help with the housework, right? You want to make them feel competent. Kids who work have much better self esteem as adults. As far as kids who everything is taken care of for them. And it's like, oh, but I have to teach them. So it's like, yeah, when you have any employee, which actually if you do is over teach them and micromanage them initially. So they're doing what you want them to do and it's like, oh, well, I have to oh, I don't want to fuss with them. Well then you're going to end up really fussing with them when they're teenagers, right? So the more you can get them to be helpful, it's an it's an investment that'll pay off. And so people go, oh, I'm not spending hours and hours a day with them. You totally don't need to do that, right? I'm one of seven. If I got in 20 minutes a day with my mother, that would have been heaven. I think it was like 20 minutes a month. I'm fine. I'd sit on the couch and read to her, and I still remember that. And it's such an emotionally positive moment.

Deena [00:21:08] Even just that little bit of time. I can go so far. This is something we talk about too. We've got the ten minute miracle, and it's such a game changer. When you really give that daily, it's small time to them and they're like, yeah.

Dr. Daniel Amen [00:21:22] But it's theirs and they connect and don't talk that much during the time this is females have language on both sides of their brain. Males, mostly just the left side.

Deena [00:21:34] Makes a lot of sense. We want to talk more.

Dr. Daniel Amen [00:21:37] The more you talk the less they're going to behave. Yeah. And you hear this probably a lot that they don't listen to me, but they listen to their dad because their dad uses fewer words and he's often more serious as hell and lives and generally with less guilt because females. I published a study on 46,000 scans looking at the difference between male and female brains. And it's sort of like we're not the same species.

Kristin [00:22:03] Tell us more. And what did they say? More? Yeah, the.

Dr. Daniel Amen [00:22:06] Limbic brain is bigger, which is where bonding occurs. But also put your greater risk for anxiety, depression and guilt too.

Kristin [00:22:14] So we biologically are more hardwired for guilt if we do the same sort of that it's fascinating. This makes we will do the same thing our husbands will do. It'll be like I would never I don't feel bad about that. What do you mean? We're just going to dinner, you know, and.

Deena [00:22:28] I literally got into it with my husband the other day. I was like, so you're saying when you go on a work trip, you don't feel guilty? You don't feel bad about the kids

like you not being there? And he's like, not even a little bit. I was like, that is mind blowing. I battle that every time we're going to go on a trip , every time.

Kristin [00:22:43] Biology. Yeah. Okay. So connection. What I really want to talk about and focus in on is this, this concept of connection, because it's just amazing that the expert on brain health, not only in kids but in adults, is saying, do one thing, have connection and attachment listener. The connection does not have to be hours and 20 hours and give up your job and give up your dreams. You can have both. You can give 20 minutes of special connection. Don't talk. Don't lead the show. Let your child lead the show and you'll foster a healthy brain and better behavior too, in the moment?

Dr. Daniel Amen [00:23:24] Absolutely, because it's harder for them to act out if they're connected to you. So clarity that's the first step bonding time and active listening. So I teach people that's what therapists do. Like if they say something and repeat it back and shut up, repeat it back. And then just listen for the feelings behind what they say. I want to have blue hair, but I would have said that my dad would have flipped out and said, you're not going to have blue hair as long as you live in this house. And I'm like, oh, you don't have blue hair. And he might go, sometimes I feel like I don't fit in or they're all, they're not that way. And it's like, oh, you want to be like the other kids? Or you feel like you don't fit and then just be quiet parents, you know, that's like, oh, I want to download all the things I've learned into your little brain. Don't do that. Listen. Right. They're going to be watching you all the time, and they'll download your values and your experiences. But when you're interacting with them, it's feedback, what you hear. And they get so close to you when you do that, right. How many of us, even as adults, have people who actually listen to us?

Kristin [00:24:40] It feels amazing. Validating, just validating what you're saying. I don't have to agree. And I also want to clarify, I think this makes a lot of sense for older kids, but the disconnect is with the younger kids, people are like, well, they're ridiculous. What do you mean? And I think what you're saying is, even if the kid is saying this crayon is too purpley, you can hear that this crayon feels really purpley, too. Are you going to give them what they want? Are you going to give them the extra screen time or are you going to know? But you can repeat back how you really want more screen time here. That means repeat it. You can hear.

Dr. Daniel Amen [00:25:10] Him. Academy of Pediatrics recommends no screen time for children under three. I think families should have group yes society has rules like tell the truth. Of course, if you say tell the truth, you have to tell the truth. Somebody calls, don't go tell them I'm not here for. I mean, that's modeling. One of my favorite roles is do a mom and dad say the first time. Because if it's the expectation, then when they don't, there can be a consequence. And that became a rule when I read this research that parents who tell children to do something more than five times their chance of abusing that child goes way up because you're angry at the disrespect, right? The second time. It's like, if you have a choice, you can do it now, or here's this consequence. I don't really care. It's up to you.

Kristin [00:26:00] And so our demographic is mostly toddler parents. And so what this means, especially at that age, is the parent has to mean what they say. Maybe the kid is two three years old, they can't clean up their toys. They can't get the shoes on and out the door. That means what you're saying is physically who have been and put their shoes on. Then ask them one time, you know, we're not repeating over and over, please get your shoes on. Please get your shoes on. Please get your shoes on. The kid has to do it the first time, but at the other age you got to step in and show them, hey, the first time we say it or. We're leaving the park. It's up to us to get them out.

Dr. Daniel Amen [00:26:34] I went up to do it generally. Yeah, a couple of times. Yeah.

Deena [00:26:38] And what you just mentioned to. I feel like it really comes into play with us as parents too, like so many of us, you know, there's so many different things that from our experiences growing up, our childhoods, the way our parents reacted to us, that have now wired our brains and we're parenting from these brains, like, what would you say is maybe the number one hack or like tool or something that parents should know about optimizing their brain health?

Dr. Daniel Amen [00:27:09] Well, you know, it turns out that it's this question. I actually worked with BJ Fogg from Stanford for six months on creating Tiny Habits. He runs a persuasive tech lab at Stanford and wrote a book called Tiny Habits. And what's the smallest thing I can do today that will make the biggest difference? So we have 50 of them for the brain, but the mother of all of them is just this one question. When you go to do something today, is this good for my brain? Bad for it? And if you can answer that with information and love, love of yourself, love of your children, you just kind of make better decisions. And quite frankly, most seven year olds know if it's good for your brain or bad for it. I, when, when Chloe was seven, we went to her classroom and I gave a lecture and I wrote 20 things on the board and I'm like, separate this for me. Good for your brain, bad for your brain. And they got 19 out of the 20. Wow. And the only thing they missed was orange juice, which they put in the good category, which has way too much sugar. They want an orange great. Give them the orange. But when you just give them pure sugar with a little bit of vitamin C, it's not good for you.

Kristin [00:28:28] Totally.

Kristin [00:28:37] For the listener, could you quickly summarize the top things that are kind of quote unquote bad for our brain or destroying our mental health? So when I learned this, it blew my mind. I did not associate the things. So with our brain health.

Dr. Daniel Amen [00:28:52] Mnemonic I like a lot called Bright Minds. You want to keep your brain healthy or rescue it. You have to prevent or treat these eleven major risk factors and in an okay, this is a problem and this is something to do. So bright minds the B is for blood flow. Low blood flow is the number one brain imaging predictor of Alzheimer's disease. It's associated with depression, ADHD, schizophrenia, traumatic brain injury, everything time. You know you have low blood flow to your brain. Caffeine. Caffeine is not good.

Dr. Daniel Amen [00:29:34] Nicotine. And we have a vaping epidemic. Yeah. Marijuana. Alcohol. I mean, talk about alcohol. But, you know, some people use it as mommy's little helper, and it's mommy's little destroyer not exercising, having high blood pressure and not being serious about it or being sedentary. And so the opposite of that is exercise. Walk like you're late for 45 minutes, four times a week. It's shown to be equally effective to Zoloft, a really good antidepressant. But with Zoloft, you get sexual side effects. With exercise, it enhances your sexuality. So exercise and the supplement ginkgo from food standpoint, beets, oregano, cinnamon, cayenne pepper, all those things increase blood flow. That's not hard. R is for Retirement and aging. When you stop learning, your brain starts dying. And so sometimes mothers who work just at home feel like my brain is going to mush because I'm just with the tiny one all day long. And so be trying to get into a new hobby, or learn something new in the process to just keep your brain growing. High iron levels prematurely age the brain. Low iron levels. You can't sleep, you're anxious, and you have

A.D.D., so getting some of your basic numbers checked, like ferritin, which is a measure of iron storage, is really important. I is for inflammation. So what increases inflammation, which we think is a root for many mental illnesses having low levels of omega three fatty acids. So I think everybody should be taking an omega three fatty acid supplement. If your microbiome is not healthy, you're likely having inflammation in your body and a lot of pain. And the one thing people don't think about is gum disease. If your gums aren't healthy, your brain's not healthy, your guts not healthy, your heart's not healthy. So become a flossing fool. And my gums were awful because my grandfather is a candy maker and my mother loved candy. So I had a lot of candy. But I also had a lot of cavities and not, you know, being one of seven I don't think we took care of our teeth the way we should have, could have. And so now I'm a flossing fool. Be really good at teaching your kids to love their mouth and care for their mouth. The G is genetics and I think we think about genetics properly. It's like, oh, I'm got diabetes because it runs in my family, or I drink too much because it runs in my family.

Deena [00:32:37] Like a zip. It's just fixed and predestined, like that's what it is, right?

Dr. Daniel Amen [00:32:41] Nothing I used to I have obesity and heart disease in my family, but I'm not overweight and they don't have heart disease because I'm on an obesity heart disease prevention program. Every day of my life. I adopted three of my kids, and all three come from serious addictions on both sides of their family, and I hammer them, lovingly. You are predisposed to have this problem if you never drink, if you never do drugs, you're not going to have a problem. But if you do, there is potential disaster. You need to be on an addiction prevention program every day of your life. I mean, that's why these children are living with me, right? I could adopt them because someone else was not being responsible. Right. They gave in to their genetic vulnerability. The H is head trauma. Mild traumatic brain injury. You go. Hey, Daniel, what's the single most important thing you've learned from 250,000 scans? Mild traumatic brain injury ruins people's lives. And nobody knows about it. Because psychiatrists don't look at the brain. Psychologist don't look at the brain. They make diagnoses based on symptom clusters with no biological data. And that's insane. So your brain is soft about the consistency of soft butter. Your skull is really hard and has sharp, bony ridges. Do not let children hit soccer balls with their head. Do not let them play tackle football. I am not a fan of brain damage, and every study on the impact of soccer on the brain is bad. Every study on the impact of tackle football on the brain is bad. And people go. But what about the teamwork? Teamwork is awesome. They can do it in something else. I think protected play a racket sport. Did you know people who play racket sports live longer?

Deena [00:34:49] Run that.

Dr. Daniel Amen [00:34:50] Everywhere.

Kristin [00:34:52] That you.

Dr. Daniel Amen [00:34:52] Know, all of their.

Kristin [00:34:54] Pickleball included the smaller court with the ball. So we're going to.

Dr. Daniel Amen [00:34:58] Live this week.

Kristin [00:34:59] It will be so. See, it is girls tennis. I love that tennis. You know I think we're.

Kristin [00:35:05] Our generation is really amazing because I think we're all very focused on our child's well-being, especially our children's mental well-being. I don't know that the same was true for our generation and our parents. So that's something that's unique. But I do think brain health, again, is a little bit missing in terms of we're so, so worried about disciplining in the right way and all this. But also wear a helmet also always protects and the brain top in general.

Dr. Daniel Amen [00:35:32] Your brain controls everything you do, how you think, how you feel, how you act. Your brain creates love, it creates and learning. It creates happiness and it creates sadness. And when in your brain works right, you work right. And when your brain is trouble, for whatever reason, you're sadder, you're sicker, you're poor, nothing works. So the first thing is not don't do drugs. The first thing is get them to fall in love with their brain. And it's a term I call brain envy. I always say Freud was wrong. Penis envy is not the cause of anybody's problem. It's the brain. Get them to love and care for their brain. So they're like, oh no, I'm not hitting a soccer ball with my head because I love myself.

Kristin [00:36:27] And how do you foster that self-worth in a child?

Dr. Daniel Amen [00:36:29] But you just get them to love their brain. That's the first thing. And then you teach them not to believe every stupid thing they think and they can learn as young as four. And so I remember a time when my daughter was four years old, she's in the bathroom with my wife, and she goes, I want you to have my ears pierced today because one of her friends in preschool got her ears pierced and her mother said until she was five. No. I kept waiting till I'm five. And I heard this blow up. And then she runs out of the bathroom into my office, which is next door, and jumps in my lap and her lips go on and the tears are coming. And I'm like, what's the matter? And she said, mommy said, I can't get my ears pierced until I'm five. But I'm like, so what's the matter? I can't wait until I'm five. And here the question was, is it true you can't wait until you're five? She goes, yes, I can't wait. I said, is it absolutely true? She said, what do you mean? You can. Are you dying if you don't get your ears pierced. And no lie thought she wouldn't roll her eyes at me until she was 12. Rolled her eyes and said, of course not. And then the fourth question, and those who know the work of Byron Katie will know I stole it from her. How does this though and I can't wait until you're five. Make you feel sad, mad. And my ears are cute. Well, and the fourth question is, how would you feel if you didn't have that thought? Peaceful is what she said. And then the fifth question is just take the original thought and I can't wait until sometime and turn it to the opposite. Shows what you mean. I said, you know, we read a book on opposites recently, tall and small, bad skinny. Oh, I can't wait and talk. And then she just got off my lap and went to play with the dog and four. Yeah, and she can get this. Concept that you don't have to believe every stupid thing you think. And that's mental strength. It's clarity. It's consistency, and it's managing your mind.

Kristin [00:38:45] And when you say consistency, what comes to my mind too? We do these exercises. Let's say they're four they're five, they're 12. But if they're watching Mom and dad lose their shit when somebody cuts them off in traffic or when the water bottle falls down. I mean, this happened the other day where my husband in a different room, he drops something and goes, God, come on. And my five year old is something somewhere else and a block falls down, I hear it go, God, come on, you know. And so we as parents have to do exactly what you just said, walking through all of those depths so that we're doing it at the same time.

Dr. Daniel Amen [00:39:20] Well, and we talk about the rule of 12, which is one of my favorite rules. I think it online. It's got 10 million views or something. When my wife turned 50, I'm like, let's go to Paris. It's I took her Paris. And I said, but let's do it differently this time. Let's just on or the bad things happen and let's not be upset until the 12th thing goes wrong, and let's just count and like, four things got wrong and nobody got upset. Now we moved on to a new house last August, and more than 12 things went up.

Kristin [00:40:00] And I'm like, now I can be upset that I'm allowed to be upset.

Dr. Daniel Amen [00:40:05] The more I can roll with saying so the more mentally strong I am, but not roll over right? You don't have to tolerate people that are not competent, right. Because that happened. So I'm not rolling over. Yeah, but I don't have to be upset because God gave me a big brain for a reason that I can solve problems. And I think the the more you can solve problems rather than be held hostage by them. And I tell my patients all the time and I think to myself all the time, argue with reality, welcome to hell. And so I'm not a big fan of positive thinking. I'm a fan of accurate thinking with a positive spin. So if a flight gets canceled and I end up stranded in a place, I'm like, okay, well, way better to get canceled than to me to be on a flight. The windows pop out. I think that's.

Kristin [00:41:09] True. So you can't control everything on the outside or other people's reaction or a plane getting canceled. But you can control your own reactions and take me. It has taken me 37 years to start practicing, by the way, because I can barely do it. But that is also the number one thing I want my kids to do. We get. So it's such a double standard right where we're like, you be patient, don't get frustrated. We're teaching them all of these things and then we're not doing it ourselves.

Dr. Daniel Amen [00:41:38] And if you're not modeling it, what do you think they pick up at the book?

Kristin [00:41:42] That's why I'm doing it right. I watched my mom get upset when the flight was canceled. I watch my mom be really heightened. Yeah, when it was Christmas morning. So now Christmas morning comes around and my body feels really heightened. You know, we gotta.

Deena [00:41:53] Now it's this practice of noticing your thoughts, your feelings, not letting them be in the driver's seat. And it sounds like that changes your brain when you practice.

Dr. Daniel Amen [00:42:04] When you think on what's right, what's true, what's lovely, your brain works better than if you're predicting disaster.

Kristin [00:42:14] Well, let's say you've been doing all of these things wrong for 37 plus years. Can you change your brain?

Dr. Daniel Amen [00:42:19] Absolutely. That's exciting. And so I do a show on Instagram called Scan My Brain. One of my favorite stories is Troy Glaus, who is a third baseman for the angels and the 2002 World Series MVP. So he's, he's a cool dude, but when he's 45, he's drinking way too much. He he's depressed. He has really dark thoughts. His memories are not good. And because of the alcohol, did you know the 30 million children of alcoholics in the United States 30 million. That's 10% of the population. Anyway, you could just see the family stress. Scanned him. His brain was terrible, and but he just did everything I asked him to do, including not drinking that supplementation exercise, better diet. Two months, lost 15 pounds. Stopped drinking. His moods so much better. I'm like. I

want to see your brain. And I scanned him at two months. His brain's already better. Two months, and then I scanned them again at 16 months. Brain's better still. And I know if he keeps with program, his brain is going to sort of grow younger. Well, how exciting is that?

Deena [00:43:50] Yeah, right. Amazing.

Dr. Daniel Amen [00:43:52] You're not stuck with the brain you have, you can make it better. You know, one thing we haven't talked about yet is brain development. When you're young, your brain is undergoing wild development, and it sort of peaks in blood flow and activity around the age of seven. So little kids, lots of growth, lots of development. But then it starts to slow march down because there's something called pruning. If you don't use these parts of your brain, they tend to disconnect. And myelination and myelination is really important. So when we're born we don't have much myelin in our brain. But when we're two months old in the back of our brain myelinates. And think of myelination as a copper wire. And it gets insulated with the white fatty substance called myelin. When a neuron is myelinated, it works 10 to 100 times faster. So it's becoming much more efficient. And so it starts about two months. The back of baby's brain is myelinated. And now when you smile at them they smile back because they really see you. And then it's this very slow march from their occipital lobes in the back to their parietal lobe. So now they can start to play catch and ride a bike. And the prefrontal cortex, the front third of their brain, is not myelinated until they're 25. And so people have teenagers. It's like you still need to feed them, right? You still need to nudge them that marijuana is not innocuous and alcohol's not an alt food, because if they damage this process, they may never really pick it back up.

Kristin [00:45:41] Oh yeah. So the early years where they were going was before seven. It really matters that what I mean.

Dr. Daniel Amen [00:45:49] It really matters all the way.

Kristin [00:45:50] The whole way to 25.

Dr. Daniel Amen [00:45:52] Yeah. I mean it matters your whole life of course.

Kristin [00:45:55] Right. But right now the.

Dr. Daniel Amen [00:45:56] Insurance industry knew this before. Neuroscientists know it like Wendy, your insurance rates change from being outrageous to being reasonable.

Kristin [00:46:06] 25 that's a good point.

Dr. Daniel Amen [00:46:09] Isn't that interesting? Yeah.

Kristin [00:46:10] Yeah. It's interesting. Yeah.

Dr. Daniel Amen [00:46:21] Another one of my favorite stories in the book is Chloe, who I'm picking on today. She's going to be a hellion. Used to say she's going to be the leader of a gang or a leader of the free world. And we weren't sure if that.

Dr. Daniel Amen [00:46:35] Because she is so intense in her emotions. And her mother would stay, you know, sit with her to do her homework when she was in second grade for like hours. And Chloe would dawdle and, and I looked at her and said, you've done second grade. And three people recommended parenting with love and laughter for her. And she

got it. And she really understand. She really understood who the problem was, which was her. Right. And one day she announced to Chloe, I've done second grade. I'm never going to ask you to do your homework again. It's on you. And if you're okay with the consequences of the teacher being mad at you, if you're okay with not going out at recess, if you're okay if you really don't do your homework of making new friends when you repeat second grade, that's on you. And I know a lot of parents are going to go, whoa, I could never do that. That's too harsh. Well, Chloe had a fit, stormed off, and 20 minutes later came back and did her homework. And no one ever asked her to do it again. And she's going to graduate from the college, and she's just a superstar. She holds the anxiety. If she forgot her lunch, nobody brought it to her. If she forgot her homework, nobody's bringing it to her. If it's cold out and she for under sweater.

Deena [00:47:58] Really letting her experience for choices and what comes with it the consequences. And at the same time, You also talk about not scaring our kids when it comes to discipline, because then that triggers certain parts of the brain where they're not able to learn. So it's a balance.

Dr. Daniel Amen [00:48:18] It's on you to do your homework. Yeah, right. And I'm not going to sit with you and fight with you about it after. And too often parents at four years old are worried about them getting into Harvard. And I'm not a fan of prestigious schools. You know, prestige is a French word. It's, foundation is a French word meaning deceit. And, you know, and so I went to a community college, and I did fine, but I've done pretty good, right? It's it's parents are looking into the future with fear and instilling low self-esteem, like, oh, I can't live up. Like I say in the book, never tell a child. They're smart. Tell them my work. Ha! Praise them for working hard because then if they come up against something I don't work hard and teach them. To ask for help is always okay. And good parents I think are like good bosses, good coaches. I've been blessed to see some of the world's best coaches. I did some work with the Miami Heat last year, and Erik Spoelstra is one of the best coaches in the NBA. I think he sold, signed \$120 million contract or something insane. His firm. If he says something, he means it is very kind, funny. The coaches, you know, bad coaches notice what you do wrong and don't let you forget it. Bad parents notice what you do wrong and don't let you forget it. And often you have to do your own work.

Kristin [00:49:56] Because firm does not mean scaring people, I mean firm. We used to mean that I think when our practices are just like, yeah, I'm I have to be firm. You can't get let them get away with anything. So I'm going to walk in here, I'm going to scream at you and say, what's wrong with you? And that's not it. Yeah, but firm can be loving and have connection at the same time.

Dr. Daniel Amen [00:50:15] But we actually did this study. We talked about what kind of parent you want to be. Are you loving or hostile? Are you firm or permissive. And that gives you four types of parent loving and firm, loving and permissive, hostile and firm, hostile and permissive. And the worst one is hostile and permissive. The second worse one was loving and permissive. Permissiveness is bad for children? But let's not be hostile.

Deena [00:50:49] Yeah, totally. Yeah.

Dr. Daniel Amen [00:50:51] Because you want them to take good care of you when you're old.

Kristin [00:50:55] You also want them to take good care of themselves. So it's really a win win, you know?

Dr. Daniel Amen [00:51:00] And I'm always like I'm always thinking way into the future. Like I love my six children, but I never want to have to live with them. Which means I have to take care of myself. And by taking care of myself, I'm decreasing their stress.

Kristin [00:51:17] Thank you for being on after bedtime. Yeah, man, this was really. Amazing and we appreciate all your insight. This was phenomenal. Yeah, this is great.

Dr. Daniel Amen [00:51:25] What a joy. Thank you for helping me spread the message.

Kristin [00:51:28] Yeah.

Kristin [00:51:31] If you are struggling with toddler or preschooler tantrums, push back discipline, picky eating, just all the confusing things. This podcast. We can only scratch the surface if you need help, Our course Winning the Toddler Stage is here to help. It is aptly nicknamed the Toddler Manual because it truly has every single thing you could possibly struggle with under the sun between the ages of one and six within one course, we're not going to do a bunch of workshops. You have to buy the Sleep Guide and the Picky Eater Guide, and this guide on the that guide. No. Everything you could possibly need for ages one through six is all in this one course. We were never meant to do this parenting thing alone. You deserve to have help. We are here for you. You can find that course at [Big Little feelings.com](https://www.biglittlefeelings.com), and be sure to follow us on Instagram and Facebook. At Big Little Feelings, we give free tips every single day. They might change your life with one free tip.

Deena [00:52:35] Thank you so much for being here with us. This has been an Audacy production. Executive produced by Lauren Lo Grosso, produced by Daniela Silva, edited by Bob Tabaddor and theme music composed by Liz Fall, then studio lighting designed by Shane Sackett and designed by Jackie Sherman. Special thanks to Audacy Executive Vice President and Head of Podcasts Jenna Weiss Berman. And thank you for being here with us. We can't wait till next week.