

216: Being Flexible Instead of Perfect (with Monica Packer)



Full Episode Transcript

With Your Host

Jen Riday

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Jen: You're listening to the Vibrant Happy Women podcast, episode number 216, we're talking about being flexible instead of perfect, which is the perfect topic for a COVID-19 world. Stay tuned.

Hi, I'm Jen Riday. And this podcast is for women who want to feel more vibrant, happy, aligned and alive. You'll gain the emotional, physical and spiritual tools you need to get your sparkle back and ensure that depression, anxiety and struggle don't rule your life. Welcome to the Vibrant Happy Women podcast.

Jen: Hey my friends, it's Jen. Welcome back to another episode of Vibrant Happy Women. I'm so glad you're here. So COVID-19. It's an interesting world, isn't it? Yes, there is suffering and struggle. And I acknowledge that many of you are working. Many of you work in the healthcare profession. And my hat is off to all of you. Thank you so much. Those of you working at grocery stores, those of you providing any essential service. Thank you.

All of us, whether we're working or not right now, have this amazing opportunity to learn from this. We learn our whole lives long, but this is a big one. Our minds will never forget it. There is a definite before and after in terms of COVID-19. But I want to talk about how one of the big things I'm learning and maybe you are, too, is to let go of control and to learn emotional resilience. Two big lessons.

First of all, letting go of control, we can't control the outcome. We don't have a lot of control over when we're going to catch it, even if we're doing physical distancing. We don't have a lot of control over the other people who live with us. We don't have a lot of control over anything except how we feel, how we manage things, what we expect of ourselves and others. So it becomes this beautiful time to stop trying to control and just let go.

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One thing letting go requires of us is to be able to handle uncomfortable feelings. When we can't control something, suddenly we might notice feelings of discomfort coming up for us. Anxiety, fear, worry, sadness. And that's OK. So really, in the end, we're letting go of control and we're learning emotional resilience.

Well, over the next several weeks in the Vibrant Happy Women Club, we're going to be talking about emotional resilience. And that's an important topic because if we can manage our emotions and let people's comments and negativities and frustrations roll off of us if we can be the calm centered lighthouse in the storm, things will feel not only so much better for us, but everyone else around us will benefit, and I love that idea.

Now, no pressure. You don't have to be a lighthouse. You can fall apart. But if you've ever wanted to learn emotional tools, that will help you be more of an emotional rock and less up and down, or at least better able to handle emotions more quickly. Definitely join us in the club for May, it's going to be awesome. You could join us at jenriday.com/join.

Today, I'm talking with Monica Packer from the About Progress podcast. She is a mom of four and she lives in California with her husband. They are doing social distancing like everyone else. She is a former teacher. And she's going to talk a little bit about trying to be less of a perfectionist during this homeschool opportunity we as parents have and more flexible. I like the idea of being flexible instead of always trying to be perfect.

The idea of being a perfectionist comes from again trying to control your outcomes, often outcomes that are totally outside of our control. What would it look like for you to be more flexible in everything you do? Flexible emotionally. That word again, emotional resilience. That is essentially, flexibility. To handle big experiences and big situations and big emotions that come your way. Well, we're going to be talking about this concept of

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being flexible throughout this episode. And I know you are going to love it. It's really good. I especially love hearing about Monica's morning routine. You're going to hear how she really puts an emphasis on movement for herself and for her family, which helps them to feel much better emotionally. So I won't give everything away. Let's go ahead and jump in.

Jen: Hey, my friends, I'm talking with Monica Packer today, and she is the host of the About Progress podcast, which is all about empowering women to take on radical growth in sustainable ways. She lives in the San Francisco Bay Area with her four kids who are ages two to eight and her husband. She's been on the show before. And I'm happy to welcome you back today. Monica, welcome back.

Monica: Thank you so much, Jen. I mean, anytime you ever invite me on, I will be here in a second.

Jen: Well, I think we have similar audiences, a lot of women and moms who are trying to just keep putting one foot in front of the other, like your tagline "to grow", though, in ways that feel balanced. Well, let's talk about Coronavirus, that's what's on everyone's mind right now and how you are doing it with four kids at home, ages two to eight. That's a lot of small children which could burn you out. How are you staying balanced in all of this?

Monica: Well, I think for us going into it, so we're into our six week I think California went into shelter-in-place, one of the first states to do that. So we've been doing this for, you know, a little while now. But I think one of the things that helped us a lot moving into it was just having a sort of plan in place. So a plan, but with flexibility in mind. So we knew some things that we were going to do to help us stay sane, which is to have a little bit of a

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routine, limited screen time, lots of outdoor time, lots of free playing time, but still some structure.

And with that, over the last six weeks, how that's actually played out, that's where the flexibility has come in. You know, we're still figuring out our exact, not even our exact, but what's going to work really well for us and even longer-term since we know we're going to be doing this for longer. So the actual details of it are still taking shape, but just coming into it, knowing that we were going to have some structure and routine that's been really helpful for my kids and it's been really helpful for me.

And also with that, the flexibility, too. So we know well, that's not working, let's try this now or this is really helping, let's make sure we make that a priority each day. But yeah, we're just like everybody else, though. You know, it's a topsy turvy world right now and we're still figuring it out as we go.

Jen: Totally. We'll tell us what your daily routine looks like. I think we all want to be a fly on the wall. I'll share mine as well after you share yours. And maybe it will give someone an idea of something that might work for them. So go ahead.

Monica: Well, I think what I've been trying to do is make sure when I talk about the structure and the routines, I'm trying to make sure we are still committed, both myself individually and as a family to the habits or routines that really help us. So some of those for me have been to still wake up before my kids. So I'm not waking up as early as I was. You know, when the school year was going on.

But even if it's 10 or 15 months before my kids, I'm up, but I'm usually up between 6 and 6:30 and I go for a little walk by myself, just a short walk. And then if I've gone up enough, early enough, I do a little strength training

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before they get up. And then, you know, we do the breakfast gig. We all go out on a long walk-run together. So that's the other half of my walk. And then we do some strength training together if they haven't I don't even know how detailed to get here.

Jen: What kind of strength training do you guys do?

Monica: Yeah, I like to do some home stuff. And one of my favorite workouts is Mom's Strong Move. And it's \$10 a month for two workouts a week. And then you get the prior three weeks before that, too, so you can repeat them as many times as you want. I love them. They're hard, but not going to make you puke. And they make you really strong. I've been doing that for a few years, so they do that with me.

But I also like OpenFit. It's another online service where you can do a whole lot of workouts for like 10 minutes for yoga or strength training or barre or anything like that that you can even think of, Zumba. I think they call it a dance class. So some of my kids do that with me and some of them don't. But either way, we're trying to get out first thing in the morning, get some exercise in, and then I've been doing this thing with them where we play a little guided meditation for kids. And I put one of my older two in charge of the toddler who is like Dennis the Menace as a toddler. He is so cute, but so destructive. So like so it has to be on top of them at all times that I paid them 50 cents to be in charge of him during the meditation.

And then they do Cosmic Kids Yoga, which is free on YouTube while I shower and get ready. And then by 10:00, that's when we start our homeschooling. We do lunch. We do more free time, outdoor time, and reading. And then we do a little bit more school, a lot more free time in reading, dinner. So the rest of the day from there, kind of just flies by because we're just trying to do the things we need to do to help them with school, just balancing what we're getting from our schools and I'm a former

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teacher, so I'm doing a lot of other things. I'm taking some things from my teachers, but I'm doing a lot of my own stuff with my kids, primarily because I don't like them to spend a ton of time in front of a computer. So they're kind of mixing that up a little bit. And, you know, that's what's taking up our days.

Jen: For the home school, they're doing all paper learning or some computer learning?

Monica: Yeah, they still have some computer learning, like www.typingclub.com, which is great. Our schools also have access to that. And they just started doing Google classroom with our school. So I am logging them on there and we're just seeing what assignments they have to print out for them and then we can do that. So not a ton of it. Even what the schools are sending right now, thankfully aren't super like, here watch a million videos. But even if they do recommend, they have a program where it's basically like you're watching people read a story and then, you know, the characters are acting it out.

So we just read out our own because that's just like a show, you know? So we just do something else, and I'm not opposed to shows. We watch a show every single night together as a family and sometimes we watch a whole movie together. But just like my kids go crazy, it's really selfish of me because if I let them watch or do anything on screens, they are just not pleasant to be around at all. So that's like a selfish choice I've had to make for myself. Like this helps our whole family. So I don't judge because everyone has to do something differently. And some kids are really unique in their needs and they need more of that structured and educational apps and all of that stuff. But my kids for some reason seem to have a different trigger in their brain that just like switches off for them.

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Jen: Some kids do. Some of my kids love screens and some of my kids eventually wander away to do something else. So what about your husband? Is he working at work or at home or how is that, where does he fit in?

Monica: So I think I probably should have mentioned that we live in a really small house in America, probably not the whole world, like it's twelve hundred square feet. So we live in a small home. He's trying to work in the back. And sometimes he has to come out in the family room and work while I'm doing things like this, which is nice, but that's been a lot to balance. Honestly, I think the best thing we're finding is to be removed and maybe you're finding that too, to just have them tucked away somewhere else because he is working, you know, ten to honestly sometimes twelve-hour days still at home. So we're trying to figure that out for him too, to have a good setup.

Jen: And what about for you? You have a podcast and you have a business. Are you finding as much time to work as you did before?

Monica: Definitely not.

Jen: Me neither.

Monica: Yeah. Definitely not. And, you know, that's one thing moving into this. I feel like I'm lucky to have that option to say. All right, I know that my primary job right now is to keep our kids happy. And that's OK with me. But we have decided between my husband and I that I still would love at least a few days a week, two hours in the afternoon for him to work out there while they're playing or doing whatever. So I can get some stuff done. But usually, I'd just be myself squeezing in little things here and there like a half hour or so during the day. And then I work primarily at night now.

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But even then, like, you know, it's shifted and the focuses have changed. And I'm just doing the best we can right now. And I'm fine with that. And I'm glad that I don't have to be holed into an eight-hour job like many people do right now. And I don't know how they're doing it. It would be so tremendously difficult.

Jen: Oh, yeah. To focus, with all the kids around or with just being at home, what do you like better now than before, if anything?

Monica: OK, I might not be like a lot of moms listening because homeschooling is very stressful. It's a lot on our plates. But one thing I've been really shocked by is how much happier my kids have been. It's been really great to see their personalities again in the ways we've been kind of missing. We've had a lot of struggles with some of our kids in particular, and they've mostly gone away. So it's been very interesting. Like I wasn't expecting that at all. So to see them thrive in ways and, you know, they miss school. They want to go back. They miss their friends. They miss their teachers.

So I don't know where that's going to take us, but it's making me really consider what we're going to do as a family differently in the future. And maybe that would include homeschooling or half schooling at some point. But I think it's just been a nice respite for them. I think another thing that's been really great is, you know, when I go on those walks, my kids talk in ways that they don't normally do that. Like, you know, my ears are talked off the entire time and it's been so fun, to just hear what's going on in their heads and to really connect in ways that we've needed. And yeah, there's been a ton of stressful moments too, like my 6-year-old who's almost seven, and I did not have a good day yesterday.

So there's still plenty of that going on and still trying to figure it all out. But I have been so happy to slow down. We've spent a lot of time hiking around

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here. You know, you pay a premium to live in California, so I feel like we're taking advantage of the outdoors in ways, you know, with social distancing thankfully, in ways that have been really beneficial for all of us. And we're, you know, learning about Georgia O'Keeffe while we're on a trail. And then they're taking pictures like Dorothea Lange on another hiking trail. And it's just been so fun for us to just have a little bit more creativity, a little more connection, you know, a little bit less of the day to day stress that they were experiencing before or more of the go, go, go. It's been really great.

Jen: Awesome. So, my family, we have not done a lot of hikes, I think, I guess it's because my family was sick and now we're almost done.

Monica: Yes. Oh, my gosh. Yes.

Jen: So how do you do that? Just for anyone who hasn't ventured out yet. How do you do that when you come across other people on the trail? Do you like to say to your kids, "move over. Don't breathe on them." I mean, how do you handle that?

Monica: Well, a lot of the trails we go on are really wide trails. So that helps. But parts of them aren't. And when that's the case, we just go up like off the trail, you know, to get that six feet difference while people walk past.

Jen: That's a good idea.

Monica: It hasn't been a big deal. We just start trying to be really careful. And other people, thankfully, are being super careful, too. Like when they see us, they keep their distance until we're off the trail. So they can walk by.

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Jen: Let's talk about your emotions. What have been the range of your emotions from day one and now into the sixth week of your stay at home order?

Monica: Yeah. You know, we're still figuring things out. I still have my moments where I'm just so stressed about trying to manage different levels of where they're at with their different schooling and their different temperaments. And, you know, we have four very different personalities with kids.

But like I told you, the silver linings for me really have weighed out the stress, especially because of the differences I've seen in my kids. Just to see them transform has just given me the energy. I do feel really exhausted at the end of the day, though, even on a good day, I just feel very tired.

So I'm sure everyone listening can totally agree with that. Just the exhaustion. But most of the time I feel a lot more stable than I thought I would. And sometimes I still get stressed out with the kids or the world or like, what are the unknowns? We're in the middle of trying to decide a lot of big changes as a family. And so that weighs on us, but overall, I feel more curious about where life is going to take us and less afraid.

I think that has something to do with, you know, just doing our best to focus on what matters. And sometimes that means we don't do anything the teachers send home. And sometimes that means we do everything the teachers send home. And sometimes that means we leave everything and just go for a hike. And other times that means like we need a full day of structure. And just doing that has kept me more even than I expected to be going into all of it.

Jen: That's really great. Well, one of the big kinds of components of your podcast About Progress is kind of the idea of making progress, but not

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trying to be perfect. And I know in the last interview you explained you're a recovering perfectionist and I love that you shared that idea of being curious but not afraid. And I've heard you kind of mentioning flexibility. Tell us more about how you're able to let go of the idea of doing it perfectly and instead choosing that flexibility and curiosity.

Monica: OK. So just a little like zoom out here about how a perfectionist would navigate something like this. I mean, either a perfectionist is going to be so rigid and be holed into their routines and all the things are being sent home from the school and trying to manage their kids and keep everything there, that it will be almost destructive and unhealthy both for themselves and for the family, or because they can't do everything the way they needed to in the past.

You know, in terms of their personal habits and routines, they don't do any of it because it's hard to see the middle ground. And I honestly think most perfectionists are the latter kind, the ones who think if I can't do this all, I'm a failure. So that's why I think if this were to happen, you know, five years ago, for me, it would have been completely different in how I would have been able to manage it emotionally, because I've worked so hard on ditching this perfectionist mindset and really just leaning into the mess a little bit more and leaning into the discomfort that growth entails and pushing myself in ways that were hard and uncomfortable and a little stressful, but so much better for me.

But with curiosity in mind not what this rigidness like I have to achieve this. I have to do things in this way. I have to be this kind of successful. No, it was more about the process. And that's how I feel about this time as I've been looking at this as an opportunity and something for us to, you know, experience together and to learn and grow from. I've been able to be more curious about: is this working? Is that working? Let's try this and less about success, failure mindset. It's more about just leaning into the messiness of

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it and learning how to thrive. And with that, you know, we talked about how I've been still trying to wake up early. I think it's been really essential for me to figure out what are the habits that I can uphold myself so I can be strong enough to deal with everything, but not in the way I was before.

Like before I would have like, you know, gone for an hour-long walk by myself or a run before my kids woke up. And now I like count 15, 20 minutes and I go for a walk with them. But we go so slow and stop every three feet to look at a deck or a ladybug. And then we run for two minutes and then we stop. But it's not frustrating like it was in the past, especially when I was all about, we must do things this way. Also, we're doing more too, because of that, too, because we lost that mindset. We're growing more because we're trying. It's about the trying. I think that's really where you find yourself and how your is going to survive is, finding fulfillment in the trying, not the outcomes.

Jen: In the trying. So what helped you shift your mindset around that? It's easier said than done, right? Or did you just practice? What do you remember? What helped you shift there?

Monica: I think for me, I came to a fork in the road. I really had that big moment. Not even like a definable moment, like I was walking down the street and then this happened. But more of just I hit a season of my life where I realized if I keep going this way, I am going to continue being so deeply unhappy and resentful and not the kind of mom and wife and woman I want to be. That something needs to change.

And, you know, I had had a big history with perfectionism and that led to really severe eating disorders in college and anxiety, depression, like everything there. And I worked really hard on my recovery. But I was missing still how it was so embedded in my psyche and my subconscious and was holding me back from trying and making mistakes in ways that

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made me afraid to try, but also kept me trapped. So I really came to that fork in the road where I realized I was a shell of who I wanted to be and that something had to change. And I don't think it really came all at once. But I remember knowing that what I needed to do was lean into my mediocre side.

I had wanted to start a blog for like eight years. And by the time I started this, you know, over four years ago, that was not a big thing anymore. But I knew I had this on my list. So now I'm just going to try these things I've had on my list forever and I'm going to lean into the mediocre side that I almost called it all Mediocre Monica. I was so terrified of mediocrity like my entire life that that either made me obsessive to the point of destructiveness or it kept me from trying. So I was leaning into it's OK to stink at things.

It's okay to not be good. It's OK to try things and just enjoy the trying. And I don't think I had a specific mantra then, but over time I've come up with virtues of what these have turned into for me, of finding joy in the process, of knowing that the point is the journey, not the outcome. You know, things like that that have really centered me in these times. And they are still lessons I have to keep learning, like I'm still not immune to this creeping up on me, but just being aware of it. And, you know, running head on to things and trying even with this homeschooling gig and being home with the pandemic. It's been all part of that longer journey for me. And I'm so grateful that I've been through what I have so that I feel like I can handle this better than I would have in the past.

Jen: That's beautiful. And you mentioned the word "mistakes". Right now, you're feeling okay to be mediocre, but you used to worry about mistakes. How do mistakes fit into all of this now, your view of mistakes?

Monica: I know a lot of people say failure is not really failure. And I agree with them to a certain extent. But I think honestly, that's still not going to

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push a lot of people to be willing to fail because they're like, I don't want to do that. One of the women I was teaching in an online class about procrastination; and she said, "I don't like to learn from failure." And my response to her was, "well, then you don't like to learn."

Jen: Oh, yeah.

Monica: And you know what? I could say that to her because I've lived both sides of that. I've learned the fear of making mistakes. So for me, I really, truly do own that. Failure is hard. It's stressful. It's not fun. It's very difficult to go through, but it's necessary. Without it, I think when people say failure is not a failure, it's just another way to success. They're kind of almost downplaying how hard it can be. But when you go into it, knowing like that actually is the point. This is how it's supposed to feel. I'm not supposed to be an overnight success. I am supposed to be floundering sometimes. I am supposed to wonder if anything I am doing is helping. That is the point. Then you aren't doing it right.

Jen: Well, looking back at the big quote-unquote "failures" in your life, what do you think the point was? I mean, if you were to kind of draw a lesson from each of them?

Monica: I still think I'm learning how much I leaned into fear that's been an overarching failure of mine. Just how I let fear either stop me from doing things or doing things for the wrong reasons. Just being so hell-bent on proving myself and rising above people. Another common theme of, you know, a mistake of mine that's been interwoven through a lot of things is pride. I just thought I was trying to be a good person before; I'm just trying to do all the things right and be a really good person. But when I really got real about that I had to face that a big part of it was not that I just wanted to be good, it's that I wanted to be better.

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Jen: Oh, yeah. That's a big one, isn't it?

Monica: And I've had to kind of get comfortable with not being the best person in the room to run into those, you know, I've almost put myself in those situations as much as I can so that I get more comfortable with not being like the fittest person in the room or the most successful or the best mom or whatever it is. And that's helped me base that on to know it's OK.

And I say one other thread, too, is disconnection. When you are trying to be displaced from other people, either because you want to be better than them or because you're so terrified of being less than that you remove yourself from people because of this position. Like I'm not good enough because I'm not perfect, so I'm going to remove myself. That's been a big thing I'm still working on. I mean, I'm talking about this with even friendships and my marriage and things like that that I realized I, you know, putting people at arm's length so they don't really see me is something that I'm still working on. That's really interwoven with my struggles I face and the failures I've made along the way.

Jen: Do you find, as you've learned, to truly accept yourself that the distance you try to put between yourself and others decreases?

Monica: Oh, yeah. And let me say I think a lot of people have a hard time with, you know, I love the self-love movement, I think it's great. But sometimes it's really hard to just move right into that. I think it really does just start with acceptance, like you said, like when you accept yourself, what you're doing is you're seeing yourself the good and the bad. And it's not that you're excusing yourself from the bad. And that's OK, take me or leave me. You know, this is who I am, I want change.

But it's more of just this openness of seeing yourself for who you really are and noting the good and noting the things you want to work on and moving

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into that in a way that's much more centered because you don't have to prove yourself to others. You're accepting that this is who I am, I will always be human. And these are the ways I am wanting to improve. And this is how I'm going to lean into that and work on it.

Jen: Love that. And being human, it's all about the strengths and the weaknesses.

Monica: Definitely. And, you know, I actually had, five years ago was when I hit that fork in the road. I signed up for therapy again. So I had already been recovered. You know, in recovery from eating disorders like eight or more years. So I thought I was okay until I hit that fork in the road. And then I went back to therapy to just kind of get more to the roots of what was going on with me then.

And I had my therapist said to me, "why does Monica Packer not get to be human?" And that really, oh, like a release, you know, almost stabbed me in the heart, but in a good way, like yeah, you're right. Like, why do I not get to be human both for myself and to others? Why do I do that to myself? And so in a weird way, owning my humanness has enabled me to work better on my weaknesses than I had in the past. And I have grown exponentially the last five years than I did like the prior 10 to even 15 years, because I'm allowing myself to see myself as human now and it's OK.

Jen: What a relief. I can just feel the energy. Why do we all not get to be human? That's really really good.

Monica: Well, and part of that, too, I think, Jen, is that people are so terrified of the fact that they think it's a fact, the belief they have about themselves that I am unusually broken like you don't understand. I am unusually broke and like I am more broken than most people like it's harder for me than most people to do these things. But that's where, you know,

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when you accept like, no. Like part of being human is feeling disappointed in yourself sometimes and being and seeing, oh, I have things to work on. It just changes it. It shifts you to a place of choice and agency instead of just like this martyr position of I'm broken.

Jen: I'm curious if you feel the same way, but for me, getting to talk to so many women in the podcast interview made me realize, oh my gosh, we all are "broken" quote unquote, we're all suffering. We're all struggling. You have to stop comparing your insides to their outsides, so to speak. Have you found that, too?

Monica: Totally. I think there is no better personal self-development thing than hosting your own podcast. It just forces you to grow in so many ways. I mean, you're doing things you've never done, over and over again. You're putting yourself in situations and places constantly where you don't know what you're doing and you're afraid all the time. But then you also learn so much and you connect so much. And everything I've done with the podcast alone has taught me that we seriously are all are struggling and trying to figure it out. And that's the process.

Jen: I love that. Well, you mentioned getting to be human. So that question five years ago, why does Monica Packer not get to be human? I want to ask a version of that question, now, in this coronavirus world, what does it look like for Monica Packer to be human during COVID-19?

Monica: For me, it means I've snapped at my kids a few times, you know, and I've had to go to them after and be like, I'm sorry. I was frustrated because you were being sassy with me and I didn't handle it well. So I apologize, you know, like talking it out, being human means, you know, we talked about those personal habits. It means being flexible with them. I can't do what I could do six weeks ago. I can't be as productive. I can't

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have as long of a to-do list. And I also am not going to handle everything great each day.

So I think me being human through COVID-19 has been equal parts, persistence, and patience with myself, persistence to lean into what matters, how I can move the needle forward, both with my personal habits and my family's habits and routines and being there for my kids. But patience, because this is new for all of us. Patience with our time restrictions, patience with our energy restrictions, and our space restrictions. You know, it's been equal parts, patience, and persistence that is helping me be human through this in a good way, I think.

Jen: Isn't that interesting? You mentioned energy restrictions and space restrictions. And isn't that the most interesting thing, it's like this COVID-19 world is squeezing us in all these ways that matter, energy, space, time. And what do you think it's forcing you to learn? Maybe that's a redundant question, but maybe asking it in that way makes it more interesting to think about.

Monica: I think it's forcing me to learn that I have to lean into my priorities for real. Like I just can't say these things matter to me and not really take action that supports those priorities. Right now, we are face to face with I say my kids are our priority. But now that they're home all day and I'm in charge of their schooling and their education and their wellness and health and all the ways that I thought I was before. But now I am really face to face with, am I really going to align my actions with that, that they are my priority or am I going to be resentful?

You can have our moments of that, for sure. But I think it's really put me face to face with, do you really prioritize these things? And here's your opportunity, it's not fun. We don't have a choice. So we're not really presented with choices we want right now. But can I still be the person I

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want to be and accepting the choices that were handed to me in this situation and be the best I can to still prioritize what I really said I prioritized before what my values were and what mattered to me with how I am acting and how I'm showing up within the choices that have been made for me.

Jen: So if you were to list your top three values or priorities right now, what would those be in this COVID-19 world?

Monica: If I were to name them into just even single word things, I think connection, creativity, both for myself and my kids. Nature, and with that, this is a weird value, I didn't exercise on values. You know, you have like a list of over 50 values and you do this exercise to whittle it down. And I kept coming face to face with the one value that I wanted to say, "oh, I shouldn't value that." And it was beauty. For me I was like, that's shallow. But then I realized, no, it's that I try to see beauty in everywhere I go, that's why being outside to me is such a value because of the beauty I see around me, because I'll tap into it and show my kids, look at that beautiful view. Look at the ridge. Do you see the unique colors in that rock?

It's leaning into all these parts I've said like the creative side, too, I've realized I value making things beautiful and noticing the beautiful around me. So that's actually been a weird one that has come up even in this COVID-19, is just like helping my kids tap into what is beautiful about where we are right now and what we're doing and what they're creating and all of that. So I think that connection, creativity, nature, beauty.

Jen: Sounds like you're rocking it then because you're doing all those things.

Monica: You know, I feel like if five years, it would have been completely different, I keep saying that again. Like, I think I'm so grateful that I have an opportunity now to test how far I've grown and to also recognize how far I

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still want to go and what I want to shift after this period is over and what we can do differently as a family to connect to the things that brought us together now and to find those silver linings back in our normal day to day life when this is over, for sure.

Jen: Well, how will your after be different than your before? Do you think?

Monica: I told you, I'm really considering homeschooling, which again, is very surprising. So that might be on our priority list. But I do know that I want to make sure that my kids are outside as much as possible together as a family, that we are outside and that maybe we're not as signed up for as many extracurricular things. Maybe we can tell those, you know, rein those in a little more and we actually don't do a ton. But I want to rein that in even more. And I want to prioritize even just eye to eye connection with my kids. Our time will be more limited together for sure after this.

But that's been the greatest gift is like actually seeing the freckles on their noses and the color of their eyes and their funny expressions and just being able to make sure I am making time for that. And I'm talking about like two minutes. You know, a day when we're back to school and all that, if we end up going back, which again, they very much want to do. But I can still have that control over how much I'm willing to put aside on my to-do list to really connect in the ways that they're needing and that I'm need too whether that's, you know, being outside or just looking in their eyes and taking a few minutes to ask them some questions and listen.

Jen: You know, two of my boys went to a wilderness therapy program and part of the therapy is the movement. The methodical walking because walking is so therapeutic. You're stimulating both sides of the brain. You can talk while you walk. I'm super curious about how much do you think your kid's happiness is related to more of this movement and outside time? Or is it more just the lack of stressors or both?

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Monica: Honestly, I think it really is mostly them being able to move and be outside and have freedom to learn and play. I mean, we know this scientifically we know this and I need this even as a former teacher, like all the science shows that kids learn best through unstructured play and time outdoors. And that's what's been so great about leading into this time, like we have that opportunity. And I don't know how that will translate, but I know that I'm going to do my best to make sure it translates more to our regular life after this.

But also, the science shows, too, that, you know, feelings follow movement like you have to take action. You can't wait to feel motivated to do something. You do something to feel motivated. It's the same thing with, I think, so much of emotions not to negate you know, we have some kids who really struggle with some deeply emotional and mental struggles. And so as not to negate that, you snap your fingers, decide to be happy. But even with them, it's been a lot of taking action, like a list of here are the things that make this kid happy.

Like we actually have a list. Like here are some things that we can do to help you feel the way you want to feel. And it's not you know, deep breathing is part of it. One of my kids likes to cook, it's so funny? My 6-year-old likes to cook, so he likes good food. And so he'll just make himself this weird burrito thing that I would never eat, ever. And it makes him so happy and jumping on the trampoline, you know, just little things like that. It's equal parts, you know, experience and science.

I think it really does show that movement creates the feelings you want. But yeah, sure, there's less stressors too. I think, for one of my kids was getting bullied pretty significantly at school before and I almost took that child out of school a few weeks before the pandemic hit. So honestly, that's probably a big part of, you know, being removed from the stressors there for that

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child, in particular, it has been really helpful, even though they still want to go back to school. And I'm like no, then you have to face all the mean kids again.

Jen: I know it's tricky. And then sit in those desks all day. And, I know, it is hard.

Monica: You know, maybe we'll just rethink a lot of our education as a nation. I mean, maybe, it's hard, this is so hard, I get it, and again, I love I loved being a teacher and they work so hard. But maybe we'll decide, hey, we need to double our recess time. Maybe we need more unstructured playtime at school, creative time, more stem.

Maybe things will shift there. And maybe we have power as parents to, you know, put the bugs in the ears of people and try to make that happen more, and if not, we can still decide how that works for us at home. You know, we can still do that. We can decide to not do all the things, all the soccer and music lessons and sports and just decide what things really are going to light us up and the kids up and the rest is giving them that space and time they need.

Jen: Yeah, for sure. You said get that bug in the air. Everyone email your superintendents with your ideas and start to get the bugs planted.

Monica: Yeah why not? Because I'm all about a public education like I would love for that. But yeah, I feel like I'm going down a whole other tangent here, but I think at the same time, like why not? Why can't we think about that stuff? Like what can we shift in our education to better match the benefits that the kids might be having now? And actually, I'm telling you so many different things.

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But two of my kids have a counselor. You know, they meet with her over FaceTime now. And she was like, "wow, they are doing really well today." I'm like, "I know." She's like, "why do you think they're happy?" I was like, "you know, honestly, I don't want to tell you this, but I think it's because they're home." She said, "a lot of my parents are saying that, Monica, that their kids are happier."

And I was like, wow, what is this? You know, and not to say that that's how it needs to be, because I still have no idea. But maybe it's still an opportunity for us to think about what is helping them and how can we interject that more to life after this and going back to school. And I don't know what that looks like yet.

Jen: Yeah, me too. I'm thinking about it, though. I hope we all get some collective clarity.

Monica: Yeah. I mean, we should do a big think tank here with your audience, just like come up with things to change the world. Yes.

Jen: OK, everyone email me your ideas at support@jenriday.com, I'm serious.

Monica: You have to let you know if you do that because I want to hear it, too.

Jen: Well, so my niece did an outdoor preschool, they actually it was called preschool in the woods and they did this in Germany. The only time they ever went inside was when it dropped below a certain temperature. Otherwise, they were in snow gear all winter. They did everything outside. And I thought, how amazing.

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Monica: Can I just share a resource, too? Because I know you like to kind of share books they've read or mentioned. A book that really shifted how I was going to do parenting, because like I told you, I'm a recovering perfectionist. Like before I have my kids, I was like, well, they're going to be reading by two and a half and we're going to do flashcards every day, you know like I thought I'd be very militant. But a book called Boys Adrift, changed and actually, this is before I had kids, so I have applied this to all my kids regardless of gender. But Boys Adrift totally transformed the way I view what it means to raise a good child and how to do that and actually the surprising amount of it is less structure.

Jen: Yes, I believe you. Have you read The Last Child in the Woods?

Monica: No.

Jen: Similar book. Yeah, I'm going to read yours, you can read mine. We'll take notes from each other.

Monica: Yeah I mean Finland right, they have one of the top educations in the world and their kids don't learn to read until they are 7 or older because they're spending most of the time outside, but yet they have some of the smartest kids in the world and the best education system.

Jen: Isn't their school day much shorter as well?

Monica: Yes, my next-door neighbors are Finnish, so I talk about this with them all the time too, just how different...

Jen: Let's do this, everyone let's change the world! Love it, I hope maybe we can, why not? Oh well Monica this has been fantastic, my mind is going to churn.

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Monica: Mine too. You are so sweet to just let me go in all different directions.

Jen: It's wonderful, thank you. I appreciate your story about being flexible and curious and easy on yourself, and really you're doing the same things with your kids, allowing them the less structured time, it's so beautiful.

Monica: Who knew, that's one thing I'm really grateful for, I am a way more relaxed person than I ever thought I was, and I'm so glad.

Jen: Way to go.

Jen: Alright I loved everything Monica shared especially that idea of being flexible instead of trying to be perfect, so important. We are going to continue talking about this topic in the Vibrant Happy Women Club this week, you can join a soul circle, you can join me for a weekly coaching call, a little bit about that. Lots of women tell me that are feeling bored, lonely and disconnected, the club has actually been a really really amazing place throughout April, we have had a self-care hour together, we all went out on a walk, and showed each other our houses and yards, we have had a greeting and crafting hour, we have had lessons on decluttering, we have had coaching calls, we have done a number of guided meditations, which really help us to stay calm and stay focused and feel better about what's happening right now.

All members of the club have free access to the Vibrant Happy Women online retreat, which is really cool, so if you've been thinking about doing that, just join us in the club and you'll get free access to all future Vibrant Happy Women retreats, really cool. Anyway, we are going to continue to keep meeting very frequently, so, you have uplift and positivity and inspiration in your days no matter how long this stay at home order continues, wherever you are in the world, I would love to invite you to join

[Vibrant Happy Women](#) with Jen Riday

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us, you deserve to feel good and to feel productive and to feel positive, and again throughout May we'll be talking about emotional resilience, how to handle the big emotions that happen when you're spending so much time with your loved ones.

The big emotions that happen when you're shifting into fear and anxiety about Coronavirus, and all the other things you might be feeling right now. If that sounds appealing, if you'd like to connect with other likeminded women, you can join us in the Vibrant Happy Women Club at jenriday.com/join. Well my friends I will be back next week talking with the beautiful and brilliant Jaya Rose, all about emotions and love and fear, it's a great topic, I can't wait for you to hear it, until then, make a vibrant and happy week.

If you enjoy this podcast, you have to check out the Vibrant Happy Women Club. It's my monthly group coaching program where we take all this material to the next level and to get you the results that will blow your mind. Join me in the Vibrant Happy Women Club at jenriday.com/join.