

Full Episode Transcript

With Your Host

Jen Riday

Jen Riday: You're listening to the *Vibrant Happy Women Podcast* episode number 218. We're talking all about emotional resilience for yourself and for your kids.

Hi, I'm Jen Riday. 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.

Hey, my friends, the world's changing, isn't it? Yes, there is struggle. Yes, there is suffering, but there is a great pause I like to call it happening now for many of us and my guest today, Rachel Macy Stafford from *Hands Free Mama* blog is going to be talking about how we can be more emotionally resilient and really start to pay attention to the landscape of our emotions.

In this interview she compares our emotional health to a garden. We can either have a dried up, brown, dehydrated, crusty garden. You can imagine it. It's what my garden looks like right now. I'm about to plant the new one. Or we can fertilize and water and add topsoil and help beautiful, colorful vegetables and flowers and anything else we want to thrive in that garden.

If you imagine the two gardens side-by-side you know which garden you want to have emotionally speaking. The beautiful thing, which we'll talk about in this interview, is when you have the choice of sitting in and being in each garden. Of course, you want to choose the beautiful one. Well, this applies to our children and teens. They are going through emotional situations right now with anxiety and grief over how things have changed. Frustration, boredom, emotions that aren't exactly comfortable and I know you would love for them to be able to come to you.

The question is, is your garden lush, and vibrant, and verdant? Or is it dry and crusty? Are you taking care of yourself in a way, emotionally that your

kids can feel that centered, grounded calm inside of you and feel comfortable enough because of it to come sit in your emotional garden and have the support and love they need?

Okay, well, the garden analogy is big, and I have been thinking about it ever since I talked with Rachel. I'm recording this after the fact, and I want you to listen and keep this garden image in your mind. How does your emotional landscape look right now? What does your garden look like emotionally? Is it dry and kind of a mess? Are you numbing by spending too much time on Netflix and your phone? What can you do to make your emotional garden vibrant and lush and amazing so your kids can feel the beautiful sense of calm that emanates from you?

Well, we're going to be talking about that in this interview. Now, before we dive in, I want to let you know we had the second ever Vibrant Happy Women online retreat last month and we raised enough money to purchase 55,000 pounds of food for hungry families. I don't think I've ever felt more proud of an achievement, that I got to be a part of this.

So, because so many people are suffering without enough to eat, without jobs, with unemployment we are doing it again on May 16th. I would love to invite you. Everyone who attends, you do pay a little price, but that price all proceeds will be donated to Feeding America. I want to collect enough to purchase even more pounds of food to feed hungry families. I love the thought of spreading love and helping ourselves emotionally to fertilize and water our emotional gardens in the process.

The next Vibrant Happy Women online retreat is happening May 16th. We are going to do one every month until the end of the pandemic. This is your chance to let go of anxiety and stress and frustration and resentment and to clean your garden out so you have room for the good stuff to grow so it can be lush and verdant like I talked about.

Creating a space to come virtually, even if it's online to do that gardening for your soul, for your emotions is so important. I promise you will leave the retreat feeling rejuvenated. Everyone who attended last time loved it. Almost all of them signed up again, and I would love to invite you to come as well.

To join us simply go to JenRiday.com/onlineretreat. It's just \$37 for a fourand-a-half hour virtual event. We have music, we have movement, we have journaling, we have connection with other women from the Vibrant Happy Women world. We have some amazing guests as well. We'll be listening to Dr. Laura Froyen. We will be listening to Heather Ambler and we'll be listening to Jill Payne, the be a freaking dime lady.

You will get to sit there on screen with them and talk to them and ask them questions and figure out how these things apply in your life so you can feel emotionally juicy rather than brittle. We want an emotionally juicy garden. All proceeds will go to Feeding America. Let's make a difference for ourselves and for others. Join us, again, it's at JenRiday.com/onlineretreat.

All right, without further this garden analogy, I know you're so intrigued. We're going to jump into this interview with Rachel Macy Stafford from Hands Free Mama and you'll hear where does this analogy come from and how can we make sure our gardens are very, very juicy and vibrant. So, here we go. Let's dive in.

Hey, everyone, my guest today is Rachel Macy Stafford and she's a writer with one goal, to help people choose love as much as humanly possible. Hey, that's really cool. Her latest book is *Live Love Now: Relieve the Pressure and Find Real Connection with Our Kids.* She is also the New York Times' best-selling author of *Hands Free Mama, Hands Free Life,* and *Only Love Today,* a certified special education teacher, and an in-demand speaker and beloved blogger. Rachel, where do you live and how are you doing right now with COVID-19?

Rachel Macy Stafford: So, I'm in Georgia and, unfortunately, the leadership in our state has decided that it's okay to go ahead and open things up which is very worrisome for many of us and we don't think it's time. I can definitely understand why some people feel like we need to get the economy going, but our cases here are still going up and from what the medical experts say that's not the time to start coming and being together in public.

So, that's a concern, and so we're going to try – our family, to do what we can control and that is we're going to keep staying home and thinking of people who are vulnerable and we want to do our part to keep as many people safe and healthy. So, I'm really trying to stay focused in the present moment and do what I can do from home to help be a presence of calm and positivity. I'm loving my family and trying to just focus on what I can do and not get too worried about the things that I can't control because that's, as you know, not a healthy place to be in.

Jen Riday: Well, you are essentially a resilience expert, in my opinion, from your book *Live Love Now: Relieve the Pressure and Find Real Connection with Our Kids.* Then, your book is coming out and this pandemic happens and you get to live it. So, tell us who you're living with and how you're applying your own teachings.

Rachel Macy Stafford: Yes, it's really quite amazing. The timing on this book, *Live Love Now,* it was an urging on my heart that I tried to avoid and I tried to ignore, but it wouldn't go away and I had been visiting classroom for about two years, got invited in to talk about being an author, but I'm a former special education teacher who worked with kids with emotional and behavioral issues.

So, I really felt like it was not an opportunity to just talk at the kids, but I wanted to talk with the kids, and what I ended up coming away with after many, many visits was a message that they wanted to share. Someone

had asked them, finally, if you could give the world one message what would it be? They had so much to say and I found out that our kids are really feeling a lot of pressure, a lot of stress. They're feeling unheard, unseen, because what they're grappling with is so different than what you and I grappled with as we grew up in our teen years.

This was just something I just felt like, okay, I think I'm supposed to use my skills as an educator, a writer, a mom, someone who has her own struggles over the past 10 years that I've overcome. So, this book was inspired by that and I didn't really know even how I wanted to set up chapters or anything, but I went to my publisher and I said, "I feel like I'm supposed to write this book, but it needs to come out in the spring of 2020." That was the only thing.

I said, "I know it's supposed to come out in the spring of 2020, what do I have to do to get that to happen?" They said, "If you can write it in four months, we can publish it in April 2020," and so I wrote 14-hour days. It was crazy, but in the end here we are in a pandemic, people are home with their families all day thinking, "Oh my gosh, I'm coming face to face with a lot of things that when I'm busy and I'm moving I don't have to face."

But when you get still and you're right there together you think, "Okay, maybe there are some things we need to work on. Maybe I haven't been connecting as well as I can, and so how do I do this?" Rachel says, "Here. Here's how. Here's a book." So, it is amazing how this is just timed perfectly for what we are dealing with.

Jen Riday: So, a lot of people listening are parents and they're juggling work and children's homework. The children are feeling stressed, the parents are stressed, there's just a lot of emotion going on so speak to all of that emotion and what we as the parents and the leaders of the home can do to just help with that soothing process we all need.

Rachel Macy Stafford: Well, one thing that I like to remind myself and my children of very often when we are in new situations and we're navigating territories that we have never navigated that is that the trying matters more than the knowing. We can't know how to do something we've never done before. So, we're trying. That's what we focus on.

The second thing that I like to remind people in my family, and myself, and people that I talk to is fear wears disguises. Grief wears disguises. Anxiety wears disguises. The unbecoming behaviors and the moods and the attitudes and the things that we're seeing not just in our family members, but in ourselves that's fear talking. That's grief talking. We're going through a lot of loss right now of things that we're having to say, "This is not going to happen. This thing that I was looking forward to, all my hard work, I'm not going to get to do what I thought I was going to get to do to celebrate."

Not seeing friends, being cut off for teenagers and kids from their peers it's difficult and thank goodness they do have technology, but it's not the same. So, there's all this stuff that we are dealing with and it's coming out looking like really unbecoming and we are wanting to react, but this is a time to be a detector and to say I'm going to detect pain when I see it and I'm not going to react.

Because the best thing we can do when we are in emotional distress is to be a calm and steady presence. That is very, very hard to do in the moment but when you that how your calmness and your expressing of, "I want to understand. Tell me what's going on. I'm listening. This is really hard," those kind of messages, watch how the wall comes down.

When they know you're on their team they don't have to keep being defensive. They don't have to keep proving that they have something to be upset about. You say, "I know this is so hard and I see how much you are handling." It's like, "Thank goodness somebody sees what I'm going

through right now and I don't have to prove it. I can just take a deep breath and say 'She gets it. She's on my team.'"

What I tell people right now as they are trying to work from home doing all the things they did when they were not under this pandemic pressure, they're trying to do that, they're trying to support their kids in their educational endeavors and I just keep reminding them the most important thing right now is not that you're acquiring academic skills, but that you are being aware of your emotional well-being, that your mental health is your top priority.

Because these people who are expecting us to perform at the level that we did before and I'm talking to myself as much as anyone here because I'm launching a book. I'm like, anybody who's expecting me to launch a book the same way that I did in prior years it's not reasonable. It's not kind. So, take the pressure off yourself, take the pressure off your kids.

I say this to them every day, I say, "We are surviving. We are showing up. That is what matters now."

Jen Riday: I couldn't agree more. It's finally to take a stand and say emotional health is number one right now. Mental health is the top. Because all of that busyness that we often used to ignore and block out all the pain and the grief and the anxiety, now we get to focus on feeling it and realize, "Oh, that's what's in there. Holy cow. It's time to do our emotional work."

Rachel Macy Stafford: That is so true. This is an opportunity and it is hard to see that, but just taking little small steps to be aware of your feelings, what are you feeling right now and acknowledging that, that is a huge piece of growth. That's a huge way to begin healing when you get quite and you say, "Yeah, I am feeling anxious. Yeah, I see how that might be presenting itself. What can I do to cope?"

My book *Live Love Now* one of the whole chapters is on building resilience in kids and that begins by modeling. When we show them how do we cope with stress, what are we doing today, even if it's a 10-minute walk outside. Even if it's just stepping outside and looking at the garden or the flowers or the birds and holding an acorn in your hand and just breathing. Those are very valuable tools for mindfulness.

Any time you can bring yourself back to the present moment and show your kids how do we just focus on this moment right now? Because fear can't thrive in the present moment. Anxiety can't thrive in the present moment. So, showing your kids how are you coping, inviting them to do these – I call them "places of refuge." Come to my place of refuge with me for five minutes. Let's just breathe together. Gosh, what a gift to be able to give our kids these tools in this time.

Jen Riday: I know and thinking back, a lot of us think back to our childhoods, you and I maybe, it was a time where no one really even thought a lot about emotions or emotional health or mental health.

Rachel Macy Stafford: Yes.

Jen Riday: What we would have given to have people, adults, our parents, and others do the same thing with us, just to hold the space and to detect not react.

Rachel Macy Stafford: Yes. It's so good really talking about the things that are a little uncomfortable to talk about. Like you said, we may have not grown up talking about hard topics and what I heard from teenagers and middle schoolers when I was talking in classrooms is they need us to start those conversations because they're dealing with it. They're grappling with it and when they feel like they don't have anyone they can talk to that's a really hard place to be in and they want us to start those conversations.

They may not look like they want to have those conversations, they may look really uncomfortable, but we can say, "You know, I really need to say this to you. No mistake you make is bigger than my love for you. No matter is happening in your online world and you feel really embarrassed or ashamed. If you have a problem, I want you to know you can come to me."

Those are the kind of things that our kids are hiding from us because they think that we will remove our love. These are things they've told me when I visit in the classroom and so I have made a point to put a lot of scripts in my book so that people have some words because I know it's hard to find the words. You say, "Well, I want to have these conversations, but I don't exactly know what to say."

I think the kids that I worked with as a special education teacher for kids with behavior and emotional issues they taught me how do you have these hard conversations? What are some of the words that really open up kids to feeling like this is a safe person, she's not going to judge me, she's going to just listen and try to help me? So, I made a point to put some scripts inside *Live Love Now* so that people know, okay, here's some words. Here's how I can start.

Jen Riday: That's good. Like that phrase you used, "No mistake is bigger than my love for you." Is that one of your scripts?

Rachel Macy Stafford: Yeah, it is. Yes.

Jen Riday: That's a good one.

Rachel Macy Stafford: Yes, they really need to know because if you think about some of the messages that our kids are receiving about failure and about performance and about perfection and having certain GPAs and having a certain persona that you live up to there's not a lot of room for

mistakes and failures. So, they're not really getting that message in school and in the media, for sure on Instagram, they're not getting a lot of that, "Hey, you know what it's like to be human? It means making mistakes. You know how you grow and learn? You make mistakes."

So, if they can hear that from you, their parent or their mentor that is so powerful because then they can say, "Gosh, my mom or my dad or my mentor, they made mistakes. That's how they got to be where they are today." Own those mistakes. I talk about with my kids some of my most shameful moments when I just felt like I couldn't even look people in the eyes and those are the moments I said, "Don't struggle alone, Rachel. Do not struggle and feel ashamed. Reach out."

One time I did reach out to my best friend from childhood when I was so ashamed of a mistake that I had made and she said, "Rachel, do not let one mistake ruin the whole story. Your story is not over." I just get tears in my eyes when I think about what that meant to me. It gave me the relief to go, "Oh yeah, this is one mistake. Why should I throw my whole self under the bus?"

I tell kids that. I tell my own kids that. It's in my book. One mistake does not ruin the whole story. That really gives perspective.

Jen Riday: It really does, and it makes me think about society in general. There's so much time to reflect now and I imagine there will be a massive shift in everyone when we get back together. We won't maybe see it right away, but historians will in. In the past, I like to say in the pre-COVID-19 world I feel like there was too much emphasis on we need to do it perfect like you said and we need to feel happy and if we're not happy we're doing it wrong.

Now, we're being forced to experience all of the human experience. Things going wrong, death, pain, grief, suffering, anxiety, none of that's wrong, it's

just part of the human experience. So, earlier you used the words detect not react. What do you think we need to change in our thinking socially so that we can be more allowing of these mistakes and allowing of all of these emotions and to realize, hey, it's not just going to be happy, it's 50/50 and that's okay?

Rachel Macy Stafford: I think it starts with one person being brave with her struggles. I did not expect when I started blogging nine years ago and I decided, "Okay, I'm on this journey to be a more present, authentic, joyful person" because the rat race and this façade of perfection those were killing me, literally killing me.

I said, "I'm not going to do this. I'm not going to miss my life. I'm not going to miss my opportunity to show up in the world as myself and share my gifts." I decided, all right, my sister had sent me a blogging book, I thought, "All right, let me give this a try." I had no idea that by being honest about my struggle would allow someone else to be honest with their struggle. They wanted to meet me in what I call, "the light of realness" where real connection happens. Where we can put down that mask and we can reject these damaging messages that we are given and say, "I'm not going to do this. I'm not going to bring my family down this path."

As I kept sharing, my community kept growing and so now here I am nine years later, my fourth book, I have these huge online groups where people come and are working and are healing – I mean, because this is not easy. It's not easy to choose a different path and to choose this path of authenticity, but I get so excited when they say, "I'm having a small group in my community now and I'm showing up and being real and people are coming, and they're being real with me."

So, it takes one person and you can be that one person in your family, in your neighborhood, in your community who says, "I'm struggling. This is what life behind this perfect picture looks like." When you see that picture-

perfect family and they say, "Let me tell you what it took to get to this photo. Let me tell you what really happened." I love those people. I'm like, yes, thank you.

You can say, "Guess what, my husband's out of work right now. I'm having depression episodes right now," and when I came forward three years ago and I said, "I thought about leaving. I thought about leaving this earth," it was my darkest night three years ago. I lost my father-in-law, I was launching a book, I was grieving, I was depressed, and I thought about leaving and once I got through it I wrote about it and someone said, "If someone like you can go through this and come out on the other side, someone who seems pretty successful and healthy then maybe I have a chance. Maybe there's not something wrong with me. Maybe this is just what it means to be human."

So, I just made a vow in that moment, this idea for *Live Love Now* was cultivating, it hadn't come to fruition, but I know that conversation with that woman who said, "Maybe there's not something wrong with me. If you can have these feelings then I'm okay." That's when I thought, "Gosh, we got to talk about our struggles," because when we do, we give someone else hope because this is what it means to be human.

Like you said, this is not about being happy and fulfilled all the time. That is not real. What is real, I'm struggling but I'm asking for help and I'm holding on to hope that tomorrow is going to be a better day.

Jen Riday: Wow, what a beautiful story that you chose to be authentic and real and pull the curtain back so people can hear what you were feeling. But like you mentioned at the beginning of our chat together, you had to figure out what you were feeling first and allow it. You probably had to stop judging it.

Rachel Macy Stafford: Excellent, yes.

Jen Riday: Then, talk about it because like shame thrives in secrecy. I think you quoted Brené Brown at the beginning, but wow, what a beautiful story. I'm so grateful you're sharing it with us today. So, kind of wrapping up, let's say there's someone out there who understands, "Okay, I want to be real. I want to be authentic. I want to help my kids do the same. I want them to know their feelings matter and they're allowed, but –" let's say this person listening, a woman let's say, she's thinking, "But I'm so stressed and I'm so anxious. I don't have space to help them solve their emotional problems." What's a first step to move out of that space?

Rachel Macy Stafford: That's a great question. I think that we start with ourselves which we often are shamed for starting with ourselves. People say, "Oh no, you're supposed to be selfless." Well, first we must tend to ourself before we can tend to the ones that we love and for example, what I did when I recognized that I was in a place that I didn't want to be as far as how I was living my life 9 years ago, I felt like I was wearing 10 different masks. I felt like I was maxed out, stretched beyond capacity, and what I did is I thought about what brought me peace as a child?

Let me just go way, way back to when did I really feel like I was showing up as me? What was I doing that I could breathe and I wasn't feeling judged and I could just let out all these pieces of me and it was just freeing? Where was that? One place was swinging. I loved to swing.

So, that's one thing that I do as an adult. I will go and I will swing and it brings me so much joy, but then the second thing that I remembered is I loved to fill notebooks. I would write stories after stories and so, nine years ago that was my first step. I bought a notebook and for 10 minutes at night after my children, who were small, went to bed, I wrote. I wrote whatever came out of my fingers. I did not judge it. I just let it flow.

I believe that the person who's listening today I would like her to think back to her childhood or to a time that she felt really alive, really at peace, what

was she doing? What was bringing her joy? If you can recreate that, whatever you can do – some form of that, whether it's painting or dancing, singing, a yoga mat, stretching your body, baking. I don't know what it is for you, but what is your outlet? We all need an outlet for our pain.

That helps us express it because sometimes we can't put it into words, but we can feel it, we can mold it, we can shape it. Put it in to your hand +something tangible and that would be my first step to how do you hone in to like that really, really painful part of you that needs tending.

It's almost like a garden. You have to tend to those dried up roots and leaves, I mean, they're still there. That part of you is still there but it needs time and attention and I do not want you to say that I don't have time. Because this is a hard truth and I have to do this to myself sometimes, I will look at my phone because my phone tells me how much I'm on there and it's painful at times to see how often I go on their to numb and to deny and to avoid.

Look at your phone and it's a screen time app, it'll tell you how long you've been on there this week and then you say I don't have time to tend to myself. I don't have time to nurture and then you say, wait a second, maybe the next time I reach for my phone I should reach for my pencil or my paint brush or my yoga mat or my earphones to listen to music or my running shoes that's what I would say. Do that and find how your breathing begins to slow, you feel more optimistic, some of that clutter clears away in your mind and you get some clarity.

I don't know how many times I get in my place of peace and all that stuff that I thought was so important it all fades away. I get perspective and I say, "Okay, yeah, I get it. My mental health it's at the top." When I can tend to myself, I can tend to my people. It's a beautiful cycle of tending to yourself, breathing, getting that clarity and then you can move forward. That next step becomes really clear.

Jen Riday: I have this image in my mind. You share that so beautifully. I can see a dry, brown garden. Maybe after the snow has melted, depending on where you live, and then I can see this lush, multi-colored, rich flower bed. Which garden are they going to want to go to?

Rachel Macy Stafford: That's so powerful.

Jen Riday: Rachel, I love what you're doing and, everyone, you're going to want to get your hands on her book, *Live Love Now* relieve the pressure and find real connection with our kids. It's so important. This is a big shift right now to start to focus on mental health ours and our kids. I know we all want to provide that lush, emotional garden where our kids can feel safe to share and we start with ourselves.

I love this. Thank you so much for sharing, Rachel. Where can people find you if they want to learn more about everything else you're doing?

Rachel Macy Stafford: I would love that, so my blog website is handsfreemama.com. You can go there and you'll see the new book is right there at the top and you can click a button to go to all the retailers that are so kind to have it for purchase online because it's, as we all know, hard to get to the bookstore. So, you can get it online and everything is shipping beautifully right now, so I would be super grateful for that support of *Live Love Now.*

Jen Riday: Totally. I'm excited to read it myself. I love mantras.

Rachel Macy Stafford: So, scripts. I have scripts. Yes, I have actual dialogues that you can have with your kids. I have tons of mantras though. I live for mantras.

Jen Riday: Oh, you do? Yay.

Rachel Macy Stafford: That book is full of mantras. So, yes, that will resonate with people because you can jot them down, put them on Post-It notes. I'm a Post-It note lover so I have them all over my house.

Jen Riday: Thank you again. I have this vision of gardens just going through my head. I'm going to be thinking about it all day, but thank you so much for being on the show.

Rachel Macy Stafford: I enjoyed this conversation so much. Thank you for having me.

Jen Riday: What did I tell you? The garden analogy is really cool and I've never quite stopped thinking about it ever since I did the interview with Rachel. What kind of garden would you have wanted to go to, emotionally speaking, as a teenager for example? Thinking back when you needed comforting or soothing, were there people that just radiated a sense of calm and steadiness? A sense of peace?

I know we want to be that person for our kids and for our loved ones. It really makes it clear that it's important that we take care of our gardens first so our kids can feel the beautiful effect and enjoy the results of our emotional work. They can feel our peace.

Emotional health is so important right now and I'm so grateful, despite the struggles of COVID-19, I am grateful that as a world we see the importance of taking care of our emotional and mental health. Well, that said, I want to remind you to sign up for the Vibrant Happy Women online retreat. It's happening over a secure Zoom link. It is on Saturday, May 16th.

We start in the morning and we're going to go about four and a half hours. We have beautiful, amazing speakers. We have Jill Payne from *Be a Freaking Dime.* You remember her? I've had her on twice. Dr. Laura

Froyen and Heather Ambler who will be talking about EFT tapping. I will also speak and you'll get to see me on the screen. I'll see you. It's going to be amazing.

Join us. All proceeds are going to Feeding America. Help us make a difference. Help us collect enough money to purchase even more pounds of food for people who need it and there are many right now. That is at JenRiday.com/onlineretreat.

I want to thank you all for listening. Take care of your gardens, tend to those gardens. You deserve to have a beautiful garden. You deserve to be emotionally juicy. Everyone around you will just come and enjoy that emotional juice. They'll feel your peace, they'll feel your love, they'll feel your joy because you made the effort to tend that garden.

I love you all. Thank you for listening. I will see you again soon. Until then make it a vibrant and happy week and garden. Take care.

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.