

Christa Paul Haley Autism Mental Health

[00:00:00] **Christa Holmans:** [00:00:00] Hey everybody, this is Christa Holmans, Neurodivergent Rebel here and may is mental health awareness month. And however, you know, autistic mental health can differ from non-autistic mental health for a few reasons. And today I am back with Paul Austin, our resident "NT" and Haley Moss, who is the first openly autistic lawyer in Florida, to digest this issue.

[00:00:23] Um, welcome Hailey. Glad that you're here today. I'm so excited to actually get to collaborate and hang out with you and do something. And Paul, um, thank you for being here and bringing your questions and perspective and balance to are heavily autistic now influence space now that both of us are here.

[00:00:40] **Paul Austin:** [00:00:40] Awesome. I'm really thrilled to be here with both of you guys. You both, uh, you know, big heroes of mine, so you want to just get started with the questions. Like you said this is mental health month and we've got a lot of questions about how that jives with autism. So my first question is, does autistic mental health differ [00:01:00] from non-autistic mental health? And how.

[00:01:04] **Haley Moss:** [00:01:04] Yeah, I think it does. And I think the way that mental health for people in the spectrum is different is mostly because of different coping skills and things that we have. So. A lot of people do have comorbid conditions, as I'm sure it's been addressed, and we could probably address that later too.

[00:01:18] But I think the fact that we mask and have these other coping skills makes it difficult or subjects us more to different forms of anxiety and things. So I think generally, and I'm pretty quick to say this, but I think certain anxiety is part of being on the spectrum and part of the autistic experience, but I think it's very, very nuanced and it is different in that it might not look at the same as traditional, Oh, I'm anxious.

[00:01:39] It might be. Or it might be difficult to communicate that for a lot of people on the spectrum too. So I think it really is a nuanced topic above all else.

[00:01:49] **Christa Holmans:** [00:01:49] I've struggled with this personally too because I deal with my own mental health and I definitely have anxiety.

[00:01:55] And like with me, that shows in very different ways. Like, I start to get anxious and I [00:02:00] might like be like picking at my face or, um, I might be biting my lips a lot. One of the things I've noticed for me that is a, uh, a hint that I may be starting to not do so great with my mental health could be that I might be having more meltdowns or more shutdowns, or I just feel more overwhelmed all the time.

[00:02:18] So like those are maybe different, like signs that an autistic person might be in distress that you might not see. I think in the non-autistic, uh, population, uh, I think a lot of our definitions about autism or related to autistic people in distress, honestly.

[00:02:34] **Haley Moss:** [00:02:34] Absolutely. Like I had noticed even for me, whenever I was really anxious, like I'd be a lot more irritable or like you said, that you would be melting down.

[00:02:40] For me, I know that I would be fidgeting a lot more or doing different things with my hands or different ways that might not be as obvious if you didn't know, but if you knew me, you'd be like, something might be off or she might be feeling something that she's not able to just express. And usually for me it does look like that extra irritability or something, but every person is different because your experience, in [00:03:00] my experience, definitely not the same.

[00:03:02] **Christa Holmans:** [00:03:02] Exactly, which is actually kind of the point of this is like you don't have any different perspectives cause we are all so different.

[00:03:09] **Haley Moss:** [00:03:09] Like I know it takes a lot more to trigger a meltdown for me at this point, but it doesn't mean it never happens.

[00:03:17] **Christa Holmans:** [00:03:17] Yeah. And it's like when I'm, if I have like more than one of them, it has certain time period. I'm like, okay, something is wrong. I'm out of control because that means I've pushed too hard.

[00:03:27] **Haley Moss:** [00:03:27] Exactly. And sometimes I think you're not overwhelmed. You might not even notice or be able to have the words to say, I am melting down. This is not okay. You might just feel it. Your body or brain might just be going something isn't right, but it doesn't have the words or the ability to communicate what exactly that something is wrong is sometimes that can even be that I'm hungry and I just don't. It doesn't recognize that I'm hungry, but somehow your brain goes, something is wrong, and then eventually you start rationalizing and you're like, girl, you need to eat?

[00:03:53] **Christa Holmans:** [00:03:53] Yeah. It's like, what is this?

[00:03:55] **Haley Moss:** [00:03:55] That's the best way to describe that experience as your body just goes, something is wrong and you don't know what it is. [00:04:00] Even if it's like. You're getting irritable and your stomach to grow your body just because something is wrong and it doesn't just jump to that. I'm hungry.

[00:04:06] So like everything kind of fails to communicate sometimes.

[00:04:09] **Paul Austin:** [00:04:09] We can have a whole other episode on that someday. You tossed in the word comorbid earlier, Haley, and I've heard that. That's a wonderful word. It just sounds so delicious, doesn't it? But I've heard that a lot of autistic people have co-occurring or comorbid mental health conditions like anxiety and depression.

[00:04:28] Can you validate that? And can you also tell me if it is because of the autism or because of your experience as an autistic individual in the world? In other words, to put it very bluntly, do you have PTSD from growing up with NT people.

[00:04:45] **Haley Moss:** [00:04:45] I wouldn't go as far to say that I have PTSD because I love the neuro-typical people in my life.

[00:04:50] I've been around more neuro-typical people than not until very recently in my life too. But I think for me, this is again, I feel weird saying it's nuanced, but I think anxiety is part [00:05:00] of the. Autistic experience, whether it's social anxiety, being afraid that you're going to miss step somewhere, or just being anxious about a change in your routine.

[00:05:08] Like I know when my routines change, I feel very uneasy. Like I'm like, what am I doing? I feel stressed about this. I feel kind of scared. Like I know.

[00:05:19] And at least for me, it was a big change. I moved back home. I, I'm not traveling. Like things are very different and it's kind of scary to go through that. And then you have the autism that wants that structure so badly, and at the same time it's hard to deal with. So I think that's something too. And I think mental health and autism also looks different in women.

[00:05:37] So I've read a lot of stories about people on the spectrum of women who've also dealt with eating disorders, and it's not because of their body image, but because of that feeling of control or that feeling of perfection and things that do align with autistic traits. So I think it really depends on the person.

[00:05:52] I think that mental health on the spectrum is very, very intersectional and definitely varies on your identity and how you grew up. [00:06:00] If you had to support a family, which I'm very blessed that my family is the most supportive group of people ever. I again, I've always been a happy kid. I'm pretty, I'm pretty happy person.

[00:06:09] It's just that I do get anxious about things, which I think is very normal for people on the spectrum, and I don't think of it as a separate anxiety. I think it's just part of existing with autism, to put it very bluntly. So I don't think of myself as, yeah, that's, that's not a separate thing. I don't, because I wouldn't know where one thing ends and one thing begins.

[00:06:27] So I think that, and also I think as a young adult, a lot of that anxiety that I have about being a young adult is also just related to that too. So I think it's something that deconstructing is very, very complicated. But I do think with the why we see these co-occurring conditions is because people don't know where they end and begin.

[00:06:46] And also just the way that it. Disability and autism intersect with our identity. So I think even for people who were diagnosed later in life, perhaps they got labeled with a different co-occurring condition first and then they latched onto it or they thought, [00:07:00] this is what's wrong with me and I identify with this.

[00:07:01] Or they also might've just had additional mental health issues. It really, really depends on the person and I can't drive that home enough.

[00:07:10] **Christa Holmans:** [00:07:10] I'm torn on this too because it's like I've had anxiety my whole life and I don't know of version of the world where I don't have anxiety, but I have noticed that in different periods of my life, my anxiety has definitely ebbed and flowed and his like gone up and down.

[00:07:26] Like when my. Self-esteem has been at its highest. I do notice that my anxiety kind of almost goes away sometimes, and I forget I have anxiety, although there's still like these things that will trigger it and it will still flare up, but then you know, there are bad days too sometimes where I am just convinced everything is going to go wrong, even though there's no, there's no danger there and I don't know, you know?

[00:07:50] Does that come from traumas that I have experienced in my childhood, or does that come from a life of not being diagnosed [00:08:00] and being labeled as a problem or othered, because a lot of autistic people, you know, we've been othered our whole lives and some of us, we've been othered by teachers and peers and some of us have even been othered by our parents are treated as if we are an inconvenience on our parents.

[00:08:17] Those things can cause and embed really serious mental health issues. I know a lot of autistic people some of us, we struggle with our self esteem issues and I think there's some systemic issues there that could definitely trigger an aggravate anxiety because anxiety, for me, it's like there's usually something that starts the spiral.

[00:08:41] If I am in my best self and I have been doing a good job keeping myself leveled, I will realize I'm spiraling earlier. But if I'm not at my best, I will have spiraled. And they've completely gone into a terrible direction before I realized, Oh, this is not so good. This is, you know, maybe I've [00:09:00] lashed out at someone because I felt overwhelmed or something I'll totally regret because I didn't catch myself first because I, you know, maybe I was. Too tired or too overwhelmed or too overextended, you know, there seems to be, it doesn't come out of nowhere. Um, but it is pretty constant, like a little companion, unfortunately.

[00:09:22] **Paul Austin:** [00:09:22] Now with that, I'll move onto the next question. I'm asking this one with a little bit of misgiving because I noticed you guys don't have gray hair like I do, so but do your best, do you think autistic mental health changes throughout your lifespan? I mean from your observations thus far?

[00:09:40] **Haley Moss:** [00:09:40] This is great to start with little kids because I think a lot of parents don't think about little kids and their mental health, honestly. So I think when kids.

[00:09:48] Oh, no, that's an anxious, just looked very different than us being able to say, Oh, we melt down. For instance, like when Christa was saying, I know that I have more meltdowns when I'm anxious, is when she pointed out [00:10:00] with little kids, someone who's maybe eight, nine years old, like I remember being eight, nine years old and just finding out I was autistic.

[00:10:05] I don't think that I would have had the words to express that or understood that concept, but for instance, a little kid might also be like. My tummy hurts or if they were like me, they would hide behind mom, hoping mom would help me with the social situation. So that might've been a different way that experience happened.

[00:10:20] And I think it also changes, especially in adolescents when you have more social pressure, more big transitions, like imagine just going from being in a, maybe a small school

to a big school, moving away from home, getting a job, like all of these things could be very. Anxiety inducing or definitely affect mental health in some way.

[00:10:38] So I think it's really important to look at it through that perspective too. And even as we transitioned throughout the lifespan, like I know anytime I've had a major move somewhere or started a job or an internship, like those things can be very stressful and it could look like I'm withdrawing because it's scary for some people.

[00:10:53] Or it could look like I am gonna talk so much just to get rid of that feeling of nerve. [00:11:00] Or it could just be, you know. I am trying to prove myself and I'm scared to talk to someone on the phone that I've talked to 50 times. So it could look very, very different depending on the experience, who you are and as you grow up, because I think about, okay, there's a time I'd be like, mom and just hide behind mom, and now I'm like, Hmm.

[00:11:17] Like even sometimes now it could be, I don't know how to respond to this. Cause I know, I know as public figure, sometimes you and I probably get emails and requests that we don't know how to deal with. And you're like, this makes me emotional or this means this brings up something that I don't feel comfortable with and how do we deal with it?

[00:11:32] And then you just, you're like. So I think it's a very, very complicated thing, and I feel like I'm just going to keep defaulting to every person's different.

[00:11:42] **Christa Holmans:** [00:11:42] Yeah. Um, and I think it definitely was, I was saying earlier too, it's, for me, it's been like this roller coaster with this ebb and flow throughout my entire life.

[00:11:53] You're talking about work and big changes. I think that as an autistic person, that is the biggest trigger for me [00:12:00] is a change in my stability or change a major change to my routine because I kind of build my routine and have my security and I'm like that. Like that's my new normal. Even if it's like, okay, you know, I'm going to hop on one plane or two planes a month, or I'm going to, you know, it's like I know what's going on and I've got it imagined.

[00:12:16] **Haley Moss:** [00:12:16] When you bring up planes, that makes me think of how anxious I was. Like going through TSA all the time. I went through, I would go through late at one point, I was going once a week and I was. Still terrified that I was always anxious. I'm like, am I in flapping or my hand? It does my body language make me look suspicious.

[00:12:33] And then the one time that they pull my luggage, even out of pre-check, I'd be like, Oh my God, did I do something wrong? They do something wrong. Like, what should I do? Because it's, and I always had that kind of, but I go through on the assumption they won't because I paid for pre-check and they don't have to take my shoes off.

[00:12:48] **Christa Holmans:** [00:12:48] That's true. That's true.

[00:12:50] **Haley Moss:** [00:12:50] The last time I got checked was because I had an oversized thing of toothpaste and I just sat there and wanted to cry. [00:13:00]

[00:13:00] It's that one change in your routine cause you're like, this is. And especially cause I can time the airport down to a science now I'm like, I'm going to lose five minutes off of when I thought I was going to be at the gate. This is not like, that's how I will start, and then you fall into this and then you're like, dude, you're not going to miss your flight.

[00:13:17] You were still an hour and a half early.

[00:13:20] I kind of want to toss this back to Paul. Actually ask if neurotypicals experience any forms of this anxiety that we're talking about. Cause I think even when we talk about it in terms of major life transitions, like starting a job or starting a new school or new kids or whatever it might be, is this something that we as autistic people just experience this anxiety in these major transitions? Or is this something that neuro-typical people also have but just don't talk about.

[00:13:44] **Paul Austin:** [00:13:44] I think you experienced it a little bit differently. It's just it as I feel like as a neuro-typical, I'm just told to shut up and put up. But you know, there are times when if that. Happened to me and TSA, I'd start thinking, Oh my God, I'm morally reprehensible.

[00:13:57] I packed the toothpaste tube that is too [00:14:00] big. I must be an absolute jerk, you know? So yeah, I get those kinds of feelings. For sure.

[00:14:07] **Haley Moss:** [00:14:07] It feels good having this conversation cause you realize it's a lot more relatable than you think because I think what happens when we have these discussions as autistic people in ourselves, we know it's relatable to us.

[00:14:17] When neuro-typical people are able to not along kind of, it makes it feel a lot more accessible. This might just be a bigger part of the human experience, more so than just like an us and them thing.

[00:14:28] **Christa Holmans:** [00:14:28] Oh yeah, definitely.

[00:14:30] **Paul Austin:** [00:14:30] I think that's a great lead into the next question, which is do you think that having anxiety is necessarily just part of the autistic experience intertwined?

[00:14:40] **Haley Moss:** [00:14:40] I think it's part of the human experience. After having this conversation through. Because I think everyone experiences anxiety at some degree in their life, and I remember I was a psych major in college, and when we talk about depression, we'd be like, it's like having a common cold. Everyone has felt depressed at some point.

[00:14:55] Same with anxiety. It's just your mileage may vary. So some people might have it [00:15:00] more chronically or seasonally, or it might just be triggered by major life events, which happens for most people. Think about anyone who's ever had grief in their life before that. You've probably experienced this to some extent.

[00:15:09] It doesn't mean that you have a diagnosed condition, but I think that it is part of the human experience. No matter in some way, shape or form. And I think in the autistic experience that it is very embedded because of how you're afraid sometimes to be seen as

less than you are so anxious about how you present to the world sometimes that you want to be seen as a full person and accepted for who you are, but you also have this pressure of sorts to fit in and be yourself, but not like that that you're going to screw up.

[00:15:39] Especially when I was younger, I'd feel that way. Like I'm like, Oh, what if I let this like mask fall off a little bit? Like, and I just think that I'm strange.

[00:15:47] **Christa Holmans:** [00:15:47] Yeah. Yeah. It's the repeated rejections that give us social anxiety, cause I have a social anxiety diagnosis with my autism diagnosis, believe it or not, which I think probably a generalized anxiety was more [00:16:00] accurate, but I was like really holding back because there's a stigma on a lot of mental health things, unfortunately.

[00:16:05] And I feel better now talking about this, but when I was first going through the autism diagnosis process, I wasn't. Where I am now in my understanding of all of the things that I've learned about in those years, but I was like, I don't have anxiety. I was just like in so much denial that I even had anxiety at all and I didn't really know what anxiety was.

[00:16:26] I don't think, like I didn't really have the vocabulary for it. It's just this thing that had been tormenting me my whole life. I was like, okay, I know yoga and meditation and mindfulness and breathing and slowing down helps, and that's all I know. I was like, okay. I was like addicted to those things.

[00:16:41] **Haley Moss:** [00:16:41] I went by how it was explained to little kids because I feel like if you could explain it to a five-year-old, you could probably explain it to anybody and they would explain how you can tell if a child is anxious. It's things like when they repeatedly go, my tummy hurts. I don't feel well. I don't want to go to school. They're like all these little tiny things. But when you look at it in [00:17:00] hindsight, make total sense. I'm like, yeah, if I do feel a certain way about a situation or I feel scared sometimes, sometimes my tummy does hurt, that makes total sense to me, and then you realize a little five year old might not have the words to say, mommy, I'm anxious, but they might be able to say, my tummy hurts.

[00:17:16] I think it's just an interesting way to think about it is how. Your body physically process it rather than just men mentally too. Cause I think mental health and physical health, they're very connected. Even when you're talking about yoga and meditation, that's things that your physical body is doing to calm down your mind.

[00:17:32] **Paul Austin:** [00:17:32] They are difficult concepts for adults to address and put words to even so I think that's an astute observation. Anyway.

[00:17:40] **Haley Moss:** [00:17:40] I think you should try to make it just, I think that all this stuff should be really accessible to anyone. So including kids. And I think when we talk about autism, we talk about kids. So I think having this mental health conversation in terms of little kids is actually important. Cause I think parents don't think about mental health, especially with the young autistic kids, cause they're thinking about interventions. They're thinking [00:18:00] about how can their kid be the best adjusted?

[00:18:02] What about speech therapy, OT, whatever it is that they might be receiving in order to have the best life that they can and not necessarily thinking what is the mental wellbeing going on and what's going on inside that kid's head. Other than they might not be talking to me or expressing themselves the way that I want them to.

[00:18:17] So I kind of want to bring this up in terms of children, because I think it's really important to keep that in mind. So I was a floor time kid. I always say this like I got to play with toys, with therapy, and have people come to our homes that wanted to play with me. And, and I know if I w if I seem to unhappy with it, my parents would have stopped it.

[00:18:34] But I was always happy. I had adults that wanted to play with me all the time. And I thought that was great. And I'm the first one to tell you I was a happy kid. But I think. If you notice that your kid is distressed or seems like, I don't mommy, I don't want to go to therapy, my tummy hurts. Then maybe you should be thinking, how is this affecting their mental health as well?

[00:18:52] **Christa Holmans:** [00:18:52] And that's a really good point because when I was in elementary school, it's like one of the first times I started to have like autistic burnout, but it was [00:19:00] actually like I was sick. I was getting sick to my stomach, I was having migraines because the sensory environment of the school was making me ill, but I was also saying, Oh, I don't want to go to school.

[00:19:09] But the teachers were like she just doesn't want to go to class. And then they made me go to school anyway and they just ignored all that.

[00:19:15] **Haley Moss:** [00:19:15] Exactly. And a little kid might not have the way to say it. The sensory environment of this classroom is oppressive to me in some way. Like you're just like, I don't want to go to school.

[00:19:22] Well, why doesn't Christa want to go to school? Is she being bullied? Is it really loud? Is it this? And then maybe if you start digging, you would have been like. The lights are really loud, which is something that like of a little kid says like, I get it.

[00:19:34] **Christa Holmans:** [00:19:34] Yeah, I get it. Yeah.

[00:19:35] **Haley Moss:** [00:19:35] I'm trying to take it from that perspective and I wish that I had taken more classes when I was a psych major.

[00:19:42] I wish I had done more with child and developmental psych. I just know we don't give kids enough credit about what they feel, what they experienced and what they observed. So I think we need to also be sure that we're asking the right questions and make sure that their mental health is taken care of.

[00:19:56] **Christa Holmans:** [00:19:56] Giving them the most autonomy possible.

[00:20:00] [00:20:00] **Paul Austin:** [00:20:00] Toward that end. Haley, with everything that's going on in the world right now, and you know, with the mess that the world was in, even before all of this, people were focused on mental health is becoming a hot topic, and corporate world is becoming a hot topic outside.

[00:20:14] And what can autistic people do specifically to take better care of themselves and their own mental health during this pandemic?

[00:20:22] **Haley Moss:** [00:20:22] It's a really hot topic. You're right. So lawyers really love to talk about it because it's something that our profession has a big problem with, that our profession struggles a lot with depression, anxiety, and alcoholism.

[00:20:33] And it starts at the law school level. And I have a lot of thoughts about how this relates to lawyers, but we're not talking about lawyers today. But I think with autistic people, the biggest thing for us is that we need stability and routine. So whether it's in our job or whether it's in our living situation.

[00:20:47] So I think finding a way to create routine is really helpful for us, especially as we're less connected physically than we might've been before, or something might have changed. Again, I'm in my childhood bedroom right [00:21:00] now. This is not where I was supposed to be this week. I look at my calendar and see where I was supposed to be or what I was supposed to be doing.

[00:21:05] I'm like, what am I supposed to be in Texas last week? Actually, maybe I would have gotten to see you and I'd seen it on my calendar and then I get sad, you know? And it's like, so for me, it's really important to establish your teen and to find something that brings me joy every day, and also to engage in my special interests.

[00:21:21] And I realized sometimes even living at home, you revert to old special interests. So one of my special interests when I was a little kid was video games and now I play a lot more video games than I did when I was in my apartment or on airplanes or doing or practicing law or doing anything else. So I realized that my special interests have changed while I was home a little bit.

[00:21:39] I'm fine with that. I don't have any issue with that. It's just fact. So getting to engage in special interests I think is a great way to take care of ourselves and help our mental health find joy. And I know this is really cliché, but move your body if you can. I started biking outside again with my dad and it feels so good [00:22:00] cause it's something that we do together.

[00:22:01] And I actually got a new bike last week, so I'm really excited. It's fire engine red. It's really, really cute. I'll have to show you later. But. Yeah. And it has like, it has like a little like little streaks of purple in it too. So it's really cool and I'm really excited about it, but it's been raining like every day.

[00:22:15] So go figure. And then I'm like on edge cause I'm like, I want to be moving, I want to go outside. So I'll try to do something that makes me feel good. Move, meditate, whatever it is you do, you, even if you just take a walk and pace around and flap your hands the whole time, if that makes you happy, you do you I am judgment free zone.

[00:22:34] **Christa Holmans:** [00:22:34] Yes. I agree. So hard on the movement thing. We'll see. The dogs are about to bark. David's pulling in right now. Um, so, and then you know the, for me, oops. There we go. I knew that. Hey, not right now. So the other thing I've know for

me that's been really essential and really important is really like when you're talking about schedules.

[00:22:53] I've learned I have to, because I work from home normally, but things have kind of changed because more people, [00:23:00] uh, who need more from home. Yeah. And so there's more meetings. There's more meetings with more calls and more things like that in my work day. So it's like really chunking off and compartmentalizing that time so that I can organizing zoom calls is more work than regular organizing calls and meeting.

[00:23:15] Definitely.

[00:23:16] **Haley Moss:** [00:23:16] Mainly because there's so many links and they all look the same. Yeah. Um, have you shown up to the wrong zoom meeting yet?

[00:23:23] **Christa Holmans:** [00:23:23] Not yet. Not yet.

[00:23:25] **Haley Moss:** [00:23:25] I've missed them because I had more than one going on at the same time and didn't know what to do.

[00:23:29] **Christa Holmans:** [00:23:29] Oh, um, but that's why it's like, okay, this is some time where there's no meetings because there's too many meetings.

[00:23:35] There's way too many meetings. Or then like blocking off, like I need this downtime. Like we must have found time here and this is time where I'm not working and not doing anything. And being more firm in those boundaries. Like, no, I really can't accept a meeting. This is my work day. Like I need quiet time.

[00:23:53] **Haley Moss:** [00:23:53] Setting boundaries is a really big one that we should be talking more about too. So I think boundaries look very different depending on what's going on in [00:24:00] your world. So it could be that, for instance, I know when I'm working on a big project or I'm recording something like we're doing now, I closed the door and it sends a signal to the rest of the house that says, this is a very, very bad time to talk to me. Please don't. Please don't barge in even if you have laundry and I love you for doing my laundry and helping you with.

[00:24:22] Oh, that's great. With like color code, the color coded badges, kind of like ASAN had that you can use for working from home. And it's like if you see a red badge, do not enter unless the house is on fire. Or green means you could say hi, but people in the room won't care. But like all of these different things, I'm like, that's really good way to set professional boundaries, especially if you live with other people and you're working from home.

[00:24:41] And I think that. Even knowing there's a time of the day that I will be like, this is my time no matter what. And then there's time. I want to spend time with everybody else in the house. So I think it's setting boundaries for yourself and also knowing like, okay, I'm not gonna respond to emails after 6:00 PM for instance, or whatever time it is.

[00:24:57] Like I said. I have times the day where I will [00:25:00] refuse to respond because I didn't want to download. I don't want to have the back and forth. So that's why I asked. If

you get emails from me, you either get them really late at night or at random times of the day, because then, you know, I know there's a good chance that it's done and dispatched.

[00:25:15] So I, and I also try to pick like one day a week that is just for administrative stuff.

[00:25:20] **Christa Holmans:** [00:25:20] Yeah. Yeah, that's, that's really good too. So also, you know, our goal today is to make sure we're helping people, right? So I want to say, Hailey, since we have you here, what advice would you give any autistic people listening?

[00:25:34] You know, what additional advice, what's the golden nugget for taking care of their mental health?

[00:25:40] **Haley Moss:** [00:25:40] First off, if you are struggling with your mental health, I want you to know that's okay. Like, don't feel ashamed. Don't feel sad about it or beat yourself up and say, other people don't struggle because everybody does to some extent, whether or not they're telling you or not, and don't go social media because everyone puts out their highlight reel.

[00:25:56] I mean, I, I hate to say it like that, but it's true. [00:26:00] Like I'm not going to tell you that. Yeah. This has been a really awkward adjustment period. Like, yes, I'm very positive and hopeful about it because I think that we're going to see so much innovation out of this, but it's okay to sometimes acknowledge that this kind of sucks and I want you to know you're not alone, but it's okay to not be okay if that's what's going on in your world and make peace with that, whatever that looks like and don't. I feel like it's very cliché to say, don't be afraid to ask for help, but do something that brings you joy. Please engage in your special interest.

[00:26:29] The world needs you. You are loved, worthy, and belong here, and whatever we can do to make that better as a society, as other autistic people, as neurotypicals allies, whoever you might be. Let us know, because I know even if I don't know you and you're watching this, I want to send you a big hug, if you like, hugs that is, if not, then a virtual hug.

[00:26:50] **Paul Austin:** [00:26:50] Follow up to that. And that is, what advice do you have for people listening who are neuro-typical who want to be better allies and supporters of autistic people in this vein? Christa? [00:27:00]

[00:27:00] **Christa Holmans:** [00:27:00] I think it's important to realize that anyone who is struggling with their mental health, you see them crying or they're upset, autistic or not, you know, realize they might need something very different. Some people might want you to just sit silently with them in the room and just be a support person. Some people may just need for you to listen while they tell you something that they're struggling with and with autistic people, if someone's having a meltdown or something. Because they're really completely overwhelmed, telling someone to calm down is probably not helpful.

[00:27:35] **Haley Moss:** [00:27:35] I feel like the other least helpful thing to say is that other people have it worse. If you've ever heard that before, because it's like, like you don't have to be worried. You have a roof over your head. You have people who love you, you're okay, and it's like hard is hard. Yeah, it's hard. And the other thing I want to mention, what you're

saying as well is that it might not look as simple as someone crying or melting down, that it might just be ignoring your texts for [00:28:00] days on end, or it might just be that withdrawing or that irritability or whatever else it might be.

[00:28:05] So check in with the autistic people in your life just because even if it's not a loved one and it's just an autistic person in your life, it doesn't take that much effort from you to just say, how are you? What's up? How's life. Don't be afraid to just don't be afraid to just be a human and be a friend and someone will tell you whatever they feel comfortable telling you.

[00:28:29] If they choose to open up to you and trust you, then sometimes you might just, like you said, just either listen or offer support if they want it. And I think it's just important to see that there's no one way that certain things struggling could look for somebody and just really. Be mindful.

[00:28:49] **Paul Austin:** [00:28:49] Anything more to add in proactive advice, Christa?

[00:28:53] **Christa Holmans:** [00:28:53] I would say. Yeah. It's always nice to bring someone, you know, if you know someone [00:29:00] has an interest or something, they're really into, you know, you could bring them, uh, you know, their favorite kind of drink or their favorite something just to show someone you're thinking about them or you can, I can say just sending that message saying, Hey, I was thinking about you. How are you? Are you doing okay?

[00:29:14] **Haley Moss:** [00:29:14] It goes a lot further than you think. Like, I know for me, I really, for me, what really is something that I struggle with is that I don't have a lot of friends. And that I wish I had more friends. Like I'm like, I could tell you how many people have called me and how many people have spoken to just for fun that isn't for work.

[00:29:28] For instance, and a couple of weeks ago, an old friend called me out of the blue. We were supposed to talk later in the week because I'm like, we need to catch up. I'm holding you to it. And he ended up calling me like three or four days earlier, complete surprise. And it made my week. And we talked for just an hour.

[00:29:43] We talked about our families, we talked about our lives, and it really meant a lot to me. And that just, how are you? Let's just. Sit down and talk and shoot the breeze meant so much to me. I just wanted to say like, I know that meanwhile, I know some people on the spectrum would [00:30:00] absolutely hate if someone called them out of the blue.

[00:30:02] But for me, it just hit. For me, it meant like, Oh my God, this person is thinking of me right now. And they care. And this means so much. Like, thank you. Thank you. Thank you.

[00:30:08] **Paul Austin:** [00:30:08] Those are great things to do. Definitely. Um, what I'd like to introduce from my last question is, what are some things I ought not do?

[00:30:16] You hinted at some of them already. Don't say, Hey, you know, everybody's got it worse than you, or whatever. What are some other things I ought not do?

[00:30:24] **Haley Moss:** [00:30:24] That's abig one. Yeah. Or saying that it's all in your head, or, or just blame the autism, which I think sometimes is apt to do where like you're autistic, but of course you feel that way.

[00:30:34] It's like. You can still have other feelings and have

[00:30:37] **Paul Austin:** [00:30:37] Everybody is a little depressed. Everybody's a little autistic, aren't we?

[00:30:44] **Christa Holmans:** [00:30:44] Yeah, that's the worst.

[00:30:45] **Haley Moss:** [00:30:45] I think, I think that comes from a good place though. That's why as much as it's awkward to hear, it comes from a good place. I think when we say it online, we all get, we all got like pissy about it, but when we hear it in person, we can't really feel that way.

[00:30:58] It's like, it's like being called, it's like [00:31:00] being called an inspiration, like, you know, in real life, you can't just go like, well, you know it's inspiration porn, bla, bla, bla, bla, and give your disability studies 1-0-1. And you realized sometimes you just have to say thank you and take it, or if you trust that person, if you had to say, well, you know, not everyone is a little autistic.

[00:31:14] Not everyone is a little anxious, even though it might be true. Actually, anxiety is the one, I think it might be true, but the way that an autistic person might experience anxiety is different in the way that a neurotypical person might. So I think you might have to say that as your qualifier. If someone just says, everyone is a little bit ... and I think just thank them and appreciate that they're trying to relate to you because I think you have to call people in when they say something that sounds ridiculous. You don't want to make them feel bad for it because I don't think those kinds of comments come from a bad place at all.

[00:31:45] **Christa Holmans:** [00:31:45] Anything that is kind of minimizing that person's experience. Cause you know, with mental health especially, there's a lot of a stigma and hesitation for people to even come forward and say that they're struggling or something is difficult for them. And if someone's [00:32:00] come to trust you with something and then you say something like that, that's very dismissive.

[00:32:05] Yeah. It makes them less likely to reach out when they do need help or when they're struggling because you know, they've, they felt like, Oh, nobody wants, nobody cares. Nobody wants to hear. Nobody's listening to me, but that's the last thing you want for someone who's struggling with a mental health issue, is for them to be afraid to reach out and ask for help.

[00:32:22] I think that's why it's like one of the most important things you can do and just to say what you shouldn't be doing, but is, you know, just being there and saying, Hey, I'm here if you need me, and you know, you can call.

[00:32:34] **Haley Moss:** [00:32:34] I also think with a young autistic people as well, this parlays a lot into independence is it's also scary if someone's very overbearing on it with

those questions too, because I think with young autistic people, they're afraid to be seen as less, or they're afraid that if they are struggling with something that they might not be seen as independent.

[00:32:51] At the same time, I want to remind the young autistic people out there, and I say this all the time, is that independence sometimes is knowing when you can't do it by yourself. Independence does [00:33:00] not mean you must do everything by yourself.

[00:33:02] **Christa Holmans:** [00:33:02] Not at all.

[00:33:03] **Haley Moss:** [00:33:03] Yes. It's, there's that fear that you're going to lose your independence if you say that something is hard for you, whether it's mental health or an independent living task, or like for me sometimes even just admitting that I struggled cleaning my apartment made me have that same feeling of like shame and anxiety, but really I realized I didn't have to do it myself.

[00:33:19] If I needed help, that's okay. I know that's, you can't compare cleaning my apartment to mental health, but it's just that point of anxiety. And I don't even anxiety. But that idea of independence is that it's okay to ask if you need something that it's okay. You don't have to do everything by yourself and no one's going to come out there and cause you couldn't do it by yourself.

[00:33:44] **Paul Austin:** [00:33:44] No, I think that's applicable. Whether it's cleaning your apartment or getting, you know, mental health or, you know, addiction help or whatever you're asking for help is a key skill that I'm trying to teach my own son right now and he's not doing too well in chemistry.

[00:33:56] **Haley Moss:** [00:33:56] I was that way in school too.

[00:33:57] Like I know when I had it subject like chemistry or I think it was [00:34:00] criminal theory when I was in college and it was a class that I was really struggling with and I felt so like if the professor going gonna think I'm dumb, if I ask for help, and it's like. No, go in there, go over the exam with him and be an adult about this because how can you know how to do better if you don't talk through it ?

[00:34:18] **Paul Austin:** [00:34:18] You're going to teach that person to go out and get the help and get farther than they would by struggling alone.

[00:34:23] **Haley Moss:** [00:34:23] And I think there's so much that goes into it. Like I know the executive functioning steps of asking for something could be really difficult to sort through.

[00:34:30] So say I needed help on that exam. It's that whole or going over that exam and I was so scared to go to professors to go over tests cause I'm like, they're going to think that I don't even though of course they want you to do that because it isn't from an executive functioning standpoint, it's okay. I need to acknowledge that I didn't do the best I can.

[00:34:45] I need to set an appointment with this person. Whether it means emailing them, phone call, walking in there unannounced, I need to find time to do it. I need to set time to

do it. I need to communicate to do it. I need to actually show up. I need to have questions ready and I need to get out of my own head where it's like, wow, I feel really dumb because [00:35:00] I didn't do well on this or because I needed help or maybe cause I wanted help on that.

[00:35:04] So going through those steps could be exhausting in itself for people and they never do it. So I think at the same time you have to acknowledge that there are steps and executive function. I think for autistic people who do need help, whether it is an independent living task or their mental health, for instance, even being able to outline those steps to get that help and let them know what's out there and how to do it can help relieve some of the cognitive burden for a lot of folks too.

[00:35:28] **Christa Holmans:** [00:35:28] Haley, thank you so much for coming on today and for playing with Paul and I and answering questions and talking about this really important topic of autistic mental health. Tell me, you know, before we wrap up, cause I know you have a really exciting thing, you need to hop off and go take care of, um, where, where can people find you online?

[00:35:48] **Haley Moss:** [00:35:48] You can find me on all major social media at Haley Moss Art or you can find me on my website at haleymoss.net.

[00:35:56] **Christa Holmans:** [00:35:56] Thank you so much, Haley, and thank you Paul so much for hanging [00:36:00] out with us again, this has been super fun.

[00:36:04] **Haley Moss:** [00:36:04] This is really fun and I'm glad that we can help break down some stigma for people.

[00:36:08] **Christa Holmans:** [00:36:08] Alrighty guys. We'll talk to you next time. Have a good week. Bye.