

Mental Health Awareness: How A Tragedy Led A Community To Act

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Amanda: Hey, Mark. I have a question.

Dr. Mark: Okay.

Amanda: How many times do you think I've asked you that question?

Dr. Mark: Do numbers go that high?

Amanda: I doubt it. And from that concept, the idea of Marked Medicine was born when Doctor Mark Brulte.

Dr. Mark: And with Amanda Brulte, my favorite nurse practitioner.

Amanda: And you're now listening to Marked Medicine.

Dr. Mark: Hello, everybody. Welcome back to Marked Medicine. We are very lucky today on this episode to have two guests. First is mister Ethan Kramer, a seventeen year old starting senior here at Coffee County High School. Very lucky to have him. He's the recipient of the state young leader award from Nami, the Georgia chapter, which is the national alliance on mental illness. Will have him tell us all about that. And we also have mister Chris Sheffield, who is the chairman of the Board of Directors for the Know Your Worth campaign here in Coffee County. And also the Associate pastor at GracePoint Church. How are y'all doing today, guys? We're good.

Amanda: Thank y'all for joining us.

Dr. Mark: We will start with Chris today and tell us about the know your worth campaign. Tell us what it is, how it got started, what your option is just give us a big overview of things.

Chris Sheffield: Okay, Mark. Thank you. So to Know Your Worth Collaborative, we started back in twenty nineteen, we had a young girl at our community commit suicide. And then shortly after that, a couple other attempts and another successful suicide And so our school superintendent Dr. Leis reached out to

our family connection director who decided to invite all a lot of people in from a community to talk about mental health awareness and try to see how we could help the situation that we were facing. And so through all of that, you know, faith based leaders, Sheriff's office, hospital, mental health, like Unison and school board.

People all kind of came together for that. And through that, we kind of coined the term know Know Your Worth and because we wanted these teams to know that their life has meaning and worth in value. We figured if we can get that across to them, then that would make them wanna continue on in life and not give in to the pressures that life offers and the struggles that they're facing. And so that's how it kind of started in twenty nineteen. And then from there, we kind of whittled it down to just a few leaders that were consistent in trying to help out do those things.

And then in twenty twenty one, in March, we finalized all the hard work for our 501 C3, so we are a nonprofit organization now. We're the Board of Directors, and I I get to serve as the Chairman of our Board of Directors, which I'm super excited to be able to do that. I've been past working with students through the church with student ministry and things like that. So the students have always been real close to my heart. So some of the things that we get to do, as we get to bring in speakers, we've been able to partner with the school system and have those assemblies, guys like Reggie Dabs, Trey Battle, all who speak, all mental health awareness, I have a good friend, Dana Ritchie, who's been and spoken at an event that we did, who has an incredible story.

And then we have done things like print out The Fun Place to provide a safe place for kids to come and hang out to have fun. And nothing really with the organization just really just find provided a fun place for them to come and hang out and have a good night. And they just have fun because a lot of times, you know, kids are struggling. They just need some fun in their life and everything is so fast paced and serious in the world we in. I mean, you know that. You're a high school student. So, you know, you're already gearing up for college, taking college classes and all that kind of stuff. So everything's just so fast paced and so for them to get a night to just kinda come and hang out and play putt put, ride go carts, you know, it's it's been pretty incredible. And then we get to partner with local organizations and really just excited about what's to come for Know Your Worth in the next which I think we can get to just a little bit. But that's kind of what we do and who we are. And so super excited to be able to serve on the board and be a part of what Know Your Worth is doing in the community.

Dr. Mark: And I know your wife, Courtney, is a part of this organization. Also, if you could explain her role and and also explain y'all have six kids, all girls, and so you certainly have a stake in this issue. I mean, there's no there's no doubt that with six kids, you worry about the future, what they had one, you know, tell us exactly when

Chiris: Yeah. So Courtney was one of the early on people that came alongside with Know Your Worth and joined in and was elected to serve on the board. She initially served as our secretary and now she just serves as one of our community board members. I didn't explain that earlier, but we tried to make our board kind of diverse. And so we have representatives from the school system, representatives from the faith based community, representatives from mental health, and then also community representatives as well. And so we have ten board members to make that up. And then we have an executive director who is April Thomason who also serves on alongside family connection who has a very close relationship with the school system and is able to help us a lot with that avenue. But as far as Courtney goes, a and our kids, yes, we do have six girls. And like I said earlier, just working with students and being a student ministry for so long. I've I've always loved young men and young women and seeing them grow and learn. And so, you know, this is one of the things that I think is in our community right now and across the

world, you know, mental health awareness, I think needs to grow. We see it a lot in our in our young people right now. And so super excited to be able to be a part of an organization that's trying to figure out how we can curb the suicides and suicide attempts in our community to make it a better place.

Dr. Mark: It's fascinating to hear you and your wife both speak your so outgoing and talkative and who talks the most at home?

Chris: Oh, Courtney. For sure.

Dr. Mark: I think now as I'd like to kinda intermix our two guests. Ethan is a seventeen year old starting senior this year, and he's gonna be one of your ambassadors for the Know Your Worth Collaborative. But he also has an initiative that he started himself called gosh. What's the name of your initiative?

Ethan: Today Will Be better.

Dr. Mark: Today Will Be Better. That's right. Tell me tell me a little bit about that.

Ethan: So it's a apparel business that I decided to start that kinda gives initiative for teen mental health awareness especially because mental health has played just tremendous part of my life ever since I was young, you know, inside and outside of my family. And so I felt that at one point in my life, especially when I was coming into high school, that I could feel that especially in Douglas as a community, that there wasn't much awareness of teen mental health. And I felt that Those around me didn't really know what it was, didn't know what I was talking about when I did mention it, and I felt like I knew a lot about it because of like research I had done or looking into it, and I just felt like I wanted to be able to spread that with them. So I decided to take the initiative to myself and make something that would use my creative ideas that I had to be able to spread something that I was extremely interested in.

Dr. Mark: Well, that is your ability to analyze and identify a problem and then to recognize the paucity of solutions for that problem at your age. And with no specific mental health training is impressive To say the least. I wish I had more words. And you're going to be an ambassador for the Know Your Worth Collaborative. It's it's amazing how your individual idea fits hand in glove with Know Your Worth Collaborative, which which initially started as with its goal as suicide prevention. But there's more to it than that now. But you tell me tell me about him being one of your investors. What what is what are they gonna be doing?

Chris: Yeah. So we're super excited. We started that a couple years ago. Our ambassador program. We worked with the high school and also with Citizens Christian Academy local private school here in Douglas. To have ambassadors at the high school. And it's a group small group of people who that go through a leadership training that we do at the beginning of the year. They get some mental health training as a part of that and just some leadership training. And then they kind of partner with us to be the liaison because, you know, I'm just almost a forty year old man who doesn't have really any fun, cool ideas anymore. So that's why we need people like Ethan to come in with his apparel stuff and help us out. So and that's one of the things we've done, the shirt that I'm wearing today is a Know Your Worth shirt that was designed by some of our ambassadors. We had a work day at the high school, and we just kinda presented there when some, hey, we're we're some things that you guys would like to do. Because as an adult, I can say all day long with the things that I think that I will work, but, you know, Ethan you guys know exactly what works for you. You know what you need. You know what you like to wear.

You know those sorts of things. And so we did that two fold. We did number one, we did, like, several shirts. And so we had the the students design, three, four different shirt styles that we actually wound up putting into to print. And then also different events that they thought would be fun for them, you know, because we can bring in speakers all day long, but if they don't wanna hear speakers You know, then it's not worth it. No matter how naturally they may be, you know. But things like just movie night, having a movie night where everybody goes to the Jardine Stadium, we throw a big you know, projector up and watch a movie together, just little things like that, and so we let our ambassadors do that. And then they also This year, we instituted a new program called our Love Coffee Day, which was started and thought of by Nicole Ricketson, who's our treasurer for Know Your Worth. And that was just a community event where we gave back to the community. We encouraged students our ambassadors, especially in their families to come and partner with the Coffey County Food Bank and go and serve their or the State Park and provide clean up. And things at the State Park in a couple different local schools with putting in gardens and different things like that. So it's a way for our students to give back because one of the things I think about mental health is that when you are physically, actively doing something to give back to your community, it boosts your overall feeling. Right? It makes you feel better because you're able to go and get back to other people once. That's one of the things that we wanted to do with the Love Coffee Day and encourage our ambassadors to do as well. So I am especially super excited to have Ethan on on board as an ambassador next year. Just to help us with a lot of the things that you've already been doing with your Today is Today Will Be Better Apparel, because I'm the one that who usually has to design the shirts. So fresh ideas are great. And just, like, the overall text out of the stuff that you're able to do as a young man. So super excited to have you on board. And see what our ambassadors are gonna be able to accomplish this year for our community.

Amanda: Well, and to kind of touch on what you said, that is exactly why we wanted to have you here today, Ethan? It's because it's like you said, we can sit here and talk until we're blue in the face and try to come up with ways that we think are best ways to reach teens or the best ways to educate their parents, or the best ways to educate health care providers. But without teens input on some things that actually would work or some things that actually would be helpful. We're just kinda shooting from the hip and hoping that we're right. So thank you for being here.

Dr. Mark: You know, Ethan, it's you've you've touched on where the idea came from and why it's so important to you, and thank you for that. Tell me about the motto though, today will be better. Where did

Ethan: well, I just wanted to come up with some kind of motto that would kinda, like, in state what I was trying to do. And I just felt like, especially being in your teen years, right, going through high school, every day is different. And every day, you're not sure what's gonna come at you. And it's just gonna be different things with either pressure from school or stress from all the work you're doing, where sports you're playing. You have so many different things in your life. And I just wanted people to know that this day can be better than yesterday. Right? Because if you have a bad day one day, it doesn't mean that the next day is gonna be better or the next day. So you just focus on one day at a time and you focus on being better and having a better

Dr. Mark: It's a message of hope. That's that's what struck me about it. When I when I read it, and that's very, very important. And I know you will understand this. It's evident that your intelligence and analytical ability is superb. When you're in your ten years high school, it seems so permanent. To so many teens. And and it's such a transient small part of life looking back, and it's so not permanent. You know? I mean, so that's why the the today will be better and that message of hope and what you just

said is so spot on. It's it's just it's like an arrow hitting the the bull's eye. It's perfect. It's literally perfect. Very impressive. Very impressive. And you've worked with the mayor here locally. Haven't you? Tell me about that.

I mean, how many high school kids are running around working with the mayor. I mean, my gosh.

Ethan: I I decided to reach out to the mayor because I wanted to make this something that would kinda go into the community a little bit better. And like you said before, I wanted to find a way that would resonate as a teenager to other teenagers. Right? Instead of just adults. So I thought that having a day where either like the school systems could represent it, right, where teachers and students would wear them.

It would just make it easier for me to be able to spread that awareness. So I reached out to Mayor Paulk and we signed a proclamation that NAMIb helped me write the and that became March second Teen Mental Wellness Day.

Dr. Mark: That was my next question that your entire program seems to be centered around World Teen Middle Wellness Day, which this year was March second of two thousand twenty three, and I don't know what the date is next year, but I'm assuming you're gonna do a similar campaign. For next year with sales. And you donated the money to Nami, which is the national alliance on mental illness, forty five hundred dollars for your first swing at the ball. I mean, it's I mean, wow, impressive. I'm sure they were impressed. What did Nami just kinda go

Ethan: They were definitely kinda a little confused. I had like, when I initially got in with Nami, I kinda had a Zoom meeting with a bunch of their board members. So there was, like, a couple of them on there. So they kinda knew who I was. They were kinda helping me when I first initiated this, like giving me advice on what to do and kinda talking to me about it. But the majority of them didn't really know who I was. Right? And they didn't know as being based from Nami, Georgia, being the entire state of Georgia. They didn't really know this small community in Douglas, which I was bringing my project out of. And So I think they were just really surprised that I was just bringing all this.

Amanda: I mean, how how many are there I mean, there can't be just lots of teams that are doing this much work for Nami. I mean, did they give you any idea how many others are doing anything similar? Are you the first?

Ethan: As I know of.

Amanda: You're the first I've heard of, I mean

Chris: It's pretty impressive.

Amanda: It is. It is.

Dr. Mark: I don't know your mom is here with you today, Meri, and I don't know. He intimidates me. Does he intimidate you? He's a very impressive young man. Well, Chris, you certainly couldn't have picked a better teenage ambassador than Ethan for the Know Your Worth collaborative.

Chris: Yeah. We're we're super excited to have him come on board next year. You know, it was funny whenever his idea first came out. We were some of us were a little worried. We're like, is this gonna, you know, take take awareness away from Know Your Worth? But but I kinda came back to it and said, you

know what? This is this is exactly what we need. This is this is the whole reason why we started the ambassador program. Is to have guys like you, students like you step up and take the bull by the horns and, you know, lead your own charge to for mental health awareness. So we're beyond thankful and grateful to have you come on on board next year and super excited for the ideas that we're gonna have this coming school year.

Amanda: So what better reassurance that y'all are doing good than to see teens turning around and promoting the same awareness that y'all are promoting?

Ethan: Exactly.

Dr. Mark: Yes. One plus one is often more than two, I believe, is the old saying.

Chris: Exactly.

Dr. Mark: And that kind of segues into the Know Your Worth collaborative, back to that. It originally started with its stated goal as suicide prevention, but it it expanded through family connection. To several other concepts, decreasing risky behavior, boosting self esteem, making responsible choices, and it also expanded in it's it's an interesting organization because they use various pillars of our society to promote these concepts, one being the school system, another being the churches, and another being the community at large. And tell us about these other goals, these other pillars that you utilize to help this campaign?

Chris: Yeah. So when we first started, it was strictly suicide prevention. And then as we as we continue to grow, what we realized was it wasn't just about suicide prevention, but it was about mental health awareness. Because that's kind of the overarching umbrella of which suicide prevention falls under, but it also allows us to talk about substance abuse, to talk about, you know, other issues these these students are facing. And so it gave us a bigger bigger umbrella, which we feel like in turn focusing on other pillars, not just one, is gonna give us a more broad approach to address the issues that our students and our teams are facing. And so part of what we've been able to do, especially since our we tried to do a diverse board with different people from in the community. Is to focus on all these different pillars, you know. So we brought in people from the school system, people from Unison, people from the sheriff's office, people from Coffee Regional Medical Center and other community volunteers and community people that work within the community and also faith based leaders who do a lot of counseling and things like that in our community as well. And so part of that has been able to to focus on these different pillars. And recently, we had another cohort meeting where we brought in law enforcement and Coffee Regional Medical Center to talk about the issues of substance abuse in our community and what we were seeing just going on in our community at large, not just necessarily with students. But that in turn, because we were a lot of us were from Family Connections, or Know Your Worth, led to us talking about that abuse of that as early as middle school and high school, which leads into a lot of the adults they're seeing in this repetitive same kind of cycle of addiction. And so it's been very helpful for us to see what's going on in the community so that we can try to figure out how to address that very early on as kids are entering in middle school and high school. And even elementary school, really.

Dr. Mark: I do think it's important. I was reading about Know Your Worth, and it's important to understand the milieu in which this campaign exists. Coffee County is very rural. It's very poverty stricken. This there are twenty eight percent about twenty eight percent of the kids in this county live

below the poverty line. Thirty eight percent or less than a hundred and fifty percent of the federal poverty line, which is at least about ten percent greater than the state average. Okay? And so you have poverty, you have substance abuse, not necessarily of the teens, but of the parents and the grandparents and the neighbors and the extended family. And so you have this perfect storm of poverty, drugs, alcohol, depression, potentially, suicidality, that it's it's a big hill that you're trying to climb here. And I'm sure you're aware of that. I'm I'm not telling you anything. You're your an associate pastor of a large church. You you get it. Okay. Ethan certainly is wise beyond his years to notice this problem and to set about trying to rectify the parts of it that he can. I want the audience to understand what y'all are up against. Look, I'm just a simple doctor. Okay? Somebody comes in with belly pain, you diagnose appendicitis, their risked out to the surgeon and it's fixed. Okay. That's simple. What y'all are trying to do is very complex. There's a bunch of moving parts. There's a bunch of unknown. There's a bunch of of motivations beyond things that you can see. It's it's a difficult mix that you're that you're playing with.

Tell me

Chris: Yeah. I think it's, you know, it's it's like what, hydro, you know, you cut off one head and another one pops back on. And so that with mental health awareness, and especially dealing with, like, all the things that you just mentioned in the community, you have to have a multifaceted approach. And so I think that's one of the great things about having the Board of Directors that we have involved in all the different avenues and the community that we have and in turn bringing in the student ambassadors to speak from their experience because, you know, you you you go to school with kids who are either involving in involved in substance abuse already, or they see their parents involved in that and how that affects them, how it affects their well-being, how it affects their behavior. And so I think trying to understand it from as many avenues as possible to try to diagnose the problem early on. That's one of the things I think that we need to get to. I think a lot of times with mental health, we want to medicate or we want to do things to just make feelings go away instead of actually fixing the root issue in the root problem. You know, and we see that from the church, you know, when I'm talking to somebody who is struggling with addiction or who is struggling with a specific sin, they just can't seem to rectify. They can put a ton of boundaries in place, you know. They can put in a ton of things to keep them from committing that sin again. But if they never address the root problem, it's always gonna be an issue. That's not until you get and address the root problem that you start to see results and you start to become more effective. That's one of the things that Know Your Worth that we're trying to do is we're trying to figure out when is this starting? When is the mental health issue starting with our with our young people? Is it when they're elementary, middle, is it when they're older? And so I think it's different for a lot of people, but being able to try to figure and pinpoint what's causing it is where we wanna go. Because if we can do that, then we can eliminate, you know, the depression, anxiety, the struggle that they have. And ultimately, that's that's where the Know Your Worth part comes in. If if we can get, you know, coming from a faith based background, we believe that, you know, everyone's creating the image of God that God and knit you together in your mother's womb. And so all life has meaning and value and worth. So for Know Your Worth, that's kind of one of the things that drives us as we want every single kid student adult to know their life has value. Regardless of what their background is, regardless of where they come from, so that they can move forward and be successful in life knowing those.

Dr. Mark: You know Ethan, we've just talked about the complexity of the problem. Okay? And the complexity of the driving forces behind the problem that you're trying to address. Okay? But having been a critical care doctor for over twenty five years, you know, I can say with all honesty, nothing. You hear the ambulance tones go out. They're coming into the and they say it's a child.

Everybody in the ER just every every muscle in your body tightens up, every every nerve in your brain fires, it's just it's it's always important. All humans are important, but there's just always that extra edge. So I think Chris, you were brilliant to immediately recognize the non compete nature of what he's doing and the and the the way it partners with what y'all are doing. And I think that you, Ethan, are particularly brilliant in recognizing the impact, the importance of stopping teens or or young young younger people from having problems and hurting themselves and God forbid even killing themselves. I mean, I I think you hit the nail on the head. Tell Tell me, I know that you're one of those people. I know that you're a teen. Okay? But, I mean, did that is it just that you recognize that that was wrong, or is that just your peers and you wanted to help the people you're around, Tim to me about some of your motivations?

Ethan: Well, like Chris said, like, you have to go down to the root problem. Right? That's your that's your last step to the process of it as a whole, but I kinda wanted to begin it with just putting it out there so people know. Because first, you have to identify that that is a problem. Right? That it's it's a real thing. And mental health is like, it's a real health problem. So it's like something that you have to identify and and deal with. Right? And then you go through the steps process of getting down to the roots of it and helping fix it. So I I had seen it in the school system as through middle school, through high school, and I noticed that it was a prevalent problem and that most people didn't even wanna identify or didn't wanna, like, believe it. And then when I dealt with it myself and saw people in my family dealing with it that I knew it was a real thing, you know. I wanted to be able to find another way to let other people know that it is a real thing and that they need to accept that in order to help themselves and get better.

Dr. Mark: Cool. Really, that's that's awesome. And Chris, I was also reading something about, what is this, the teen maze program? I didn't see an explanation of that. Is that

Chris: Teen maze is not something that we actually do. It's something that family connection does. Okay. But it's at the middle school. And so it's a program that started, I think, across the state several years ago. But basically, what it does is they walk through, you know, did you do teen maze? You might be able to remember I don't know if you remember more than I did. Yeah. Those are So basically, they walk through and they're given different life scenarios. So they're basically kinda it's kinda like a lottery. And they draw different scenarios. So some of them go on to go to you know, go to college and get a degree. Some of them get, you know, they get they draw a card where they get drunk and they go outside, they put on beer goggles, and they try to drive a golf cart, and they get into a wreck, and, you know, they get a DUI or put somebody in the hospital, and some of them even like they get STD's. Yeah. Some of them die. Like, I mean, because I I had to come in as a youth pastor and do eulogies for kids. They would bring me a little card with their name and I'd say, here lies so and so. You know? It's pretty crazy, but it helps the kids understand, alright. These are these are how I get to this point. If I wanna graduate and be successful, then I need to take x y and z step. But if I make a wrong turn and I do choose to do this, then here are the consequences that could possibly be before me. So it's a really good way to help middle schoolers, especially in those young development years to understand, alright, here are the consequences of my actions.

Dr. Mark: Consequences of choices and acts. I didn't I see. I didn't know where there was no explanation of it. I I wasn't.

Chris: Yeah. So that's what that that is. It's a it's a program that they put on at the middle school.

Dr. Mark: So Ethan, next year, you're planning for next year, I presume? Tell me tell me what the plans are for next year.

Ethan: So the plan is right now just to go a little bit bigger. I mean, this year, we kinda stalled a little bit. So we only got to really put it out for, like, a little over a month to really put it out and go through March second as the day when people wear the t shirts in the community. So this year, hope to go a little bigger. And maybe a different design and maybe some other things of apparel besides just t shirts.

Chris: So Know Your Worth is continuing to grow. We've, you know, brought on Marnie Smith to be one of our board members. Marnie's daughter, Caroline, was one of the teens who committed suicide early on in the twenty nineteen before we started the whole thing. And so she's been able to go and tell her story to multiple counties, and we have so many people interested in what we're doing for Know Your Worth. And so part of what we're working on right now is we're about seventy percent done with a curriculum that we will be able to hand off to other school systems to be able to implement into their, like, monthly regimen. So there's there'll be kind of like a a template for them to go by. So, like, for one of them that we looked at at our last board meeting, like, was empathy. And so it'll talk about what empathy is. It gives the teacher, like, ten minutes worse, of, like, a discussion, how to ask questions about empathy, tell their kids what empathy is, and then even like a YouTube clip or some sort of multimedia that they can utilize in their classroom to just kids get kids to discuss these things. And so they're all positive. They're all designed to kind of go and focus on the the mental health of these kids, you know, compassion, all those kinds of things. And so there's ten different words that we'll be able to do one a month for the school year. So we've got that curriculum along with, you know, all of our branding, all that kind of stuff that they can use speaker lists, resources, partnering with Nami, like you said, you know, all of our board members went through a Nami training where we got awareness on how to how to specifically deal with suicide prevention. If we knew of somebody that was going through that, how we could deescalate all of our board members went through that, which was pretty pretty interesting to see how all that works and to kind of give us some more insight on it. But trying to put all that together, so that all these counties that want to be a part of what we're doing where we can resource them and be able to not just affect people here in Coffey County, but throughout the state of Georgia, hopefully.

Amanda: Right. Well, and part of what, you know, Mark and I's goal has been throughout this process of starting this podcast is educating healthcare providers on how to best take care of patients in different situations with always keeping the ultimate goal amount of treating the person as if they're a member of your own family. And Mark may want to expound upon that. If you do, as I'll let him, if not, there are a couple of questions that I wanted to ask y'all, you know, things that we can help teach our listeners, you know, some tips. Hopefully, we can give them, that they can keep in mind when they are dealing with patients that are presenting to them with some issues that y'all are, you know, helping to bring awareness to.

Dr. Mark: Well, I I think philosophically, it's really cool to me that there are people out there doing these things. You know, it's it's you you don't see that as a practicing physician. You really, you know, I mean, my world is actually very small. There's a sick person in the room and I'm trying to help that person. Okay? But there's bigger forces out there to hopefully prevent me from having to see somebody that's suicidal. In the ER and all of the potential catastrophe thereof, it's impressive that people are thinking of these things. It's impressive that people are actually doing these things. It's even more impressive that young people are approaching these issues. It's it's really amazing to me. And and the the far reaching impact of it because you may not even know who you've helped. Well, you won't know who you've helped. Unless

somebody comes up to you perhaps even years later on say, hey, you may not know this, but I was on the verge of, you know, and thank you for being or they may never say that to you. They may have moved on and gone somewhere else. I mean, but you you have to understand the value of what people like y'all are doing. It's you may not ever know. The the reward is intrinsic. The reward is societal. The reward is Ethereal. It's there, though, it's real.

Chris: That's right.

Dr. Mark: And hopefully, it it prevents me from having to see them in the state of crisis and catastrophe. Seriously. It's it's very, very important.

Amanda: Well, and, I mean, I did actually share this with Ethan's mom on the phone, I think. But just to give a little personal story, I guess, of how another person's actions impacted me. Just to share with y'all, you know, you never know what like Mark said, you never know the impact you're gonna have on somebody through the work that you're doing. But Ethan, your mom was super nice to me in a way that touched me. And I told her, I said, I I know all these years I've not really conveyed my appreciation to you, but we certainly still talk about it as a family, and I've never forgotten your kindness. But when I had my second baby, we showed up at Mark's old house, a friend of mine was living in it, and there was a gift on the doorsteps. And it was from your mom, and it was Ragged Ann and Andy dolls, and she didn't know me. I don't think very well at the time. I certainly didn't know her. But when I picked up that gift and I saw it, it was I really don't have the words to be able to explain how touching that was to me because I'd been through a difficult time in my life before that. And to see somebody who really didn't know me, embrace me, and embrace my baby, and be so happy that my baby was in this world. And extend that love offering. It was it was very touching. And it it has left an impact on me. And my point is, you know, the things that you're doing for people, you may not realize the impact that they're having and you may they may never thank you or hopefully someday they'll have the opportunity to thank you, and it may be years later, like in my case. But you you really are doing good in the world, I believe that. And I'm a personal recipient of how just being kind or raising awareness about a situation or just extending a love offering whenever a person may be going through a difficult time. I'm a testimony of how how touching that can be forever on a family. So thank you.

Dr. Mark: The, I guess, the old saying, the single beat of a butterfly's wing. You know, I mean, it can it can set off a hurricane on the other side of the world in that you know, obviously, you want it to be a good hurricane, not a bad hurricane. And I think I think you're doing that in spades, Ethan. And certainly, you have a long history of doing that, Chris. Y'all's efforts are greatly appreciated, and it's very impressive.

Chris: Thank you. Yeah. I think, you know, going back to what you said, Amanda, everybody has a story. Mhmm. And that's one of the things that I've realized in ministry, and one of the things I try to instill in my kids. They'll come home and talk about somebody being mean at school or saying these things at school. And that's one thing I try to remind them is that everybody has a story and you don't know what that story is. For Caroline, all the all the outside factors didn't look like there were any issues. You know? She was a cheerleader, she was popular, she had friends, was about to go to prom, and so, like, all the outside factors there, you would have never thought a girl like this was struggling on the inside. And then you have some kids who, it's very clear that you can tell just about accountants that they're going through something difficult. But at the end of the day, you never know what someone's going through. And so just a con where just something nice, you know, you never know what their story is. I remember I've been a lot of customer service in addition to Ministry of My Life and we watched the video,

and I think it was a Chick fil A training video. Actually, that we the company I worked for showed us. We weren't I wasn't working for Chick fil A where they used this video. And, basically, it panned around the room, and it showed all of these different people in all these different scenarios, you know. So you had somebody sitting alone by the window eating and you had a lady yelling at the person behind the counter because they forgot her drink or, you know, messed up something. And then it kinda went through everybody's situation. They ended up panned back through. And then at the bottom, it had these captions, you know, and so, like, the person by the window, they had lost their husband's and they always came there every Tuesday and sat in that same spot. And so that wife still goes there. The lady that was, you know, yelling that the person behind the counter, she had just gotten a cancer diagnosis right before that and was frustrated and angry and distraught. And so I think part of just being good people. Like you said, Mark, just putting it out there into the universe. Part of that is just you just need to look at everybody through the lens of you knowing what their story is. You can't control them, but you can control your kindness and your ability to convey that to the people around you.

Dr. Mark: And and that's what striking Ethan about your motto Today Will Be Better. And the message of hope that it is, the best man at my mother and father's wedding. My father was an optometrist. He died at a young age. His best man was an optometrist, a good friend of his, that ran away from an orphanage at age fourteen, ran away from an orphanage. He was an orphan, and then he was treated so badly at the orphanage that he weren't even this was a long time ago. Okay. Then he had to run away from an orphanage, put himself through school, put himself through college, put himself through optometric school, the day he died, he was the largest landowner in that parish in in Louisiana, not that the material part is what's important, but hope hope persists in the human heart. I know two other physicians that were orphans that are superb physicians. Again, I think actually one of them left the orphanage early also and became excellent doctors and have saved and helped so many people. And so your message of hope today will be better is so accurate it's so important. I just think you should know that.

Ethan: I just I think it is. It's just a little something just to just to let you know that it's it's gonna be okay, you know? Because when you're in those moments, right, like when you're sitting alone by yourself and you're dealing with all these emotions and stuff, you you can't really be outside of your body and seeing what's going on. Like, you don't really know it's gonna be okay. Right? Because you're trapped by all these other feelings. So just that little motto of today will be better or it's gonna be better or if you just take it one step at a time, it's gonna be better, then that'll just help you in the long run.

Dr. Mark: It's amazing.

Amanda: So Ethan, since you've started your initiative, have you had what types of things have you dealt with from your peers and your classmates? Have they been supportive? Tell us about that.

Ethan: Yeah. There was a lot of support in there. It was a big thing when I was first doing it was being comfortable with, like, putting myself out there and being, I guess, in a way the face of that campaign or that initiative for teen mental health awareness. So I was kind of worried about that. But once I got out there and once it was in the newspaper a couple times, then especially in school, I found a lot of support like friends coming up and telling me that I don't know. I was doing a good job where I had, like, my coaches texting me and telling me good things or teachers always saying things and especially on March second when everyone was wearing the shirts at school. It was really cool to see so many people even people I've never seen before, I just randomly saw in the hallway with my shirt on, you know. And it was just like, wow. So I've had a lot of support in that.

Amanda: Yes. So do you have any advice for teens who may be wanting to start a similar initiative?

Ethan: I just put it out there. I mean, just yeah. Just go for it. I mean, there's nothing nothing that can hurt you with it. And I guess, life's full with things that you can't control. So if you worry on things you can control, then you'll be fine.

Amanda: And and maybe just one last question because we all wanna know. Do you have any advice for parents on how to I think Chris worded it best. He said how to not be weird. How did how did you say it a second ago Chris?

Chris: You said how to not be weird, but it was not how to how to be weird but still be approachable.

Amanda: Any tips for parents on how you can be approachable for your teen?

Ethan: Well, I mean, the big thing is to show that you care, I guess, but it's not like overreaching in a way. And just to kinda, I don't know, be a part of what's going on in their lives. Right? You know? And I guess questions are a big thing just to ask, you know, and see what's going on, you know, and that's how you can realize or see what kind of mental health issues are going on or what they're dealing with on a daily basis.

Amanda: Should parents just point blank ask, like, hey, are are you okay? Are you having a good day? Or

Ethan: I mean, that's always a first if I guess. I know sometimes if you're you can be standoffish and not wanna really talk about it all the time, but it doesn't hurt to ask.

Amanda: You never know if you don't

Dr. Mark: I've got a question. You know, your your dad is one of the specialist surgeons here in town, a foot surgeon. I've known him for a long time. And my understanding is some of his patients have told him about, hey, I saw your kid in the paper. What's good? Tell tell me about some of those interactions. What does he come home and say?

Ethan: Yeah. Well, he he would just come home and tell me he was proud of me and I was just kinda, you know, confused at first because I wasn't really sure what for, you know. And then he would kinda explain to us at, like, the dinner table that a bunch of patients had come in and would tell them that they saw me in the newspaper and that I was just how great it was of the cause I was doing. And I guess he was just telling me how much it made me feel good.

Dr Mark: That's awesome. I I know he's proud. That's He's he's a good guy. Obviously, you are too.

Amanda: And that has to let you know that your messages get out there. That people are seeing it. You're reaching people that you don't even know.

Dr. Mark: You've got a good ambassador, Chris.

Chris: I do. Super excited.

Amanda: Well, what about you, Chris? Do you have any advice for health care providers? How can we help your initiative? What y'all are doing? How can if we have somebody in front of us? Like, Do you have anywhere we can direct them if if you kinda don't, if you just have some tips for us because you've been boots on the ground dealing with these kids.

Chris: Right.

Amanda: So give us some advice.

Chris: Well, I think I think Nami has a lot of resources, you know, that Ethan partnered with. They have a ton of resources. There's a number. It's just nine eight eight. You can call or text it. It's the National Crisis Hotline, and anybody can do that. Teen adult doesn't matter. And they will put you, you know, in contact with someone who can walk you through a situation. So, you know, we've got there's a couple of billboards around town that have that information on it. And I think just from us, with Know Your Worth. I think you can do more in helping us with you know, the people that you see? Are you seeing people, you know, as doctor, as a nurse practitioner who are struggling with these issues? You know? And what are you finding out that is contributing to those factors, you know? And then how can we address that early on? I don't know that that we can necessarily do anything for y'all. But except for, you know, just put the message out there just to remind people their lives have meaning, you know. And and Mark, I think you said this before we jumped on the podcast. You know, just, you know, being patient first as a doctor is important to you. And and that's one of the things in ministry that that I've always strived to do is to be people first. You know? I can love you in the moment regardless of how you're treating me, or how you're acting towards me, and then we can figure out the situation. Because like we said earlier, you know, everybody's got a story. We don't know what that is. But if I lead with love, we can kinda go from there and kinda figure out where it's at. But if I immediately get defensive or jump back, then we're not gonna progress anywhere. We're not gonna get any better.

Dr. Mark: Well, you know, sitting here listening to this, I'm wondering about Do y'all need volunteers? Do y'all need help with the Know Your Worth collaborative? Do you need community people to help y'all do things. I don't know. You know?

Chris: Yeah. Of course.

Dr. Mark: You know, because it's it's always been in my mind that nothing works like work and nothing helps like helping. So you can take somebody that's maybe having some issues and say, look, get hooked up with these people. You can help other. Nothing helps somebody like helping someone else. You know, if I can steer them to y'all's. Y'all need volunteers to hang up flyers, sell t shirts, whatever, you know, I don't I don't know.

Chris: Yeah. We can always use help. And so some of the ways you can do that. You can always donate to the calls. You can always be boots on the ground. We did that Love Coffee Day. Like I've mentioned, in the spring, we're gonna do one in the fall. And so, you know, we can, you know, look that look out for that community as we're gonna be putting information more about that as we as we have some more information. And then in addition to our Know Your Worth board meetings, we also have what we call the Know Your Worth collaborative. And anybody in the community is invited to come to those meetings. And so that's where we get a lot of our, you know, how can we how can we address this situation? We get a lot of ideas from people within the community who may have had a family member who struggled with

mental health or may have seen something, you know, if they're coming from the medical field or from the sheriff's office. They may have seen like a uptick in specific mental health related causes, you know. And so they can convey that to us, and then we can in turn figure out if there's something we can do. To help in some in some way, shape, or form. And so those collaborative meetings, we do those, I think, every other month. And so we post that on social media and and kinda send out the information. So those are definitely two ways. We always need volunteers. And, you know, anyway, to help us keep going.

Amanda: Well, let me just say, you said a moment ago, you said, I don't know how how we can help you all. Well, let me just say, y'all do help us. And for everyone listening, I encourage you to get to know about your community resources because for me, when I'm sitting there with a family or I was working with pediatrics for eight years. So when I was sitting with a pediatric patient who's going through a hard time, you know, having somewhere to direct them, a a a club, like you said, so to speak, that they can join, a place where they can volunteer, somewhere where they can plug in and get the help that they need. More than just what I can do with them with the twenty minutes that I have with them. You know, that's that is a gigantic I mean, you're helping more than I'm helping, honestly. And so you do help us because we're not boots on the ground out there with the kids. We're not working with them. We're not giving them somewhere to go to have fun on Sunday nights and somewhere safe to hang out. You know, we're just there once the problem's already you know, a lot of times the problems way out of control by the time we get to them. So y'all are a gigantic help for us, which is why we wanted to have both of y'all here so that we can help bring awareness to the fact that, you know, hey, know the resources that are in your community, if you have resources like this, then get you some reach out to Chris and Ethan and see how you can get some of these resources in your community.

Dr. Mark: Well, I wanna thank y'all for being here. It's I want to help y'all in any way to expand these programs And it's it's an amazing thing y'all are both doing. Thank you very much.

Amanda: Well before we end up for Ethan, tell tell the listeners how they can find you and find out more about you and and your apparel.

Ethan: So my website is www.todaywillbebetterapparel.com, which you can just search up and find. There should be a donation page on there if you would like to donate. And shirts are not available as of now, but probably starting springtime around January, February, going into March, shirts will be back up. And in person in Douglas, Designs Down South will sell the shirts as they print them, and you can order them straight from the website.

Amanda: And we'll have your website linked. And whenever you have a design ready, we'll definitely share that. We'd love to share that. And when people make a donation to your cause, where is their money going? Is it all going to Nami. Is that right?

Ethan: It'll it'll all go to Nami Georgia, and they'll use it for their initiatives that they do.

Amanda: And what about you Chris, how can our listeners find find what you're doing?

Chris: Yeah. I think it follows on Instagram. @knowyourworthcc for Coffee County, and then also just go Facebook and search, Know Your Worth collaborative. And we will have a website up and running in the next month or so. Where we'll have some of our apparel up there to purchase and kinda like Ethan all that

money turns around. We're non profit. We don't have anybody that works for you know, us that makes any money, all that money goes back into the community to provide stuff for our kids to do, students to do, bringing speakers, have advanced those sorts of things.

Amanda: So if people in other communities are listening and they don't have a Know Your Worth campaign or they want a Know Your Worth campaign, can they reach out to y'all and see if because I know you said that y'all are prepared and curriculum.

Chris: Yes. They can reach out to us. We're in the hopefully, in the closing stages of that because we do have a couple of neighboring counties especially that are, like, they're ready to hit the ground running with this because they have seen an uptick in their mental health issues as well. And they see the impact that we've had here in Coffey County. And so you know, reach out to us on Instagram, Facebook messages. I usually get those those notifications, and so I'll be happy to respond to you and see how we can partner with you guys once we get everything kind of finalized and be able to send that out to you and hopefully get that implemented in your county as well.

Amanda: Awesome.

Dr. Mark: Well, Thank you for listening today. I want our listeners to be left with the following message. There are really good people in the world. There is hope there's people out there doing things that are amazing, and two of them are sitting here with me right now. Thank you very much.

Amanda: Thank yall.

Chris: Thank you.

Amanda: Mark, I think those are fabulous guests. Don't you?

Dr. Mark: Oh, absolutely.

Amanda: They had a lot of very good information that will be very useful to many people or at least I hope it will. So now it's time for my very favorite part of the show, my very favorite segment. Where I get to phone a friend, I get to ask you some questions that some of our listeners have had, Mark. So I know we just talked about teen mental health awareness and mental health awareness and ways that there are community resources out there that can help teens when they're having mental health crises. Okay? But parents at home. The parents at home oftentimes, okay, they recognize as their child may be dealing with depression or anxiety or even attention deficit disorder or hyperactivity disorder. And they've tried therapy, which is great. They've tried coping mechanisms. They're doing everything that they can and they feel like, hey, I'm still just not feeling like my child is really getting all the help that they need. And so they decide it's time to go to the doctor. Maybe we need some medicine. Maybe we need to try some medication. For this anxiety and depression. One of the biggest questions that I always heard when I was practicing pediatrics, parents always wanna know, you know, Is this medicine safe? Are these medicines safe for my baby? And are these medications gonna change my baby's personality and turn my baby into a zombie? What can you tell parents providers? What what can you tell parents about that and answer in a way that health care providers can learn from it? And learn how to best convey the same information to their patients and their family members?

Dr. Mark: I think in general, and I'm certainly not the guy that prescribes these medicines or knows a lot of the details about any given medication for treating pediatric anxiety, depression, etcetera. But in general, by the time a patient is at a provider's office and discussing the potentiality of of medicine to control whatever. Or to help control whatever. You know, there's an obvious problem. Okay. There There's a situation that needs to be dealt. Right. Okay.

Amanda: But by the time the pair or the caregiver has taken that step and said, okay, I'm going to the doctor. They've probably been dealing with this a while.

Dr. Mark: Correct. And so like all medical treatments, whether it be medicines or surgical interventions or whatever, everything is a risk reward ratio. Okay? So is the risk of whatever you're doing or not doing gonna provide you a reward that outweighs what you're doing or not doing. That's the question. Okay? And so again, by the time the patient's there at the provider's office, there's a situation, a problem, difficulty that needs to be dealt with. Okay? The the the problem has been identified. We need to now do something that provides us some reward. Okay? And so all of these medications that are used, the modern antidepressants, the amphetamine based drugs for hyperactivity disorder are studied extensively. These drugs are not just thrown at people willy nilly. There's massive studies to show that they work or don't work, that there is not severe danger involved with them. Of course, anything anybody can have a problem with any given drug at any time. But in general, what I'm talking about is they're proven to be safe and of benefit. Okay? So if you have a kid that's so ADHD that they can't perform at school, they can't you know, gain the basic knowledge that they need to succeed later in life. You've already got a problem. You know, your specific comment, quote, turn them into a zombie, end quote, you know, I don't see kids zombie fied. Okay? So, you know, I mean, you've got a situation where this child needs help to to achieve a foundation to succeed later in life. Okay? There's people that study these drugs and invent these drugs and and do massive ongoing trials with these things. You know, they're proven to be reasonably safe. Okay? And that's why you get to an experienced provider, pediatric pediatrician or pediatric nurse practitioner that's adept at prescribing these drugs. In which drugs may best benefit any given situation in any given child, and that's what they're there for. They're there to help you do those things and the same things with the anti depressants. Now the the specifics of any class of drugs and and details about drugs that I don't prescribe, you know, hey, I'm just gonna have to punt back to you. You're the one that did this for eight years. You're the one that prescribed these drugs and worked in conjunction with pediatricians that prescribe these drugs and know This is not really infinitely more about it than I do.

Amanda: This is not really the way the phone or friend works Mark.

Dr. Mark: Well, I know, but see, I'm kinda here to provide a philosophical overview of why they may need the medication. And now, back to you.

Amanda: Well, I can say this is just speaking purely from experience in the field. Whenever a parent says, hey, I'm scared, this is gonna make my my baby be a zombie. My answer to that question is always, okay, well, let's talk about why why are we here? Let's talk about what's going on with your baby. Let's talk about, you know, because I'm keeping in mind the whole time. You know, I'm talking to them. Just the way that I want I would wanna be talked to if I was showing up with this same type concern with my own baby. You know, hey, what's going on with your child? What's going on with them at home? What's going on with them at school? What are their grades like? Are they struggling? Specifically in reading? Is reading difficult? Are they having trouble with the reading comprehension or are they having trouble staying focused?

Is the reading grade dropping? You know, what's going on? Are they having? Are they experiencing anxiety? Are they experiencing depression? What's going on in their life? And if they are experiencing things or their grades are struggling or whatever, I say, okay, hey, in specific to specifically answer your question about ADHD medications, amphetamines, no, they don't change your baby's personality. The way that they work, the best way that I ever had it explained to me, and the way that I try to in turn explain it to parents. The way that those medications work is you've got a child who they're little, you know, they're most oftentimes they're super smart, you know, they're not able to slow their brain down enough that their brain can focus on the task at hand, the task that they're trying to learn. And so what these medications do is they wake up the part of the brain, that says, hey, we need to slow down, we need to focus, we need to pay attention to what we're trying to learn here. They wake that part of the brain up, because that part of the brain is just kinda always just kinda asleep or whatever. And in doing that, is your child gonna seem a little calmer and seem a little more focused or are they going to focus a little more on certain things possibly, but that's that's the point of the medicine. That's not changing who your child is because when this medicine, you know, wears off your baby is right back to running around wide open or whatever. Your baby is still the same baby. And they're still the same baby while they're taking the medication. It's just that now we're able to focus on the things that we need to focus on in order to be successful in life.

Dr. Mark: And I think it's a similar thing with antidepressants. They're used, yes, there are people that are on lifelong anti depressant medication, but oftentimes it's used as a bridge measure for a couple of years to let things reset while you're going through the normal reparative process of whatever is going on. And it allows your brain to work again, you know. And

Amanda: Okay. Well, since this whole our whole goal here is that treat patients the way that we wanna be treated treat them like they're part of our own family. I have to ask Mark, if your child was experiencing seeing depression, anxiety suffering from ADHD or ADD, you know, to the point that it's affecting their grades and affecting their ability to learn. Would you feel comfortable giving your child medication and antidepressant and amphetamine whatever the medication would be, you know, as related to their diagnosis. Would you feel comfortable?

Dr. Mark: Yes. Particularly, if I went to an experienced provider and they said, I've done this for x number of years. I've had x number of patients that act just like this that are having these same kind of problems. And this is what usually helps. And that doesn't help. You know, they have a plan in place. They're thinking one step ahead out of me as a parent just providing that medication that day. And if if they assured me that they were comfortable with it and that it was appropriate, for the child presenting to them with with the situation that I'm showing them. And yes, I would feel comfortable giving the medication.

Amanda: Well, I hope that our message of, you know, treat people like you wanna be treated, take care of patients as if they're part of your own family. I hope that that was conveyed today. Reach out. Learn what your community resources are. Use those community resources when you're taking care of your patients. Those community resources are such a big help when you're sitting down talking to families and patients. Just just being able to set about a plan of action for them because we're only with them for a few minutes, but being able to help them set about a plan of action. To help them, you know, get their own life on track or set about doing good in the world or rebuild their self esteem or whatever. Those are just great resources to know about.

Dr. Mark: Yes. Too excellent guests today, very impressive. I was I feel proud that they were here.

Amanda: Me too. And so for all of our listeners, You can find us at www.markedmedicine.com. Go to our website, check it out. You will see all of our social media pages linked. You'll even see an area where you can submit questions. And if you tune in next week, you may just hear me ask Mark the question that you submitted. So thank you for listening.

Dr. Mark: Thank you.