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John Moe: A note to our listeners: this episode contains discussion of suicidal ideation.

I used to believe that for most people, having one mental illness—just one, just the one!—was possible. Common! I thought it was very normal for someone to just have major depressive disorder, to have generalized anxiety disorder and nothing else. You got OCD, but OCD alone. I don't really think that way anymore, and that's because it's simply not what I have seen. I don't see people with only one thing. I don't talk to people with just one issue—maybe ever, or at least barely at all. There are no solo artists out there as far as I can tell, when it comes to mental health conditions, only bands. If you have one condition, you probably have more than one condition.

People are complicated. Their minds are complicated. The terminology of different disorders is useful in a couple ways. One for insurance purposes, two for better understanding some of the elements of one's mental makeup. But I think it helps to understand that these are elements and not really a totality. I'll show you what I mean by the conversation we'll have this week. It's *Depresh Mode*. I'm John Moe. I'm glad you're here.

Transition: Spirited acoustic guitar.

John Moe: You might know our guests this week from times in your life when you've been trying extremely hard to ride a stationary bike as strenuously as possible while a very positive and energetic woman cheers you on. Kendall Toole became pretty famous as an instructor on Peloton, amassed hundreds of thousands of followers on social media. And one might be tempted to think that because Kendall is physically fit and energetic and comes across positively that she has never known mental health problems.

Not so. It doesn't work that way.

Kendall does have experience with depression, anxiety, OCD, suicidality. And the idea of using her platform to speak out on those issues has informed the work she has been doing lately: advocating for mental health awareness, fighting stigma. She started a company called NKO Club. It stands for Not Knocked Out. She'll explain that in a bit. They have an app coming out. Kendall's also involved in an organization called Project Healthy Minds, which is holding a World Mental Health Day Gala and Festival on October 9th and 10th in New York City.

Transition: Spirited acoustic guitar.

John Moe: Kendall Toole, welcome to *Depresh Mode*.

Kendall Toole: Thank you so much for having me.

John Moe: I want to talk about anxiety. I wanna talk about depression. I want to talk about exercise. But I understand that OCD goes really far back, and I feel like we need to touch on

the earliest mental health things in your life to get a full picture. When did OCD come into your life?

Kendall Toole: Yeah, so OCD came into my life I think inadvertently. It came in in a bit of a whisper because of what I was drawn to as a kid. I really fell in love with gymnastics as a young girl. I wanted to go to the Olympics. Clearly that did not happen, but I got in the fitness realm in a different way. I would say the Olympics of professional fitness, maybe, would be the way to go. But I really fell in love with the sport, and it was this draw and this kind of draw towards perfectionism, I think, and the repetition of it that felt very comfortable to me. But that really kind of revealed itself to be OCD when I was about 10 or 11, and it was when I stopped doing gymnastics, but I still had these very intense tendencies and rituals.

So, I was very afraid to be barefoot. Which is kind of funny, because I was barefoot all the time when I was competing and at the gym. But I had to have clean feet. I had to be tucked into my bed a certain way. I needed to turn light switches on and off a certain amount of times. And I would get very, very anxious if my rituals—particularly around bedtime—weren't completed. And then that led to really ruminating and very intense thought patterns that I would have trouble getting out of, which was really the anxiety.

So, I'm really grateful though. My family is very open-minded when it came to therapy and seeking help and support. I know I'm very lucky in that respect. A lot of people don't have parents who are open-minded to those sort of things. And so, I went and saw my first therapist when I was about 11 years old and was diagnosed with OCD. And that's when we were like, "Oh, okay. This thing isn't just me feeling out of control. There's something that I can assign to it." It took the pressure off of the experience that I was feeling to know that it was something that other people have.

John Moe: I know gymnastics can be really intense, and often it's more intense than I think kids of some ages are really equipped to handle. Do you think that contributed to that pattern, to that disorder?

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Kendall Toole: I would completely agree with that. I think we're noticing this now, and I'm happy that the conversations we're having about mental health are expanding as we look at childhood, at childhood sports, at the pressures that come with sports. And particularly things like gymnastics, where—you know, if your toe isn't pointed, you could do an incredible combination or move or whatever you needed to do on any of the modalities and then be dropped points. And this pressure perform and to achieve perfectionism is so ingrained in the scoring system that you're trained that way.

You know, a lot of— Nothing against different cultures, but there was a very strict Eastern European kind of energy.

John Moe: Béla Kàrolyi. Yeah.

Kendall Toole: Yes. Yeah! And then that's been revealed as time—obviously, a lot of scandal and unfortunate experiences for a lot of gymnasts there because of that style of training and what that environment can allow. And so, I'm excited on one hand that we're finally starting to shape and change the way we look at children in sport and how these sports are set up. Because I don't believe a lot of them— They come from an adult's mindset of how to train somebody, but they don't take *(unclear)* the sensibilities of a developing child's mind. And I think that's where a lot of problems come.

John Moe: And just this idea too—especially gymnastics, but I suppose it's true of like diving in some other sports—that a child is gonna go out there and do their best, and then a quantified number is going to be presented for how they did. It's kind of bananas.

Kendall Toole: It is! Because it's not something where you can judge growth. And I think—

John Moe: Yeah, or effort.

Kendall Toole: Plenty of us who come from these very competitive sports growing up—or even competitive dance, which I got into after—and cheer and more of the—I would say more artistic side of sport, it still is this expectation of always being better and not being able to celebrate the growth in the wins and the development of your skillset. And that partly can come with individual sports. I know we see a lot of athletes who come from individual sports who the mental strain is very, very difficult. We see this a lot in tennis. We see it a lot in golf, in gymnastics. These individual sports are very difficult, because you don't have the support of a team, emotionally. There's a lot of onus on the individual athlete.

And so, mental health and making sure you're training your athlete mentally from a very young age should be deeply imbued in children in these independent sports in particular.

John Moe: Yeah. I hope that's the next step. What happened after you got diagnosed with the OCD? Was it meds? Therapy? Like, how did they approach it?

Kendall Toole: Well, I learned a lot of therapy, different approaches. We weren't quite to the point of needing medication. I had a wonderful psychologist who gave me a lot of— Ironically, I look at them now, and I guess they were almost like meditations or breathing exercises. But one thing that I really love doing, I still do to this day. And bless my mom, like whenever I'm going through a season, she'll send me a sand timer. And this is what I learned from my therapist. It's a three-minute sand timer. And I would have these really overwhelming intrusive thoughts. And it would be just kind of like catastrophizing different scenarios in my life. If I didn't complete my ritual a certain way, something bad would happen to someone that I love, or— All these thoughts that my brain was coming up with.

And what I was allowed to do was, for the time that I turned the sand timer over, I was supposed to think those terrible thoughts. I actually—instead of fighting, not thinking about it, my therapist said, "Hey. You have three minutes a day to go all in. To think all of the bad thoughts, to exercise that fear, exercise that muscle." It's kind of like— I hate to say like popping the pimple, but like *(chuckles)* it kind of was that. Like, going into the more shadowy space.

And then when the sand timer was done, I had to start coaching my brain and self-talk and saying, “You already had your moment. You already thought those thoughts. That time of the day is done. Get present.”

And so, I found different seasons of my life—now being 32 and an adult woman and operating my own business and all these big scary things—that sand timer trick has held me through so many different seasons of my life.

John Moe: Do you still have a sand timer?

Kendall Toole: You know what? Yes, I do. It is in my closet. And now that I'm talking about it, I'm like, “I need to bring it out.” We moved recently down to a new home, so I'm like—It's in a box! But thankfully, I haven't needed the sand timer, but I think in the coming probably—I have a lot of big stuff coming. So, I think I might need some sand timer talk for a little bit.

John Moe: Yeah, no, I've heard the expression with anxiety, like, “Let the bird fly into your house, but don't build a nest for it.” Like, keep the windows open so it can fly out when it's done, and don't let it make a home. Yeah.

Kendall Toole: Yeah. Allowing it to have a space, but also not defining yourself by it. I think that's something I've learned a lot in the process of being open about my mental health is that it's a part of who I am. It's something that I deal with. But it doesn't define the way I go through my world. It makes me, I think, more empathetic and more understanding, because I can feel things in a lot of different ways. And I know a lot of people also feel that.

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But no longer is it a form of isolation. It's more, “Oh, I could sit with somebody and kind of pick up on something and be like, okay, they might need a little bit more time.” Or I can feel connected to them. So, it is. You don't wanna define yourself by it, but it is something that can be a descriptive superpower in a different way.

John Moe: Yeah. Yeah. It's the philosophy behind person-first language. You know? He is a person with schizophrenia, not he is a schizophrenic. Because he's more than just the disorder that he has.

Kendall Toole: Absolutely. Absolutely.

John Moe: When did anxiety and depression emerge?

Kendall Toole: Mm. Yeah, so that slowly started to emerge through my teen years, and it really came to a head my senior year of college. I think a lot of individuals who've gone through what I've been through or deal with anxiety and depression, we see a big spike in diagnosis right around those college years, those late-teen college years. It's a big life transition. The stresses are high. There's a lot of unknowns, a lot of uncertainty, and it kind of feels like this perfect storm. And so, really where it came to a head for me was in between—

The beginning, actually, of my senior year, I had a very, very dark moment. It was leading up— Honestly, like my mental health, it felt as if the colors were kind of draining out of the day. I had, on the surface, everything at my disposal. I was getting great grades at USC. I was top of my class. I was in a difficult program. I was a cheerleader there. All of the things from the external. But inside I just felt numb. I would isolate myself from my friends. I would make excuses to not go out. I would be in a very, very— Even beyond being sad, I just felt empty. I felt kind of nothing.

And it came to a head one night just before Thanksgiving, and I was moments away from taking my own life. And I saw that my phone was lighting up. And I had had it on silent, and my mom was calling me. And at that point it was 15 calls in a row, 15 missed calls. And I looked, and I picked it up, and she goes, "What's wrong?" She had this insane urge—or intense urge as a mom to say, "Something's wrong with my kid."

And sure enough, I just said, "Can you come pick me up?"

John Moe: Had you given her any clue that something was going on, or was this a total instinct thing?

Kendall Toole: It was total instincts. I was very good at masking. And I think— You know, I didn't tell my parents for probably about two and a half/three years just how close I was in that moment. There was so much shame that I felt about that, because I knew the mask and the external perception that I had put on for the world—and especially for my parents, who'd done so much for me, who'd been so supportive, who'd already taken me to therapy when I was younger. So, I think I put a lot of pressure on myself to kind of shoulder it and find a way through it. And I just got to the point where I just felt nothing, and I was tired of feeling nothing.

And obviously, when you're in that space— I can look back now and be like, "Oh my gosh!" But at that point in time, being in that headspace, it feels like a foreign concept. Which is notes of my own growth. But it also—at the time, that felt like the only option that I had. And I'm very grateful that, obviously, we didn't get to that.

John Moe: I mean, it's so interesting to me that you have these parents who are so enlightened. You were diagnosed with something else at an early age, so you were aware of mental health. But depression is so good at lying that it sounds like you thought of this as just reality, not "Oh, I think I have a depressive disorder. I think I have a psychological issue that can be addressed." Like, did you not think "I have depression"; you just thought this was the world?

Kendall Toole: No, that was exactly it. I thought there was something wrong with me. And I think you just nailed it. Depression is so great at being a liar. And it kind of convinces you through the sense of like— It feels a bit shame-filled. It feels just like personal isolation, because it's a slow burn. What people don't recognize, I think, they think, "Oh, you're such a happy person on the external, how could you be depressed?" And it's like— It was almost like someone was turning down the volume knob incrementally for probably three to four years. And at a certain point you notice the gap in sound, but not until there's a huge dissonance between what's standard and where you are now.

And that was the interesting thing. I never thought of myself as having depression. I had thought—and in my head I had conquered it; I had figured out my OCD. Yeah, I'd get anxiety sometimes, but it also was part of being in a competitive environment. There's a sense of expectation. When you go there, you're supposed to do amazing things, and they really imbue that in you. And so, everyone in a way was kind of fronting. You didn't really wanna show what was going on underneath.

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Because there was that sense of excellence that we were all trying to live up to. And I definitely— I masked it. I still have girlfriends to this day who I'm very good friends with who are like, "Kendall, we had no idea. Like, we thought it was weird you canceled plans, but we were like, 'Whatever. She's like—duh, she's stressed. She's got a ton of stuff going on. She's busy, whatever.'" But they never knew the depth of like what I had hid from everybody, including the people closest to me.

Transition: Spirited acoustic guitar.

John Moe: More with Kendall Toole in a moment.

Transition: Gentle acoustic guitar.

John Moe: Back with mental health advocate Kendall Toole, talking about depression and masking.

Did you have a sense that the depressed Kendall was the real Kendall, and the one that the rest of the world saw was fake? Did you have an idea of which one was the real you?

Kendall Toole: It took me many years to figure that out. That was probably the most difficult part in therapy afterward. So, I had, obviously, that very close moment, that episode. Moved home. I don't remember much about the following months. My dad, I remember at one point, came up to my room. And this is a beautiful thing, 'cause it's turned into something so much greater. But he came up to my room. I had moved home. My professors—my mom reached out to them, and they were like, "She's good. She doesn't need to come back to class for the rest of the semester. Her grades are high enough. We'll just pass her." So, that was wonderful. USC and my professors were wonderful about that.

But I could not get out of bed. I was struggling eating, showering, the basics. Like, it was all kind of a big gray-matter wash. I don't remember the holidays that year. Still looking back, like that's probably the thing that creeps me or spooks me out the most is how time just kind of inverted on itself in that period. And my dad, I remember, came up to my room, and my parents were talking about going into inpatient treatment and putting me in a position where I could really focus on my mental health. 'Cause I wasn't making those efforts myself. I was really struggling.

And he came out to my bedroom, and he said, "Look, I love you very much. What is our motto?" He's like, "In this family—" He's like, "I know you're going through it," but he goes,

“This might knock you down, but you can't let this knock you out. And I need you to get up. I need you to shower. I need you to just try the basics. I just need you to conquer the basics, honey. But this is your choice, and I need you to fight.”

And so, the whole concept of “they can knock you down; they can ever knock you out,” which was like the family motto for years— Fast forward when I started teaching fitness, and I started falling in love with empowering people through boxing and then through eventually cycling. Every time I teach a class, I would always close it with my dad's motto, which is, “They can knock you down; they can never knock you out.” And what's really beautiful about that was those were the words that lit a fire.

Seeing my dad, who's a—you know, he's my father. He's my dad. He's like the guy. And to see him worried and scared and asking me to fight for myself—'cause he couldn't do the fight for me; I had to do it for me—really shifted something. There was this moment of electricity there. And so, to be able to share that with the people that I reach through fitness and empowerment really means the world.

And now, that's led to what's coming out into the world now with my own brand, with NKO Club. Which NKO stands for Never Knocked Out. So, it's kind of amazing how something that can come into life in one of the darkest moments can really be the seed to something sooo much more vast and great.

John Moe: It was that thing that he said that turned the corner for you?

Kendall Toole: It was that, and then a lot of therapy. There was also a bit of fear on my behalf. I'm not gonna lie. I still have stress dreams if I have a lot on my plate that I don't graduate USC on time. There was something in my head about a deadline and wanting to graduate on time. I didn't want this to stop my plan for—through life and getting on with it. So, yes, I was very scared of not graduating on time. I knew I had to. I wanted to walk with my friends at graduation. That was important for me. And so, it was a mix of my dad's words, my own probably high achieving self not wanting to fall behind, and then going to therapy two to three times a week.

And I have a great mentor who's a film director who randomly loves boxing, is a big boxer. And he invited me to come to train at his boxing gym in Santa Monica. And he was like, “You got a lot going on.” He never acknowledged and I never had told him what was really going on. I would work on different commercial shoots with him or different film shoots, whatnot. And he was like my very dude uncle. *(Laughs.)* Like, he was kind of— It was always guys, all like masculine movies and commercials and all this stuff. And he's like, “Come by the gym.”

I'm like, “What are you talking about?”

[00:20:00]

He’s like, “Come by the gym. You got a lot going on. You got a lot going on. Just come by the gym.” And I started learning how to box. He covered my private training at the gym. I

have— He's never once asked me for money, never once charged me. And I would go and get private training lessons learning how to box three times a week. And I'm not joking, hearing the power of that glove connecting with a mitt, of realizing, "Oh, I can create power from my own turmoil. I can find a way to channel all of these feelings that I have, all this chaos in my head, and it— I'm focused when I'm boxing, and I'm finding power in that movement. And I don't have to be a girly girl. I can let it out. I can be aggressive in a functional way."

And that was a huge unlock for me. So, yeah. I'm grateful to him and to sport for that.

John Moe: Do you imagine when you're doing the boxing that there's an opponent? And you personify that as like depression or somebody who stood in your way? Like, is that how the boxing works?

Kendall Toole: The beautiful thing is that early on in training— One of the first things you do when you're learning how to box is you shadow box. So, you go up to a mirror, and you are looking at yourself, and you're learning all— You know, your jab, your cross, your uppercut, all your different punches. And you're trying to hit, essentially, your reflection. Like not—you're not hitting with your knuckles meeting the mirror, but you are fighting yourself.

So, if I'm turning, what would I do? And there is this whole concept in boxing called you-versus-you. Because really what a lot of people don't recognize about the sport is they think, "Oh, it's this opponent versus this opponent." No, no. There's something beautiful about boxing that your insecurities, your fears, all of it comes up when there's an opponent coming at you. It's not even about the opponent; it's about how well you can read that other person. So, whatever you bring into the ring is what you're gonna be fighting that day. It's not the person. It's your own shit, essentially, is what's gonna come up.

And when you see a fighter who's prepared— And what's really beautiful about that sport is it's very internal. There's so much— You have to know yourself to be a good boxer. You have to know your fears, you have to welcome them in, and you have to fight your way through it. And so, boxing was metaphorically therapy for me, but physically also. And being able to marry those two things really connected something I believe in my brain that built like a new neural pathway, that gave me another road out from where I was.

John Moe: How did you get involved with Peloton?

Kendall Toole: Yeah, so Peloton happened— We can go back a little bit. So, my boxing trainer at the gym was starting a boxing fitness studio in Los Angeles, and I had worked in tech and media. Again, very high-achieving. Very big company. Dream job out of college. That workplace was probably not a healthy spot for me to be in. I'll keep it cute and leave it there, but I pivoted. *(Laughs.)* That's a story for a whole other day.

(John agrees.)

But I pivoted out of there and was like, "What do I wanna do? I don't wanna go and work on an agency desk. I don't wanna get yelled at by like— You know, and make 10 bucks an hour.

No, thank you." So, I was like, "You know what? I love the sport." I fell in love with boxing. I was pretty skilled at it at this point, and my trainer was starting a boxing fitness studio in West Hollywood.

He's like, "Hey, would you ever wanna teach?"

And I'm like, "Hell yeah, that'd be fun. Like, I love to help people. I wanna teach women how to fight. I love that."

All of a sudden I went from being in corporate mixed with like tech and media to full-time training people. I'd have like celebs in class. I'd have these models. It was like so Hollywood and so random. But my favorite thing was I had a Wednesday night class that barely anybody came to, and that's the one that— I'm not—I'm gonna say like all like the normal people. Like, none of the celebs, none of like the scene-y stuff, but the people who really just wanted to work out and wanted to release something. They'd come at 8PM. And that class on Wednesday nights became like a therapy session.

I could try different things. They could cry on the bag. We'd fight it out. It got very emotional. And I really fell in love with coaching in a way that goes beyond just the physical—trying to bypass the physical and get a little bit into some mental work and some emotional work while we're in the process of sweating.

So, one of those classes then— I get a DM slide from somebody who worked at Peloton. They were looking for talent. Three weeks later, I'm in New York City auditioning. I lied and said that I could cycle and that I taught cycling. I had taken two SoulCycle classes in my life and figured, "I can fake it, I'll figure it out." And got through the auditions, and got the job. And so, that was about five years ago.

John Moe: You know, I think of people in positions like that, fitness leaders and instructors, as being the opposite of depressed or anxious. And I'm sure that's because I only encounter them when they're cheering on a class. But they seem to have it all together. Is that an act?

[00:25:00]

Are they just as messed up as everybody else?

Kendall Toole: Honestly, I think people who teach fitness are probably more messed up than the people who—

John Moe: Okay.

(They chuckle.)

Good to know. Good to know.

Kendall Toole: Like, I'm gonna be fully transparent. Because I think it's important to call everybody out on their own shit. And I mean this in a loving way.

Usually— And I think growing up both in Los Angeles and on like the tails outside of Hollywood/then going and being in front of the camera in a way, nothing surprises me. I'm probably a little jaded. But whenever I see somebody who's such a light and such a joy and such a performer, I'm like, "Damn. I know it's probably difficult for you. I know the nights are probably really quiet. I know your voices in your head are probably really loud."

And it's been a beautiful way to walk through the world. Because… I don't buy the glitz and glam. I don't buy—I don't usually buy it. I appreciate the work and the effort that goes into being at that level. It's very hard to perform all the time. It's very hard to be up and to be giving at that scale.

John Moe: Yeah. Regardless of how you feel. Even if you don't feel up to it, you have to do it anyway. It's your job.

Kendall Toole: Yeah! Well, that was mostly— You know, especially on camera and at Peloton and through COVID, you know?

At the time, I had moved to New York City. I was living in a 500 square foot studio. It was cold. I'm a California girl. I'm like, "What the hell?" And you didn't really go outside. You know, I went, and I'd be in a room with nobody else—like, a bunch of cameras—and teach class to hundreds of thousands of people. But I never saw those people! So, it was a very isolatory experience that— It really taught me how to be with myself and taught me how to sit with some parts of myself that needed work and needed extra love and needed that growth.

And so, yeah, anytime— I would like to say I'd love for the fitness industry to be as well as what it tries to give the people, but I call BS. I think it's bullshit. Like, if you are in the wellness community, it's 'cause you're also searching for it. I think we're all searchers at the end of the day trying to do our best.

John Moe: And some people become therapists, and some people become podcast hosts, and some people become fitness instructors, I guess. *(Chuckles.)*

Kendall Toole: I think we're all just— That's the whole point, though! We're just trying to connect the dots and figure it out. And if anything, that's kind of beautiful. Everyone's— You know, we're all just in search of connection and feeling like we're not the only ones going through it. You know?

Transition: Spirited acoustic guitar.

John Moe: More with Kendall Toole just ahead.

Promo:

(Sci-fi beeping.)

Music: Playful synth.

Adam Prianca: Now everybody knows that the greatest generation has always been MaxFun's go-to podcast for old *Star Trek* recaps. But what my theory presupposes is: what if it isn't?

(Aggressive record scratch.)

Music: High-energy techno.

Adam: In a shocking turn of events, *Greatest Trek*—the comedy podcast covering new *Trek*—has gone through a temporal wormhole back to the very beginning.

Ben Harrison: Because we are now reviewing *Star Trek: The Original Series*. That means when you subscribe now, you'll get episode-by-episode recaps of all the 1960s-style action and intrigue, along with all the jokes and fun that make *Greatest Gen* and *Greatest Trek* the number one *Star Trek* podcasts out there. Subscribe now to *Greatest Trek* on MaximumFun.org!

(Music ends.)

(Sci-fi beep.)

Transition: Gentle acoustic guitar.

John Moe: We are back talking with Kendall Toole.

How are you doing today?

Kendall Toole: I am doing great today. I am doing— I'm on a high stress blip, full transparency. I have my app that I'm launching in less than a month. I have funded the whole thing myself. It's my chapter post-Peloton. I had to wait out creating the app, because I was on a non-compete contract out of New York. And so, it's been a lot of anticipation. It's been a lot of risk. But it's also been a lot of work. It's very different when you go from being talent for another brand to operating the brand yourself. Like, I'm the one hitting record and setting up the lighting and making sure the audio's good. Everything on every level.

So, I'm great, because this is what I've dreamed of happening. And I'm sitting in a studio and in a space that was in my head a year ago, and there's something really magical about bringing something into the world. But I'm also anxious and a little scared, because it'll be

released soon. And right now I'm just working through the quiet and banking probably 50—literally, 50 classes worth of content. So, I'm *(unclear)*.

John Moe: Wow. *(Chuckles.)* I'm sure!

Kendall Toole: *(Unclear)* my muscles. It's a lot.

John Moe: Are you a liberty to talk about the app? What it's called and what it does and everything?

Kendall Toole: Yeah, we can give a little taste, a little teaser here.

John Moe: Yeah, that'd be great.

Kendall Toole: It's called NKO Club, so. Makes sense.

[00:30:00]

Never knocked out. So, from my dad's words to the community now. And it's more expansive than what I was able to do in my previous job. So, it's cycling, boxing, Pilates, strength training. And then I'm very, very pleased. In this time period I've gotten a science backed breathwork certification from Oxygen Advantage. And so, these are nasal breathing exercises, and they're incredible for helping us get into our frontal lobe, oxygenate the brain in a really functional way. And then— So, we have the mental health prong with the breath work. And then we have a gratitude journal that's also part of the app. And then there's a whole digital cookbook with protein-forward recipes, exciting ways to wanna get inspired for food.

So, it's touching at fitness on the three levels with which we need. Obviously the physical, but then also the mental, and then the fuel—the nutrition side of things.

John Moe: I wanna talk about exercise a little bit, especially in regard to depression and anxiety. 'Cause exercise is something every human knows they should get, and I think a lot of people feel like they don't get enough of it. But when you're dealing with something like depression, it can be kind of a vicious circle. Like, I'm depressed because I don't get enough exercise, and then I don't get enough exercise because I'm depressed. How do you break out of that? How do you make this a reality for somebody whose mind is dragging their body down that hard?

Kendall Toole: Yeah, exactly. I think… it's very easy when you're in that state of depression to just stay stagnant. It's like the mind is racing, but the body won't move. It's the most debilitating. I hate it.

John Moe: You've been unable to get outta bed before; you know what we're talking about.

Kendall Toole: Yeah, totally! And then you start layering these feelings of shame on. So, there's two things I think that are very, very helpful. One, really trying to get in that practice of gratitude, because it's the absolute counter energy. You can't be in a state of anxiety and of gratitude at the same time. The brain can't process both simultaneously. And so, part of it— And it's tough with depression at first. It's like, what am I grateful for? I have everything wrong. And it's very easy to list the negatives. But I think trying, the moment that you wake up—when the brain is not fully aware and functioning or allowing all those negative thoughts in—don't go to the phone. Dear god, don't go on social media. No. If you're depressed, do not go on social media first thing in the morning! Just wait. Just wait.

(John agrees.)

But having that gratitude practice— And even if it's not, "I'm grateful for," 'cause sometimes that can feel like a heavy thing, I just go and I say thank you. Like, I say thank you to myself. I'm like, "Oh, thank you. This bed is so comfortable. Oh, thank you. Oh, my dog Bowie looks so cute today. Oh, he's being so sweet. Thank you." And it's something about the thank you, of giving something beautiful its moment, that starts to open up I think a little door, a little window out of the depressed state and letting some air in the house.

And then from there I'd say start with small things. A walk. Get outside. Put your feet on the ground. Walk. Do five minutes. I think small, kind of snackable bits of movement start to build a habit. And so, if someone's in a really depressed state, changing the environment that you're in is massive. So, even if it's just going outside and walking around your backyard saying, "I'm just gonna walk 10 laps or 10 circles," that starts something. And then what will happen is the brain's like, "Oh, we're already out here. Let's jump— Let's go down the block. Or oh, I guess I can go and pick up the mail. Oh, I guess I could go and, you know, trim that one bush or whatever." And things start to stack up.

But the idea of fitness and of movement and of "I need to do this so I can get outta my depression," that's never gonna work. You have to make it much more accessible and a part of the day-to-day. So, I would say wake up, say thank you for at least one thing—even if it's, "Thank you, my toothpaste is minty, and I don't hate it." *(Chuckles.)* Like, that counts. And then get outside and walk for five minutes. Just a walk.

John Moe: Who is the you that you're thanking?

Kendall Toole: For me, I mean— I go back, but for me, that's faith. So, it's God. I say thank you to God. I believe in the interconnectivity of everything in our world, and I can look at my own life and see how faith has played a big role in it. The times I had it, the times that I didn't. And whenever I say thank you, it's— When you really take the moment you think about it, our lives and how the interconnectedness is and how essentially like our path and my path—I look at all of these moments that should have ended me and things that should have taken me off course—and everything has always happened in my favor, even if it takes sometimes a couple years for that to reveal itself. So, for me, whenever I say thank you, it's thank you to God.

[00:35:00]

It's thank you to what created me and the life that I have today.

John Moe: What about people who might go to a class, look at the instructor, or go on Peloton or NKO Club or something, and—you know, you see this fitness instructor. They're very positive, they're very energetic, and they have a great body because they're professionals at this. And then you think, "Well, I'm not that positive. I don't have that energy. I don't think I'm ever gonna get to that body. I should just give up now. This is doomed." What do you say to that?

Kendall Toole: Yeah. I will say this. Everybody has a different level of optimum. So, when you look at, case in point, myself: people see me on the street, they've taken my classes. I am exactly what you would expect in a fitness class. And you'd be like, "Oh my god, nothing has ever been hard for her. Her life is easy. She's got all these privileges. Like, she's, you know, attractive and fit and has the fit and has the outfit and all that."

Yep. That's why I think it's so important to talk about the reality, the quiet side of my head. Because we can all compare ourselves to anybody else and find everything that makes us different. I think Brené Brown said, "If you look for evidence that you don't belong in the world, be careful. 'Cause you'll find it."

And it's true. When you're already coming into that, it's not an open-minded perception; it's a preconceived notion. If you're looking to find ways in which you don't fit, you will find it. But I would counter that and say: why would you not look at the ways that you don't fit and see that as what makes you valuable? If we're trying to assimilate and be like everybody else, we're never gonna find that we have the right group of people. But if we stand in who we're supposed to be and in our own difference and do our best to honor that, we'll feel more connected, because we're not trying to be a square peg in a round hole. You know what I mean?

John Moe: Yeah. Yeah. Do you see depression and anxiety as something that you've conquered or that you manage? Or like, how do you view it for yourself?

Kendall Toole: It will never be conquered. *(Chuckles.)* It's not— I would love if I could do that. I don't believe that's how it works. It's something I manage. It kind of— I joke around. The voice in my head, whenever I get depressed, I've named her. 'Cause that helps me de-personify—

John Moe: Oh, what's her name?

Kendall Toole: Tina.

John Moe: Okay.

Kendall Toole: Tina. Which, no shame. I love Tina Turner. So, that's also part of it, I'm like— And it's kind of Tina Turner, 'cause because Tina can be like this ball of energy and like AH! And forceful and loud and also kind of sassy and bitchy at the same time. And I love that about Tina, but sometimes Tina needs to just shut up. So, whenever I have my—

when my depression or when Tina, so to speak, gets loud, I recognize it's like, “Okay. It's okay that she's in the car, but she can't be in the passenger seat, and she's gotta be in the backseat.” And there is times when Tina needs some food and some music and some quiet time, and it's my job as the operator to give Tina the space to have that.

And so, I think de-personifying my depression as—it's just a—it's a part of me that needs work. But it's also helpful, because it lets me know—Tina's really helpful, because if I'm in an environment that's not good for me, she will let me know fast! And I'm like yeah. It's kind of like I get smoke signals early for everything. So, it’s in some ways— It's just something to be managed. It's a part of who I am. And it also—it helps me in different environments at the same time too, and makes sure— It gives me a lot of discernment.

John Moe: You're also involved in Project Healthy Minds. Tell me about what you're doing with this organization and what people need to know about it.

Kendall Toole: Yeah. Project Healthy Minds is doing absolutely incredible work, and I'm honored to be one of their move leads for this year's Project Healthy Minds event. I'll be teaching a Pilates boxing class with a little bit of breath work. But what's great about the work that they do is they provide access to resources in many, many ways. They partner with some of the greatest talent on the planet who are also very supportive and outspoken on mental health. But I love their resources, so I always direct people from my own community towards their website. And it just allows you to ask questions and kind of search and find what your personal needs are.

Because we know mental health is expansive. It's not just depression; it's not just anxiety; it's not just schizophrenia. It could be a mix of all these different things, or it could be a resource for someone who's trying to help a friend or a family member, and they don't really know what to say or how to be helpful. So, Project Healthy Minds is a great, great spot where they can find those resources and feel connected and just educate themselves so that the stigma doesn't exist when it comes to mental health.

[00:40:00]

John Moe: Kendall Toole, thank you so much. Best of luck to you and NKO Club and Tina and everybody else. Thanks.

Kendall Toole: *(Chuckles.)* Thank you so much.

Music: “Proud Mary” as covered by Ike and Tina Turner.

I left a good job down in the city

Working for the man every night day

Well, I never lost one minute of sleeping

Worrying 'bout the way things might've been

Big wheel, keep on turning

Proud Mary keep on burning (burning)

And we're rolling (rolling)

Rolling (rolling)

Rolling on the river

(Music continues under the dialogue then fades out.)

John Moe: You can learn more about Project Healthy Minds, World Mental Health Day Festival, and events at ProjectHealthyMinds.com.

We exist because our listeners support us. That's the only way we can keep making these shows.

Music: "Building Wings" by Rhett Miller, an up-tempo acoustic guitar song. The music continues quietly under the dialogue.

John Moe: We hope that these shows help you along your own mental health journey. We hope that you see the value in shows that help other people as well. And if you're already supporting us, thank you so much. You're making a big difference. If you haven't yet supported us, it's so easy. Just go to MaximumFun.org/join. Find a level that works for you, and pick *Depresh Mode* from the list of shows. Be sure to hit subscribe. Give us five-star ratings, write rave reviews. That would really help us out. Get the show out into the world.

The 988 Suicide and Crisis Lifeline can be reached in the US and Canada by calling or texting 988. It's free. It's available 24/7.

We're on BlueSky at @DepreshMode. Our Instagram is @DepreshPod. Our newsletter is on Substack; search up *Depresh Mode* or John Moe. I'm on BlueSky and Instagram at @JohnMoe. Our Preshies group is on Facebook; search up Preshies. There are a lot of people helping out with each other's mental health and supporting each other—sometimes talking about the show, and sometimes just having some jokes and memes. I'm on there, and I'll see you over there. Just search up Preshies, and you'll find it. Our electric mail address is DepreshMode@MaximumFun.org.

Hi, credits listeners. I recently learned that a group of turkeys is called a gang. A group of all-male turkeys is a posse. When did Turkeys become so badass?! *Depresh Mode* is made possible by your contributions. Our production team includes Raghu Manavalan, Kevin Ferguson, and me. We get booking help from Mara Davis. Rhett Miller wrote and performed our theme song, “Building Wings”. *Depresh Mode* is a production of Maximum Fun and Poputchik. I'm John Moe. Bye now.

Music: “Building Wings” by Rhett Miller.

I’m always falling off of cliffs, now

Building wings on the way down

I am figuring things out

Building wings, building wings, building wings

No one knows the reason

Maybe there’s no reason

I just keep believing

No one knows the answer

Maybe there’s no answer

I just keep on dancing

(Music fades out.)

Transition: Cheerful ukulele chord.

Speaker 1: Maximum Fun.

Speaker 2: A worker-owned network.

Speaker 3: Of artist owned shows.

Speaker 4: Supported—

Speaker 5: —directly—

Speaker 6: —by you!