

Everyone has a story: talking about mental health

Supporting young people with mental health issues – COMPASS's Ekaterina Malievskaia speaks to Grammy-award nominated singer, Jewel

In this episode, we speak about supporting young people with mental health issues. Ekaterina ([Katya](#)) [Malievska](#), Chief Innovation Officer and Co-founder, COMPASS Pathways, is joined by Grammy-award nominated singer, New York Times bestselling author and mental health advocate, [Jewel](#). Jewel has spent the past two decades helping young people with mental health difficulties through her [Inspiring Children Foundation](#).

[01:08] Jewel talks about her personal journey. She's from Alaska and comes from a family of people who are not averse to big challenges. Her family is highly creative and very connected to nature. However, she explains that her mom left when she was eight and her dad took over raising her and her siblings but he became abusive, which led Jewel to move out aged 15. Jewel started paying rent at a very young age, she says, getting herself through high school. She soon realised that kids like her end up becoming a statistic. She says she had learned what she calls an 'emotional English' in her childhood but didn't know where to go to learn a new emotional language and she found that daunting, as she didn't want to feel like her life was over at 15. She set off on an ambitious mission to learn a new emotional language and this has inspired her entire life, she says.

Jewel talks about her experience with panic attacks, agoraphobia, an eating disorder, and how she began shoplifting when she became homeless. By the time she was discovered as a singer, she says she almost didn't sign the record deal because she knew the odds of her future working out were really slim. Jewel promised herself that learning how to be a happy whole human would be her priority, and being a musician would always be secondary to this.

Jewel talks about how she has spent her life innovating in this field, creating exercises to change habits, and how she has been able to develop that into a curriculum that helps other people like her, particularly those who may not have access to traditional therapies or support groups.

[05:08] Jewel says that as somebody who was on the receiving end of charity, she recognises the value of community and just how much helping matters.

[05:48] Jewel says that her Inspiring Children Foundation is a whole human school that teaches people how to emotionally regulate. The foundation aims to equip people who are struggling by teaching them mindfulness tools that help them take responsibility for their own happiness. They also teach people entrepreneurial skills and have a 99% success rate for college scholarships, almost 90% of which are Ivy League level. Their practices have been proven to work thanks to neuroplasticity, she says. Many of the exercises are techniques that she stumbled upon while she was homeless. For example, she says, although not aware of the term 'mindfulness', she found techniques that helped her be consciously present.

She talks about when she was homeless and how she became addicted to shoplifting, along with negativity. She talks about 'the anatomy of addiction': the feelings she experienced before, during and after shoplifting. She could see that before shoplifting she felt stimulated and scared. Her response to that was to steal, and afterwards she felt cared for, as odd as that sounds. She explains how she soon realised that she couldn't change her stimulus - being homeless wasn't an overnight fix - but she did have power over how she responded. So she started to swap stealing for writing songs. It didn't feel good at first because stealing was a lot more exciting than sitting down alone and writing in your notebook. This made her curious because she started to realise that her body only experienced two states: dilated and contracted. Every single thought, feeling or action led to one of those two states.

Jewel says she used mindfulness to observe the thoughts and actions that made her dilated and contracted. The things that dilated her were joy, gratitude, exercising, getting out in nature, observing the world around her and connecting with friends. She always contracted - felt tight and anxious - when she became negative, disconnected from others or stole.

Jewel says these are the types of things they teach the kids at the foundation, and they've all been proven to work. She says we have to learn these skills: nobody gets out of life without pain, so we have to figure out what to do with it.

[14:22] Katya points out that a lot of these issues are propagated through parents, as no one teaches you to be a good parent or how to understand your child. She asks whether there is a parallel track for parents, adding that, in general, the issue of engagement in these programs is challenging because taking part requires work; it's not an immediate fix.

[15:22] Jewel believes that if we can solve pain points for humans at any age, they're going to show up better at work or school. She says it's important for employers to invest in this type of curriculum because they're going to have more productive employees. She adds that being dysfunctional is hard work and crisis will often inspire you to try something new. We're built to evolve, we just need people who help us break it down into doable steps.

[18:00] Katya says that improving mental health care is very challenging, and asks how we can make help readily available for everyone who needs it.

[18:42] Jewel says her foundation has been trying to integrate mental health tools into health systems and make them more readily available for 20 years. The field of psychology can be very philosophical and we're missing more practical tools that we can scale, she says, adding that she would love to see reform in psychiatric wards.

[21:18] Katya says the story of COMPASS is built on her own family's personal experience of being on the receiving end of poor mental health care. You're extremely lucky if you get into the system and receive effective help with no side effects, she says. Understanding biological mechanisms, combined with unique human experiences, makes mental health challenges particularly difficult to treat. She adds that it's extremely important to raise children who can recognise these experiences, value them, and make something from their adversity. Navigating a wide spectrum of experiences, from general difficulty to real pathology, is a huge challenge in mental health care.

[23:41] Jewel comments that everybody's path to healing and their illness is unique. She says she realised at a very young age that the physical problems she was having weren't a siloed thing. Instead, she says, they were affected by her thoughts and feelings. Anxiety can be an

ally: it's our body's way of saying we're not in agreement with a thought, feeling, action or environment, and we should learn how to listen to it.

[26:24] Katya says that in her own journey, she spoke to thousands of people in similar situations and everyone had a story about their challenges with mental health care. One person told her that the system was not utilising its main resource - patients' ability to heal - and not doing enough to engage people in their own care. She agrees with Jewel that we need to accept and work through symptoms, rather than trying to fight them.

Jewel says the weird privilege of her life has been that she's had to figure these things out for herself in order to be happy.

She ends the podcast by singing her song 'Grateful', which is about the first time she was able to stop a panic attack on her own.

Further information:

- [Inspiring Children Foundation](#)
- [JewelNeverBroken](#)
- [The Wellness Experience](#)