

For The 1 Podcast by Freedom2: Episode 1

Host: Mel Manning

Guest: Molly Forbes

Mel Manning 0:03

I'm Mel Manning Welcome to the for the one podcast. This week's guest is Molly Forbes.

Molly Forbes 0:10

All bodies are good bodies. Even if someone's body doesn't look or function the way that your body looks or functions, they are still worthy of respect and compassion and kindness.

Mel Manning 0:22

This is season one of our further one podcast and I'm Mel Manning, the founder of the charity freedom. We are an early intervention service helping teenage girls to know their worth and significance so they can reach their potential and empower others. Why for the warm because we can all make a difference and reach out to help at least one person. It doesn't require you to be qualified and you don't need to be an expert. This podcast celebrates the stories of individuals and organisations that have seen a need and reached out by helping the one that had been instrumental in making changes in their communities and beyond. Join us as we journey through their stories.

Former journalist turn presenter turn body image influencer Molly Forbes has appeared as a host on Channel four's naked beach regularly presents events around confidence in body image and have spoken about the subject on ITV this morning, BBC Breakfast Radio One newsbeat and various local radio stations and podcasts. As a 35 year old mom of two girls, Molly decided early on in motherhood that she wanted to ditch the diets, but it proved easier said than done. Working as a radio presenter in an appearance obsessed showbiz industry, Molly often found herself comparing her body to the celebs she was writing and talking about. The lightbulb moment came when her eldest daughter asked her why she was weighing spinach. And Molly realised there was no rational answer. And so she decided to work on changing her mindset instead of a body. Now Molly devotes her work to helping others make friends with their body too. And she's never weighed spinach again.

So Molly, thank you so much for joining us this morning for our first podcast, actually. So welcome!

Molly Forbes 2:05

Thank you. Thank you for having me. I'm excited. I feel very honoured that I'm on your first one.

Mel Manning 2:11

Yes, yeah. It's exciting. So this has been a really strange year, hasn't it with the pandemic and all that's gone on? And have you had a moment of joy, because there's been so many dark moments, but has it been something that sort of carried you through the pandemic,

Molly Forbes 2:28

I would say, I think definite positive from this year for me has been rediscovering how much I love being outside. And just being in nature. And, and that's not to say that I'm not very bored of doing the same walks over and over again. But I've really come to appreciate just the small, really basic thing of just going for a walk. And I've always enjoyed being outside, I used to really like running and then I hurt my back a couple of years ago, so can't really run anymore. But I've always enjoyed kind of going for longer walks and hikes. But I've really got into it this year. And as a family we've got into to doing that as well, because it's we're really limited for what we can actually do in terms of leisure activities, I would say that just having those moments of when everything starts to feel a little bit overwhelming. I know that if I can just go outside, even if it's just for 20 minutes, and just get out in nature, and just have a walk and just like you know, be surrounded by trees or whatever. That is an instant grounding, like tool. It's a resource that I have at my fingertips, I'm very lucky to be able to use. And I think that it's taken an enforced being inside to make me appreciate how much I like being outside even when it's raining.

Mel Manning 3:59

Yeah, no, I agree with you, actually, because we've actually got a dog. And so it you know, in a way we have to go out, but actually it's been those moments in the fresh air, whether it's raining or not. I've just been able to get outside, I think what you said is the fact that you can go out rather than having to stay in.

Molly Forbes 4:16

Yeah. And it's free. And it's simple. And it's something that not everyone actually can access. Not everyone is able to go outside at the moment. And you know, I just feel I've really tried this year to focus on the things that I enjoy doing. And focus on the moments that make me happy and bring joy because there's been so much negativity to like focus on and that's not to say, I'm like minimising my feelings or invalidating those days when I feel bad, but really trying to focus on those little things that make me feel good. And actually recently, I've just started going for bike rides with my eldest. We found that we've got two daughters. And we found that now they have, they're just sick of each other, they've spent so much time together that they just are really looking for like, they're just desperate to, like spend leisure time with their friends. And they're already talking about, oh, when this is over, can we go to this place? And can we bring this person with us. And so a few weeks ago, we started sort of doing a divide and conquer thing at the weekends. And taking it in turns to go for a bike ride one of us or go for a bike ride with our eldest, like a fairly long bike ride, and then the other one will take the little one to the park or go for a walk or something. And actually having that one on one time with them has really made a difference. But also it's made us appreciate again, just how great it feels to just do you know, just go for a bike ride and it's something we you know, it's not like we've newly bought bikes. We've had these bikes for a while, but we're very much before. So that's definitely been a positive.

Mel Manning 5:59

Yeah, I think we've all formed new routines haven't wait because of lockdown. And something I love that you do is your kitchen disco. So is there a favourite song from kitty disco that you think this is just one tune that everyone gets up to wants to dance do

Molly Forbes 6:14

Oh, gosh, it really depends on the day and the mood sometimes. What I find is music is an instant mood booster for me. And it always has been a when I was a kid, I used to love dancing, I used to do a lot of dance. And then, you know, 10 years ago, I was a radio presenter. So you know a word like listening to music every day, it was part of my job. And, and I have found again, I think I mean, I've always loved the kitchen disco. But I know that that in the last year, there have been moments where everything's a bit heavy, and things you know, the kids are arguing, or you just feel a bit cooped up inside or whatever, I know that if I put some happy music on it is an instant mood booster. And I know that like some days, it might be like a dually per song. It might be a Blondie song, it might be some Fleetwood Mac, it might be some old school tape that from the 90s. Or sometimes I'll just find we'll just put like a playlist on or often the kids want to choose their own songs, you know, they like they've got you know, my eldest is really into Kpop. So she'll she really likes his band called Black Pink. So she'll often put Black Pink on or will have a dance or

whatever, you know. But yeah, kitchen discos, again, it's free. It's something that we've got is a resource right there that we can just use, and those little things that you can just do to try and boost you're made. And the things that I've just sort of taken for granted or overlooked maybe in the past are not really appreciated as much have really, really come into their own this year.

Mel Manning 7:54

A lot of people have said, you know, it's the little things and it isn't it that you've made sort of become big things again, in your family or wherever you are. So yeah, that's fantastic. But you have been very busy in lockdown as well, because you have written a new book, *Body Heads*, and which is due out soon. And obviously, you're the founder of *body happy org*. So you want to tell us a little bit about why you you know why you're passionate about children being like kind of their bodies and their bodies.

Molly Forbes 8:21

So, um, I think it started for me, it came from, I went on my I went through my own stuff with this, just like everyone that I know, actually, you know, I've been sort of on and off the diet bandwagon throughout my life. And often, if I was feeling low in confidence, or I was feeling like I needed to kind of have some kind of control in my life, I would then turn to Oh, I'm gonna like, go on a quote unquote, health kick and try and change the shape of my body. And you know, I'm only going to eat this type of food, I'm going to cut out this type of food, I'm going to do these kind of exercises and everything in my life will be fixed and it will be good. And obviously like that's a lie, it doesn't work like that.

So, um, I had a bit of a moment when my eldest was about five and I was on my latest, you know, quote unquote, healthcare. And actually what I was doing wasn't very healthy. I was really kind of becoming almost obsessive about you know, making sure that I was having to do particular type of workout every day and not being not not looking after myself from a place of compassion. It was very much almost about like punishing my body trying to like force it back into it sort of pre pregnancy existence. And my youngest was a baby at that point. And I think looking back, I'm actually what I really needed was I needed more sleep. I wasn't getting any sleep. I needed some space, like just physical space. I felt like my body almost wasn't my own because I was breastfeeding, and I've just given birth, and it was like my body existed for other people. And I think I was quite low in confidence at that point, I was happy and content, but also, going through that whole identity shift that happens when you become a new parent and your hormones are all over the place, you're not getting very much sleep until your world has shrunk. You know, similarly to, you know, in a pandemic, like those early weeks where the baby is difficult to get outside, it's difficult to go to many places, so often

found I was at home, and I wasn't seeing very many people. And I think I went back to what I had always done and thought, right, well, I'll just, you know, we're going on holiday, I'll go on a diet. And it was when my eldest asked me why I was doing whatever it was I was doing. I was weighing spinach at the time, she's like, why are you doing that? And I thought, I don't actually have a rational answer for you.

So I that was kind of the beginning for me of my own exploration with unpacking some of this stuff and unpacking some of the things that I'd always believed to be true about health and body size, and starting to explore, you know, self-compassion, but also how we feel about our bodies, you know, impacts every aspect of our lives. And also, big subjects like gender stereotypes and weight stigma. And, you know, I started to really learn about this subject through interviewing different people for and writing about it and reading about it. And it was at that point, when I started to feel better in myself, I started to notice all the messages that were coming at me trying to drag me back to that, you know, place of negativity.

Then I started to notice all the messages that were coming from my children. And I was shocked that I hadn't noticed them before, but because before I'd been so deep in it, I just hadn't that because it's so normalised like it's the air that we breathe every day. It's, it's, it's difficult to notice it when it's there all the time. And so once I started to notice those messages, I became quite focused on wanting to be part of changing the culture that my kids were growing up in, so that they didn't have to go through a whole period of unlearning a lifetime of negative messages that I'd had. And I started to realise how much and how deeply these messages can impact children on every level from like, whether they're going to raise their hand in class to whether they're going to take part in sports and how they interact with their friends, and all of these kind of really like pivotal key things that are part of the well being and health and happiness of children and teenagers. And it all came back to how they felt about their body and the messages that they were being told about their body and how those messages would were always so normalise that used to make would make make them think that their body is almost like a signifier of their personality or their worth as a human being. And and yeah, I think that it started off with a campaign I started a campaign called the free from diets campaign, which is still going that's like the advocacy arm of the social enterprise body happy org. And what we're campaigning for is tighter restrictions on the way that weight loss products and slimming products are advertised around children and young people. So that started in 2019, I started campaigning on that issue, and then it was a very organic thing. We, as part of that campaign, we had a roundtable discussion and we had various different people come along, people from Girlguiding UK and a GP and an eating disorder therapists and other campaigners and parents. And we just had a chat for a couple of hours about all the different places that we were recognising and some of the people from Girlguiding were older. They were young guides, leaders

who had been through guiding so they were only sort of 18 years old. So they were very well placed to be able to say, look, this is happening in schools where they're still every day. And we're seeing this and it's not that the tea, it's the teachers fault, but it's that they're living in this too, and that we it doesn't seem like they have any support. And then they're not always aware of how the language that they use around food and exercise and health. It can impact us in a negative way. Actually, what we would really love is for them to have a bit more support with this. So we went off and we did. We did a bit of some surveys and sort of asked, you know, people in the community what they thought, and out of that came a teacher workshop.

So just over a year ago, we did a crowdfunding campaign and we raised enough money to create this workshop for teachers and we delivered it to laser teachers for free. And that was around the same time that I got my book deal, to write body happy kids. And then I knew at that point that I wanted to create a social enterprise where we could create more resources and actually have a couple of different workshop offerings and also have stuff for parents and downloadable resources. Because the more I was working in this area, the more messages I was getting from people asking advice about what to do in X, Y, or Z situation, or resources or whatever. And I realised there was a really big need for it. And so that's kind of how it came about. It was very organic. And it came from my own experiences.

Mel Manning 15:39

And I think that's obviously with the premise of our podcasts is, is about helping the one and I think what you said is true, is that often you start with something very small. But it's only through doing that, but then, you know, it's almost like you open this thing of, Oh, I need this help, or I need this, or can you help me here and you realise, actually, you know, there's a lot of people who need that support. And I remember at the time we did the campaign, and I remember, you posted something, and it was about people giving leaflets out like Weight Watchers and stuff outside schools and stuff. And I just thought, you know, we're just not thinking this through are we?

Molly Forbes 16:11

No. And I mean, that was the thing that I found really shocking at the time. And I don't find that shocking anymore, because I think I was almost naive to it back then, because I was still only just becoming awake to how deeply ingrained this issue is. And I remember being really shocked, I had a leaflet through my door for a diet brand. And I was really shocked that they were allowed to put leaflets through people's doors because I thought you don't know who lives on the other side of that door. You don't know what their relationship to their body is. That's an incredibly

intrusive, aggressive marketing tactic. We're told to unfollow the accounts on social media that make us feel bad. And we're told to not buy the magazines that make us feel bad. But what do we do when someone literally physically comes and puts a leaflet through our door? And then our children come home from school and see it on the doormat and ask Mummy, what's this? And I think I shared that on social media. And later, people started getting in touch saying, Oh, yeah, this is really normal. And it's not actually that they just put the leaflet through the doors.

At my children's school, they've got a big banner on the railings, because it's where they host their meeting. So they have a big advert on the school railings as the children are walking past school, using words like inspire and you know, health and happiness and really linking, looking a certain way with being a healthy, successful, worthwhile person. And that's directly at odds with creating an environment where children can be accepting of others and actually, themselves as well. And then be empowered to look after their bodies in a positive way, regardless of what their bodies look like. And we know that there's decades of research, academic research that knows that, but for some reason, it's not making its way into the very places where children should be safest from body ideals. And, you know, we have classes on PSAT around self acceptance and health behaviours. But then outside the children are walking past a huge banner that says, you know, lose weight and be happy, what's happening there, there's a disconnect. And that really surprised me. And then I started hearing people saying, Oh, yes, and you know, one of the parents in my son's class is a rep for one of these companies. And she gave the teacher a load of leaflets and the teacher put them in the kids book bags, and the kids brought them home. And, you know, and then all my son's football, steam is sponsored by this other brand. And, and it was just like snowballing. And I just was really shocked that they weren't they weren't tighter restrictions around the physical marketing of these products, and how children are being exposed to these messages, because there are restrictions when it comes to TV and radio adverts. They're not allowed to directly advertise to children under 18. And there are restrictions around the way that foods that are high in fat and salt and sugar are advertised on their schools, they're not allowed to be advertised within 100 metres. But we know that dieting and restriction is equally damaging for kids and teenagers health there is a difference between seeking like health promoting behaviours, and weight loss. And we often conflate the two and assume that weight loss and health are the same thing. And actually, they're not.

So what I'm not arguing for is for children to not have, you know, access to eating nutrient dense food and learning the joy of moving their body. But that's a very, very different conversation from teaching children about calorie counting, and how to lose weight and how to look a certain way. And it's a very complex subject because weight is influenced by so many different factors many of which are beyond our control, and it impacts all these other things. areas such as bullying, for example, in schools and safeguarding issues as well. But I think that it's just a lack of

awareness and a lack of support and a lack of resources for so what we were arguing for is actually let's just kind of create a bit more resources and education and support for teachers in this area, and parents, any adults around children, youth workers, sports coaches, whoever, let's just like not expose children to some of these messages. And actually, just take a moment to think about what we're doing and the language that we're using around this stuff. We really need to rethink the way that we discuss bodies with children. And we really need to rethink the way that we empower children to look after themselves and their bodies and their minds in a really positive way.

Mel Manning 20:52

And I think that's why education is so important. I'm a huge advocate for education in lots of different areas because I think once you've got that information and children can make informed choices from the education.

Molly Forbes 21:06

Exactly. And I think what's happening is that we're teaching children that, you know, we're teaching kids about good and bad food, we're teaching children that they should do exercise, because it's something that they should do to look after their body, rather than reframing it as something that is fun and joyful, and how is it going to make you feel, and also giving kids like a real like diverse representation of the kind of people that they see doing movement, because actually, there are loads of sporting heroes in lots of different types of bodies. But regularly, children don't see those people on the front of magazines. And actually, they're really successful, as actually, if we give children wider representation, allow them to see that actually movement and sport and moving your body, you can do that, in whatever type of body you have.

It's for everyone it's for, it's, it's a joyful thing that everyone is allowed to experience, you don't have to do PE, in order to change the shape of your body. And actually, if you're in a higher weight body, you're still Welcome to do PE, it's really fun, join the team, you know, rather than make it like something that we have to do to change the shape of our body, and immediately stopping. So we're closing the door to so many kids who might be who might actually be interested in movement. And so if the aim is that we want children to eat, you know, nutritious food, and we want them to move their body, then one of the things we need to look at is how we can give them positive body image. Because when children feel bad about their body, and this isn't just high weight kids, but this has kids in all different types of bodies, when they feel bad about their body, they're less likely to do things that make their body feel good. So actually, if the aim is the aim weight loss, or is the aim health behaviours, if the aim is that we want them to get involved in movement and eat a wide range of food, and mental health and physical health

are not two separate things. And so actually, what we could do is take a wider view, and really empower kids to really, you know, actually take some control and know that it's if they're allowed, they're allowed to make their bodies feel good, regardless of what their bodies look like, that will be good on an individual level for children. But I'll also be good on a societal level because I care deeply as a parent about raising two children who are good humans who treat other people with kindness and compassion and are accepting of everyone. And part for me, like part of that is making them understand that all bodies are good bodies. Even if someone's body doesn't look or function, the way that your body looks or functions, they are still worthy of respect and compassion and kindness.

Mel Manning 23:53

And that's why I looked like a beach when you're on that because I think even as an adult, and as a woman, you know, we still have these hang-ups, about the way we look and our bodies. And when I watch naked beach I was I was like liberated because I just thought actually, there's people, different sizes, different shapes, different personalities, you know, so many differences. And that's okay. And as an adult, I was feeling that and I thought actually, for these children, we need to be modelling that so what what what made you get involved with naked Beach was it you know, what was it that inspired you to do it?

Molly Forbes 24:23

So naked Beach was so we filmed that a while ago, that was filmed in 2018. And I had put a video on the internet and I think the producers have seen it picked it up. And I was invited to go on it and be one of the hosts and it was just like a bit of a surreal thing. I didn't have much notice before I went out there. It was a big deal because I had two young kids, you know, and I was leaving them for nearly five weeks to go and work on this show in Greece. And that was it was a big decision to do that but also I feel really honoured to have taken part in that Show and be part of the stories of the people who came out to be helped. So it was a real honour to be part of their stories and see them start to unpick this stuff and start just to feel good and start to feel free. and realise that they couldn't let these feelings about their bodies stop them from actually living the life in the body that they had right now, rather than spending any more of their life trying to chase, you know, this other body, this other body that wasn't their body. And so yeah, it was it was a fun show to do. Very, a bit surreal.

Mel Manning 25:39

With the people who were on there I just was always amazed because it's almost like something lifted off them. They came in looking so heavy and so burdened by the way they felt about themselves, and then at the end, and you could tell that wasn't acting that wasn't put on, you could see that physically felt so much better about themselves.

Molly Forbes 25:57

I know it's amazing. I know. And the thing about that show, and I think that this is the case with everything, actually, it really illustrated how when you start to feel better, you like you hold yourself in a different way. And some people were saying was like a makeover show, without a makeover, because there was no makeover, we weren't physically changing their appearance at all. Like it wasn't like they arrived on the first day. And they deliberately, like had no makeup. And then by the last day, like the makeup teams will come in. That was absolutely not the case. But what was happening was as each day went on, they started to feel better and more confident and happier. They were holding themselves in different way. They were unapologetically taking up space, and they were smiling. And they were just like, living in the moment, when you get to that point where you do actually start to feel better. It's such a liberating feeling. It's like I described it the other day as like, you know, when it's really cold and grey and horrible weather for like a few weeks, and you just almost don't even notice it because you just get used to the weather being bad. And then you get that first day of spring where the sky is blue, and the sun is shining, and you just like feel in a really good mood, and he can't put your finger on why. But actually, it's because it's a sunny day. And you didn't realise how much you know, when it was a cloudy day, it was impacting your mood. That is what it's like when you start stepping free from feeling like you have to conform to like these ideal bodies, and you can actually start living your life. It's like the sun's just come out, you know?

Mel Manning 27:34

Yeah, no. And you can see that, you know, obviously, they weren't spending loads of time there. It was a short period of time, but even in that short period of time, and it actually I would I think gonna do any updates, because that would be amazing. If we could see like a year on or two years on, you know, where they're at now and how they feel about their bodies.

Molly Forbes 27:51

I don't know. I mean, I think it's, I think unlikely now think it was a one off show, but all of the guys, I mean, I am still in touch with loads of them. And I mean, even Jody just she stayed at my house a couple of years ago, I went on holiday, and she came down and stayed in my house while I was away. Everyone is doing really well. And I mean, yeah, it's, it's, it's interesting, because the thing is with that show is we didn't know if it was gonna work. Like we didn't know if that experiment, um, Dr. Qian West, who devised that he's he is the person who created the original social experiment and did the study that that show is based on and he says he knew it was gonna work, he always knew it was gonna work. I think the interesting thing for me is that when you're in a situation where you're very, you know, surrounded by positive people, and you're not constantly being bombarded with these negative messages that tell you, you need to look a certain way in order to be valued and respected. Whether that is from being surrounded by positive people in your life who like your friends, or whether that's through making sure that you're following those kind of accounts on social media, or you're not following accounts that make you feel bad at least, I think that it shows how much of an impact the people around you can have.

I think that that's actually a really empowering thing because we do live in a world that does still value people based on the way that they look. And unfortunately, we have a long way to go before we've got rid of weight stigma and any other like systems of oppression that lead to people often feeling bad about their body. And I think that it can become really overwhelming to think, you know, our will nothing's ever going to change and all of this stuff needs to change and nothing's ever going to get better. So therefore, I'm just gonna, like give up and I'm just gonna feel like this forever. That actually we know that there are certain things that we can do, you know, to make ourselves feel better right now. It's a huge subject and it's a huge issue. But I think that kind of trying to be positive and know that there are some things we do We can do to make us feel better. And I can feel like less desperate, I have to be optimistic and have hope otherwise. It's like, what's the point?

Mel Manning 30:10

Absolutely. It's almost like you have to start somewhere, isn't it? Yeah, I mean, the work that we do have been to so we work with teenage girls. And we do talk a lot about social media, because it feeds into all their life in some way. And we talk about, obviously, about who we follow, as you mentioned, and pulling the right people. And actually, we held an exhibition before lockdown. And we did it around body image. And that should be talked about you as one of those, because it's good to give me examples of good accounts to follow because you can just say, of don't follow that person. But if you're not giving anything in replace of that, you need to say, Well, actually, what about this person, this person is

inspiring or so. So yeah, so your Instagram account, I love it, you know, looking at, you know, scrolling through. And the reason I like it is because I feel that it's genuine, I feel that there's no filter of pictures, it's not fake. Is that something you work hard on? Is that something that you want to do and inspire people as they look through your account?

Molly Forbes 31:07

Um yeah, I mean, Instagram has always been, I have a bit of a love hate relationship with it, to be honest, I really love and I think it's like with everything, there's nuance, I think social media can be a really, really positive tool. And it can be a really positive tool for good. And there is academic research to show that if we follow, you know, body positive accounts, and we diversify the types of people that we're seeing on our feed, but even not just people, but like the types of accounts that we're following, that can have a really positive impact on our body image and our overall well-being. But the other side of that is that it can also, I have to really manage the amount of time I spend on there and as my accounts grown, I've had to really be better about creating kind of clear boundaries around around how I use it and around how other people kind of access me because I think that sometimes people can follow people on social media and forget that there's there's that that that person is a person, they're a human being. And it can be almost dehumanising, I don't want to be put up on a pedestal by anyone who thinks that like, oh, like, it's really flattering to hear people say, Oh, it's inspiring, like your contents inspiring but it's also, I'm also very keen to regularly say, like, I don't get it right all the time. I'm a human being, I'm messy, like, you know, I'm not the perfect mom, because the perfect mom doesn't exist. You know, I sometimes have days where don't feel great, you know about how I lurk. And I have to remind myself that there are reasons for that, you know.

So I definitely like try and avoid being put on a pedestal in that way. Because I think that what then happens is that you then can become inauthentic with what you're putting out, you're trying to then live up to this like, weird character that you've created, you know, for the purpose of social media. And actually, we got to always remember, whether it's your best mate that you're following online, who, you know, who, who isn't an influencer, or whether it's a social media influencer, or a celebrity or whatever. Actually, what we see on social media is a snippet out of someone's day, it's not the full picture. It is really flattering. And really lovely that people are like, supporting my message and sharing the news about the book, and, and, you know, whatever. But also, I sometimes do feel a bit like, Oh, don't put me in that position. You know, there's a long way to fall when people hold you in high esteem. Like, it's almost like sometimes it feels like everyone shouting each other. And it's always that I'm right, you're wrong. I'm right, you're wrong. Actually, no one's communicating. And then that's because the way that the

algorithms are set up, the people who really benefit from these kind of like infighting and arguments online are the people that own the social media platforms, you know, the people that own Instagram and Twitter and whatever. And so I'm just like, regularly trying to, like remind people that there's nuance in everything. And often things are not as straightforward as we might think. And just like, try and look at another perspective, and, you know, kind of look at, let's try and peel back some of the layers and recognise that there are different layers to conversations. And it's not always easy to do, but I mean, yeah, that's what I tried to do.

Mel Manning 34:38

That's why when we talk about it with the girls that we work with, we talk about the pros and cons of social media, because I think you're right, you know, there are there are very positive things about you know, we can communicate through social media, we can share important messages. But it's just having that understanding as a young person as well, because actually, they're still growing, they're still maturing, aren't they? So, you know, trying to now Again, social media has been complicated.

Molly Forbes 35:02

I think I mean, there's a whole chapter in my book about social media. And I think it's really important as adults to recognise the huge impact that social media can have, not just on our kids life, but on our own life. And I think a lot of the time, we are expecting our kids to be able to navigate this world, when we don't even know how to navigate it ourselves. And we talk about boundaries. But actually, how many of us are up late scrolling on our phone at night, you know, I mean, guilty, like, I try not to do it, but definitely can fall down that rabbit hole of like scrolling, with all my work, it's about really tapping into who we are as people and knowing that our value comes from our unique individuality and what's inside. And those are the things that the people around me love. They don't love me for how I look, they don't love me for how many followers I've got an Instagram, they don't love me for, like, whatever the number is on my bank balance, like numbers don't mean anything, the things that mean stuff, like who we are inside. And the thing that worries me about social media, is that sometimes, like it's wired in a way that we if we're not careful, we can start to place too much value, we can start to allow too much power to an external force in deciding, you know, how we feel about ourselves, if we start placing too much value in that, you know, those likes or those followers or whatever. I think that's a bit of a tricky, downward slope. Really?

Mel Manning 36:34

Yeah, yeah, definitely. And I think, you know, obviously, through the pandemic, as well, that children will have been spending a lot of time probably on devices and things like that. So do you think that the pandemic will have affected children's body image and their general well being through this time

Molly Forbes 36:51

100% that we know it we know it has, it's a really, really pivotal time for kids, that we had serious issues before, we know that the research is telling us that more and more children are younger, not younger age are feeling bad about their body or feeling like their bodies wrong. And we also know that the pandemic has heightened those feelings more we know that doing online learning. So you know, seeing yourself constantly, when you're on a video call, you're sitting there look like I can see myself now, in a normal situation, when you're having conversation with someone, that wouldn't be the case, you're not sitting in front of a mirror, having a conversation with someone, you're listening to what they're saying. And I know I mean, even just anecdotally, my husband's a teacher. And he found that a lot of his kids were turning their cameras off. Because they didn't they felt low self esteem, they didn't want to be seen on camera, they didn't want to have to look at themselves on camera, but I was trying to explain to him that there's a reason that they're turning their cameras off. And it might be because they're feeling they've got low self esteem because they're embarrassed about the way they look or they don't want to have to look at their face all day. Also, there is an incredibly heightened focus on weight. And all the time we're hearing about pre and post pandemic bodies. And we're hearing about, you know, people gaining weight through lockdown, and like, it's the worst thing ever, and how we have to get back, we have to snap back. And we have to do something about this awful issue of weight gain. We're not focusing actually what the real health issue is, is huge, huge mental health issues anxiety and low self esteem.

We we need to recognise how all this talk about weight gain and and pre and post pandemic bodies is making it worse. It's making it that is exacerbating the health issue that is also contributing to dips in how kids are feeling about themselves, and also just that overall health and well being. So yeah, I mean, I really, it really upsets me when I hear I mean, I had a DM the other day from someone who was saying that their school setting that they were involved with the head teacher had was planning to do extra nutrition classes with the school nurse because she was concerned. She felt she needed to do something about the weight gain of the children. And I just reset my heart sank when I had that message because I just thought I understand where that is coming from. And it's coming from a place where the head teacher thinks this is what I need to

do to help the kids in my care and this is this is a positive thing. But actually, that shows me the huge lack of awareness and support that teachers get in this area. And actually that can be hugely damaging really, really harmful thing. And, and a school nurse is obviously a health professional but they're not a nutritionist. We need to recognise that doctors and nurses are not they're not registered nutritionist, body happy org all of our Food education resources are created with that they're paid. They're created by teachers and peer reviewed by other teachers. And also peer reviewed a second time by a registered nutritionist, who also has a master's in developmental psychology, and works with families in a public health setting to help raise you know, healthy happy eaters. These are the people who are actually trained and qualified to be giving us advice around food education. But as soon as we go from a kind of a diet culture perspective, where we're saying immediately assuming that one type of body is better than another, and we're going down that route, we really risk creating serious, serious problems.

But again, it's not like a deliberate, it's not a deliberate thing. I don't, no one goes into teaching with the intention of harming the kids in their care. Like all teachers, I come from a family of teachers and married to a teacher, I work with teachers all the time, all teachers just want the best for their kids. Same as you know, every social worker, I know, and every nurse and doctor, but what, unfortunately, there's a big lack of awareness and there's a big disconnect between the research and the academic knowledge, and for some reason and i think that like i said it's just not filtering through into the settings. And a lot of that is political. And a lot of that comes from, you know, like the public health kind of campaigns and lack of awareness there as well. And, and that is, I mean, the women and equalities commission have just done a massive survey into body image. And I've been speaking to them about that. And hopefully, that will help make a difference when it comes to like the political side of things. But ultimately, it's a huge, big thing. Um and I think that like I said at the very beginning it's just being more mindful around language and supporting people to learn more about this subject. We can't assume that every ones on Instagram an is following body positive accounts on Instagram or whatever because many people aren't.

Mel Manning 42:00

Exactly. I think that goes back to that education thing, doesn't it? Again, I mean, I actually used to be a teacher. So when I think back to my training to be a teacher, you know, you're not prepared for what you feel you're faced with, you're really taught to teach lessons. But actually, when you're working with children, young people, there's so much more other things that involve looking after those children and giving them the best care. So what you're doing with your organisation, actually, that you can equip teachers, because teachers want to know these things. It's not like they're sort of like, Well, I'm not interested. Of course they are. But they're not always given that information, though.

Molly Forbes 42:38

I mean, I would love to see it as part of teacher training. We did a workshop recently with five trainee teachers, and they'd signed up off their own, you know, bat because they wanted the knowledge and they wanted the information. And, you know, they were saying afterwards, they all of them emailed, and afterwards said, this should be a mandatory part of our teacher training, even just doing this one hour session, as part of our teacher training would make a huge difference, you know, and having access to these resources, right from day one. So yeah, I mean, that's a thing for another day.

Mel Manning 43:19

So last year, I don't tend to have I don't do New Year's resolutions or anything like that. But I do sometimes have a word for the year that kind of inspires me during that year. And mine was kindness. And it was, you know, showing kindness to myself but also to others. So how do you show kindness to yourself? Do you have any tips or anything that you sort of, you know, just a reminder for yourself? Because sometimes we're actually quite harsh on ourselves, aren't we?

Molly Forbes 43:41

Oh, my gosh, I am the harshest. It always makes me laugh when people ask me this question. Because people because I do talk about self-compassion and the importance of self-compassion. But I have to actively really work at doing that. It doesn't come naturally to me at all. Because I am often my own harshest critic. And I think often people are surprised by that, because I talk a lot about the importance of self-compassion. But it is something that I have to work at. And I think I'm just wired that way. So I try to treat myself in the way like, almost like, I'm like another one of my kids. And remind myself to do that boring stuff, like going to bed early, you know, or making sure I get enough sleep, tuning into how my body feels, and making sure if I'm hungry, I'm eating, you know, and just Also, I'm naturally a worrier. So reminding myself that there are some things, you know, like, like, right now, I am absolutely terrified about people reading my book, I've got massive pre-publication nerves, like, I'm really excited, but I'm also so nervous about it. And like, the negative voice in my head is like going tend to do, you know, people won't like it telling me all this stuff, I have to then remove myself from that. And just note it for what it is. And the thing that I find helps with that is kind of just sort of neutrally noticing that, that that that's the voice that regularly comes up that that like self-doubt voice. And

it's just the self-doubt talking. It's not, it's not the truth, it's not real. And I think just sometimes being able to recognise that voice and take a step away from it, that really helps in terms of like self-compassion, and then like, forcing the other voice to be a bit louder and say, right, you know what you need, right? I need to go for a walk. You need to, like, put some music on, you know, get an earlier night, you know, don't spend so much time working or whatever. But it Yeah, it's something I have to work on. It doesn't come naturally to me.

So it's good to be gentle with yourself. And if this stuff doesn't come naturally, that's okay, too.

Mel Manning

Yeah, I think it is good. If you recognise yourself what those little triggers are. Maybe like I said, if you know, you're not looking after yourself, or you're being harsh to yourself, if you're aware of it, I think that's half the battle is when that that thought creeps in, you can be quick to say no, you know, or you go for a walk or whatever it is that you need to help yourself. And that's important, isn't it?

Molly Forbes

Yeah, absolutely. I think sometimes there you know, particularly if we've got used to speaking to ourselves in this way for so long. It's really difficult to recognise that it's not that what recognise it for what it is, and not just assume that it's the truth. You know, we tell ourselves all these stories? And how often do we take a step back and actually examine those stories that we're telling ourselves? You know, that's only been something that I've got good at, though in the last couple of years, really.

Mel Manning

That's what I think with the work that I do with teenage girls, I feel like I want to impart something of, you know, we learn it as we get older in a way that we so many things about ourselves, not always the case. But in a lot of cases, I think, how can I almost save them from going through some of the things that often we go through as women especially. But I know sometimes we learn from our mistakes, don't we, as well. And that's part of it as well.

Molly Forbes 47:25

No, and actually, that's quite a refreshing piece of information as well, because I think that in the past, I've been so worried sometimes of making mistakes that I haven't even tried, and, or you know, or have been so kind of worried about, you know, saying the wrong thing, or doing the wrong thing, or not putting myself forward for something, or, or overthinking something afterwards, thinking I've done it wrong, actually. We're all humans, we're allowed to make mistakes, and making mistakes is how we learn. And you don't get to a certain age, and then stop making mistakes and stop learning. We that's what we it's a lifelong process. And I think that that's quite a liberating thing, when we can start to recognise that and lean into it a bit and, and give ourselves some space to make those mistakes. And it's alright, it's okay. You know, we are all we're all learning, everyone's learning all the time, even grownups.

Mel Manning 48:28

So how can people access? Obviously, once your book comes out, obviously, and the resources you talked about on happy body org, how do people go about finding out or even the workshops?

Molly Forbes 48:40

Yeah, so if you go to body Happy org.com, that will take you to social enterprise, which is called the body happy organisation. And though on that website is everything, so you'll see there's an area for teachers, we've got, like teaching resources, the workshop that teachers can sign up to, there's an area for parents, we've got an online masterclass that parents can do. You can also pre order the book from us, but you can get it from, you know, all good book shops as well. And we also have downloadable digital resources. And the important thing is that we're adding to them all the time, we're just in the process of creating like a blog area, there is a lot of information on there as well already. There's also like downloadable if you're a parent, and you want for example, us to come into your school and do a workshop with the teachers. There's a downloadable information pack that you can download, which includes a template letter. So we've literally done all the work for you, you just have to fill in the gaps and then send it off to your school. And the masterclass for parents is just a 90 minute session like an online session that's broken down into a whole range of bite sized videos. It's about 19 bite size videos, presented by me. And it comes with extra downloadable resources. I think there's like seven different documents, including a course notes booklet that's nearly 4000 words packed with more

information and signposting to loads more resources. And it also comes with access to a private Facebook group, which I think is really like really, really key because when we are unpacking some of this stuff, having a community of people around us supportive community is really, really important, particularly if it's going against maybe some of the mainstream ideas that we might hear, you know, regularly in the newspapers or whatever. But yeah, basically go to body Happy org.com or follow me on Instagram, Molly J. Forbes. And you'll find a link in my bio with links to all my stuff and the podcast that I do. Everything is there. Just have a nosy around.

Mel Manning 50:49

Brilliant. Thank you so much. Well, thank you for your time. Thank you for talking to us. It's been really really, really interesting.

Molly Forbes

Thank you. Thank you for having me.

Mel Manning 50:59

Today was a great reminder chatting with Molly that all bodies are worthy of respect and kindness which is why it's so important that we are educating our children to view their own bodies and others in a positive way. To find out more about body happy org and the work that Molly is doing please visit at @bodyhappyorg on Instagram.

Thank you to all of the young people have been involved in making today's podcast Elsa Arnold, Freedom2's youth trustee and our Freedom2 ambassadors. The music is written and performed by Josie Beth.

I am Mel manning thank you for listening. Please subscribe to our podcast and follow us on Instagram @freedom2UK or go to our website www.freedom2.org.uk.

End of Podcast.