

For The 1 Podcast by Freedom2: Episode 4

Host: Mel Manning

Guest: Hope Virgo

Mel Manning 0:04

I'm Mel Manning, welcome to our 'For The One' podcast. This week's guest is Hope Virgo.

Hope Virgo 0:11

I think every school needs to be talking about eating disorders. I think often schools were so afraid of talking about it. And now they're kind of slowly stepping into that they need. They need to understand about disordered eating and diet, culture and body image and everything like that.

Mel Manning 0:30

This is season one of our further one podcast and I'm Mel Manning, the founder of the charity freedom to 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 one, 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.

Hope Virgo is the author of stand tall little girl and a multi award winning international leading advocate for people with eating disorders. Hope helps young people and employers to deal with the rising tide of mental health issues, which affect one in four people and costs employers between 33 and 42 billion annually. She's been described by Richard Mitchell CEO of Sherwood Forest hospital as sharing a very powerful story with a huge impact. Hope is also recognised media spokesperson having appeared on various platforms including BBC News night, Victoria Derbyshire, good morning Britain, Sky News and BBC News. For four years hope managed to keep it hidden, keeping dark secrets from friends and family. But then on the 17th of November 2007, hopes will change forever. She was admitted to a mental health hospital. Her skin was yellowing, her heart was failing. She was barely recognisable. First to leave her family and friends. The hospital became her home over the next year at her lowest ebb, hope face the biggest challenge of her life. She had to find the courage to beat her anorexia.

There is a trigger warning on today's podcast as we'll be discussing eating disorders and mental health.

So good morning. Hope. Thank you so much for joining us on for the warm podcast.

Hope Virgo 2:28

Hi, thanks so much for having me. It's so good to be here remotely.

Mel Manning 2:32

Yes, yes. How are you doing today?

Hope Virgo 2:35

Yeah, really good. Actually. Yeah, quite a nice steady morning actually went to the river near where I live, and watched kind of like the sun come up, which was something that I never do get there that early. But it was really, really nice. So yeah, a bit of a change of Yeah, process today, which is good.

Mel Manning 2:51

Yeah. Oh, we did that once. One year, we went and watch the sunrise. And it just was amazing. And I thought I don't know why I don't do this more often. But it means getting up quite early, doesn't it? Yeah.

Then your like just died for the rest of the day. Yeah, it's definitely worth it. Yeah, absolutely. Yeah. so it's been a difficult year, hasn't it? well over a year really now, with the pandemic, and there's been lots of highs and lows for people. And but what has been your moment of joy through the pandemic as a bit? Has there been a moment of joy for you?

Hope Virgo 3:21

Yeah. And there definitely has been, and it's really interesting. So I live in South London. And just before Christmas, we went into tier four. And I had this moment on the Saturday night where I just felt so upset about the whole thing. I I don't find Christmas that easy, anyway, but I'd kind of

worked out what it was going to look like for me and how that would work. And I was desperate to see my family because I hadn't seen them for so long. And then they announced this tear for and I was literally just like I cried for hours. It felt like and was just devastated if i'm honest. It sounds ridiculous. And I know some people will have experienced a lot more grief over the last year. But for me it everything just kind of came to a head that evening. And I sat down after kind of this. Yeah, I was acquiring probably. And she was my best friend over WhatsApp. We were messaging each other kind of all of those kind of joyful moments of lockdown. And it was the first time back then that I've really stopped to kind of think about it and be like Actually, there has been some really good moments in the midst of like this terrible year. And but it was Yeah, I kind of shelved it after I did that. And then obviously when you when you just asked it then I was like oh actually do you know what I've done this before, but I haven't thought about it for so long.

So I think for me, probably the two things I'm going to pull out kind of the most three forms. I think one of them was last summer when things began to open up a little bit in London. And we were allowed to go and sit outside and I basically spent that time kind of really investing in friendships that I wanted to prolong and people that I wanted to see and it felt really good and really joyful because

There was so many happy memories made. And it was just nice being around people that I wanted to spend time with and not feeling the pressure to be around loads of people that I don't really know if I want to spend time with. And then I think my second one, which is something actually that I do every Friday morning with my other half and have been doing it since kind of started January. So every Friday, we get up kind of quite early, we are early risers, people will probably have noticed, like slowly starting to realise, and we head up to the common near where I live, get a coffee, get a pastry, and just kind of like catch up on the week. And it's it sounds ridiculous that we catch up on the week because we live together. But actually, it's one of those moments that I'm just like, you know what, this is really, really wonderful. And there's no work stress, there's just kind of good, just stopping. And it also feels when it's happening, that we're not in a pandemic, like, yeah, we're wearing a mask into a coffee shop to get a takeaway, but actually, yes, maybe sitting on a bench and maybe walking around the common with a drink. And it's like this is this is nice, like this is good. So for me, I think it's been those those moments definitely.

Mel Manning 6:06

I think people like you're saying you've kind of formed new routines so and what you would maybe would have never been thought of doing before actually has become that moment of joy. Isn't that that moment that sort of getting away from what's happening around us?

Hope Virgo 6:19

Yeah, definitely. It's, it's so it has been interesting, I think, because we've like, obviously, I'm probably like everybody, we're spending a lot more time outside. And both sometimes it's like, oh, I don't want to go outside again. I'm like, actually, do you know what, like, it's really nice. So I think like, definitely, as an individual, I'm gonna actually I have learned a lot during lockdown, and the pandemic, and all of those little things that I really enjoyed doing. I know that actually I need to make an effort to keep doing those things. And it doesn't necessarily mean every week going and getting a coffee. But actually, maybe once a month, actually just putting aside that time to go and do all of that stuff that we used to do and that we want to do. And I think for all of us, there's probably like you said stuff that we can take forward, that will be beneficial to our routine.

Mel Manning 7:04

Yeah, yeah, definitely. And it will be I think it would be a case of Kind of, yeah, those routines that you've loved having, like you said, not not losing that, you know, sort of getting back into old ways, maybe of working too hard and not having those boundaries.

Hope Virgo 7:18

yeah, no, definitely. I think for me, like with my work, I travel so much. And like, don't get me wrong, like I really missed that I missed the travelling, I miss going and doing stuff face to face. But at the same time, it's been really, really nice just being at home. And like, yeah, like being sleeping in my bed every evening and having like a home cooked dinner and all of that sort of stuff there. I totally just didn't really think about how much I probably missed all of it over the last couple of years. But yeah, I think definitely working out how I can Yeah, how I can do what I was doing beforehand, but doing it in a less intense probably way.

Mel Manning 7:54

Yeah, yeah, absolutely. And so COVID hasn't been an easy time for people, obviously, if they've been ill, or they've had family that have been ill. And I think especially for people with eating disorders. So in one of your Instagram posts, which I loved seeing you'd written the 2021 roadmap

COVID fears. And then you talked about resetting, and it seems that you write things down a lot. Does that help I can you explain a bit about what this kind of the sort of roadmap was?

Hope Virgo

Yeah, definitely. So I guess Firstly, I write everything down. So I'm like a real? Yeah, like, it's just how I process things. So I see over the pandemic, I've gone through so many more journals that I normally go through. And but as part of that, I try and take time to just put every single worry down on paper every now and again. And I found the roadmap kind of really challenging, actually. So it was it was announced on the Monday this kind of opening up with the UK. And I was so excited about it. I was like this is amazing. Like, I'm going to see my mom again, like my other half was excited because he can go to a football stadium. And like we went for this walk that evening, and we were like, this is amazing. It's gonna be so so good. But then kind of the next morning I woke up and I was just a bit like, I don't I don't know how I feel about this. I was like, I feel really anxious. I feel quite uncertain. I'm, I'm worried about like x, y, or Zed. But I didn't name it. I kind of sat with this really like just horrible feeling in my stomach for like the next three, four days, and was in a really bad mood was so unpleasant to be around. And I was like What is the matter with me, like I just couldn't work out. And then on the Friday morning, I was like, but I need to just have a little bit of time for myself. So I went for a walk and kind of took some time to just write every single thing that was on my mind. And it turned out that actually I had all of these worries around the roadmap and life going back to normal and what that might look like and and I think for me some of it was like the worries with food and you

Like my eating disorder and things like that, but actually, there were other worries as well about actually like how, like, what it will be like to interact with people what it will be like how other people are going to change, like, what's it going to look like? And, and yeah, and it really, really helped. And I do think that actually, when we have situations in life, and it doesn't even have to be like a big announcement, like a road map, it could be anything. But it's like actually thinking, what is worrying us, like, what is bothering us? What can we control in that situation? What can we do to then alleviate some of that control, like, alleviate some of that stress and that worry.

So what I tend to do is write a list of the worries down, and then over the next couple of weeks, like work my way through them. So work out actually what I can do to help that better. And I think one of my worries are kind of from the habit, one of them, was probably around eating in front of other people again, and and to actually just since kind of since writing that list, I've started to make sure that I have a snack with someone else, whether it's on zoom. And now obviously, we can kind of meet people again, I'll be like, doing that with friends a bit more. But actually just slowly starting to do that sort of stuff, and coming up with a bit of a timeline and a bit of a plan of action for myself to deal with each of those kind of anxiety kind of provoking things. So do you think that other people in similar situations, maybe with eating disorders through lockdown, may have caused more anxiety? Or in the thought of coming out of lockdown? Do you think that will happen? Yeah, definitely, if there has been a huge increase in people struggling with eating disorders over the last year, but also people who've been in recovery have kind of gone back to old coping mechanisms. And whilst it has been a year of uncertainty and isolation for everybody, actually, when you have an eating disorder, it's those two things, that the eating disorder really, really kind of thrives off and uses as a transitional psyche back end and pull you back.

11:47

And so I do you think that a lot of people have been struggling? And from the conversations that I'm having with people there is this fear of actually, what is this going to look like, like have, we all become so safe and secure with only eating with certain people only having certain things and we're gonna have to go back to kind of spontaneous kind of events, we're gonna have to go back to eating and restaurants going out with friends.

12:09

I like yeah, and I'm worried for people actually, I think, I think people are gonna have to make a decision about it. And particularly when you've had an eating disorder, you're going to have to realise that the next few months, as we start up, things start to ease up, it's gonna feel uncomfortable, it's gonna feel difficult, and the eating disorder will do its absolute best to try and pull them back in. But actually, in those moments, it's like, focus on the positives, focus on those actually amazing things that come with recovery. And I think if you set your mind to that, that actually it will help to just alleviate some of that discomfort.

Mel Manning 12:41

Yeah, yeah, I think it's interesting as well, that you said about writing things down, helps you because I, something that we do with the beneficiaries that we work with, is we have art journals that we we design, the front cover, book, that's something that they can take away and actually use, and we say to them, that actually, when they're feeling not great about themselves, or whatever it might be, it's really good to write it down or draw it or cut things out and magazines, you know, whatever it can be whatever it is that they want to do, but actually by just like you said, naming it can actually be quite powerful.

Hope Virgo 13:14

Yeah, definitely. And I think it just, it also just helps to just by naming it and bringing it into the light. It just takes some of the power away from everything, doesn't it?

Mel Manning 13:24

Yeah, yeah, absolutely. And so we're sharing stories of individuals who are seeing a need, and doing something about it. So for the one, it's very much about someone seeing something, and then the thought, How can I help that one person? So how did your journey of sharing your story with others start? And how did that help in your recovery?

Hope Virgo 13:44

Yeah, so I started kind of speaking up about eating disorders about probably 545 years ago now. And yeah, which seems ridiculous amount of time I've been doing it now. I say that. And But yeah, I, I thought really passionately about eating disorders, having had my own experience of living with anorexia kind of throughout my teens. And when I was kind of out of hospital for eight years, I relapsed. And I remember when I came to my relapse, I was like, You know what, no one has a real understanding of eating disorders, we still have this huge stigma around them. There's a lot of shame, a lot of guilt wrapped up in them.

And I was like, right, I need to do something about this. And so decided that the best way to do it was to write a book, and then use that as a way I guess, to start speaking in schools, doing kind of workshops with organisations and just seeing where it would go.

14:41

And yeah, I kind of quit my job, which was terrifying to do, but I wasn't really that happy in my job. So it was kind of like, well, maybe this is the right thing to do, but didn't really have a proper concrete plan in place if I wanted, and just kind of was like, I'm just gonna see what happens. I don't have anyone that like relies on me financially. So I was lucky in that sense that I could just take a little bit of a risk and just see what was what it was gonna happen and what it was gonna be like. And yeah, like it definitely, it definitely helps my recovery, it helps me to stay accountable to myself. But I think also I feel, I guess I feel more pressure to keep challenging myself and pushing myself and I think the problem with eating disorders is a lot of people get to these places, but I've definitely been in where you kind of settle at where you're at, and you just accept that this is life. This is what what it's going to always be like. And for me, definitely, even over the last kind of three, four months, I've made this kind of conscious effort to be like I said, You know what, I've, I've made so many mistakes in my recovery. And I'm determined to not make any more. And so even like now kind of being in those final kind of phases of recovery, and being like I said, You know what, I'm gonna do this, I'm going to challenge it, it's going to be uncomfortable. And I think for me, like just being honest with people who follow me and support the work I do with that is always been really, really important to actually just make sure that, like, they know I get it and they know I understand how hard it is.

Mel Manning 16:03

Yeah, yeah. And that was amazing that you actually just decided I'm going to write a book. Was it easy to do? Or Or was it? Actually you've written a new book, which is out tomorrow? Yeah, yeah.

Hope Virgo 16:16

It's fourth of April.

Mel Manning 16:17

Yeah. So So a few days? Yeah.

Hope Virgo 16:20

Yeah. Which is awesome. Yeah. So yeah, it was quite I find it really therapeutic to write, I'd written a lot of stuff, kind of when I was in treatment. So I spent a year in hospital and had written a lot of diary entries, all of that sort of stuff to kind of use a lot of that, as well. And B, I absolutely loved writing. So it was quite a Yeah, it was quite nice. Yeah, I just felt Yeah, kind of like the right thing to do. And the right step for them. I think, whether you want to write a book or not, I think people getting stuff done on paper is just amazing.

And well, the people that I speak to you just kind of like piece together bits of your life and work out why you've responded in a way why something's happened, maybe, as well. And then the book that's out this week is on a bit more of a self help kind of book. So I wrote it alongside a psychiatrist. And it's basically trying to equip people with eating disorders, to step into that final phase in their recovery to actually, I think there's only so much that treatment can give people and it's not a slight on treatment, I think it's just the way it is. So actually getting people to understand about how they can push those boundaries, what they can do, and yeah, various kind of activities and tasks in it.

Mel Manning 17:30

So do you think that's important with eating disorders, that you do have self self help, as well as obviously getting professional help? Do you think that's part of the process that you need to get to a place where you can help yourself as well?

Hope Virgo 17:42

Yeah, I think I think you need to, because you need to be you need to be honest with yourself, and you need to be accountable to yourself as well. Because at the end of the day, if you're not gonna Yeah, I guess at the end of the day, if you're not doing it, right, you're just gonna be kind of preventing your life kind of living to the fall. And I think with eating disorders, so often, when you're in this recovery, it's like, it's kind of constantly has this kind of ability to just be around you. And unless you're constantly challenging and pushing out, you're not going to get to that final phase. And I think quite often in treatment, as well, like, treatment is amazing. And I think if people can access treatment, everyone should firstly be able to access treatment, I 100% believe that. But if you are in treatment, I think so much of the focus is on that weight restoration, and kind of trying to change some of the behaviours, but you don't really ever get to the space where you're able to kind of live in the outside world. And so for me, actually, the self help type stuff. And being accountable to yourself is when all of that kicks into place, when maybe you go to uni, or you get a job, or you're going out with your friends. And just understanding and guess making the distinction between what you what you want to do and what the eating disorder is telling you to do as well.

Mel Manning 18:56

Yeah, because I think I mean, obviously what I've seen from on Instagram, and when I've seen you talk, I didn't realise that actually not that I thought that, you know, once you recovered, you're recovered. And I didn't think that but just that there is a daily, it's almost like a daily steps for you. And for other people. Actually, you're still working through this daily.

Hope Virgo 19:16

Yeah. And I think that's what makes it so hard with eating disorders is with and I'm not saying it's worse, obviously, than other addictions. But with other addictions, you're you cut, you cut it out, as a way to kind of cope with it. And that is still unbelievably difficult, and it's challenging, and it has its own difficulties within it. But actually, with eating disorders, you have to find a way to bring the food back into it. And which I think is then again, where a lot of that stigma gets wrapped up because people think that you're choosing to do it or you're making a choice and because we are making a choice every day to stay well. I think people assume it's an easy choice. And you're like no, it's not it's really difficult, like but I want to do it because I know I have to do it kind of thing.

Mel Manning 19:56

Yeah. so I want to talk a little bit about your campaign, Dump the scales. Now, obviously, this is an ongoing campaign, I get the emails that come through on it, he can tell that it is an ongoing thing that you have to do. Have you seen your progress so far translate into an improvement in GPS recognising eating disorders? Or do you think that further work is needed in this?

Hope Virgo 20:19

So yeah, really good question. I'm probably gonna give a really long winded answer. So I think the main progress has been with the government, and actually getting the government to realise this is an issue. And it's an issue that needs to be tackled. And I think there is a lot of education that needs to be done. And because there's not funding in place, because there's not the education for GPS, actually, they don't have an

understanding about it. And even when I go to the GP now, they constantly talk about BMI. And I'm like, literally sitting there, like, do I briefed them on my campaign while I'm sitting here being?

I haven't yet done that. But I probably will show it. Yeah. Yeah. So I think there is some progress, but it's, it's just really slow. And I think the thing that's made it even slower, is given the kind of kind of massive increase in people struggling with eating disorders over the pandemic services, it's even more stretch than they were before. So now there isn't support out there. So GPs are having to make quite cutthroat decisions on eating disorders. And I think across the NHS, we just need a whole cultural shift on eating disorders. So they have a real understanding around it. So yeah, I guess in short, there's been progress in some parts of the country, there's been progress with the government, but we're still looking at that for kind of foundational kind of changes being made and needs to be made.

Mel Manning 21:40

And you think, obviously, with doctors maybe training like said further education, is there? Is that something? I mean, when they get trained? Do they get trained on eating disorders? Or is that something that happens?

Hope Virgo 21:51

Yes, they get two hours of training throughout their whole medical degree. But for me, that's not enough. And so yeah, right now we're working on like an education strategy to actually look at who we want to be trained, how that might look. And I think as well, like if we brought eating disorder training into something that was just a bit more well known, and was something that was a key priority, it would also just help some of that stigma that comes with eating disorders as well and make it a more attractive career path for individuals.

Mel Manning 22:21

Yeah. And what about schools? I'm just thinking I used to be teacher. And is there sort of provision for teachers to spot signs and things like that?

Hope Virgo 22:29

Yeah. So there's not a huge amount if I'm honest. So I know, like, like myself, like there's a couple of other people who do what I do with kind of staff training and education and that sense, but there still isn't something kind of substantially out there. And I think one of the frustrations is even. So even in the phsc syllabus, they don't have to talk about eating disorders, they have to talk about depression and anxiety. But eating disorders is an optional topic. So again, I think it's even that sort of stuff that needs to be re brought back into it as an absolute priority. That's what I thought was fantastic. I mentioned earlier to you that when we were talking about my daughter's school, and that's when I first heard about you, because I'd seen that you'd visited and done a talk for students. And I thought that was fantastic. Because not only are the students here in the teachers are hearing as well. And yeah, whether that was needed more, which sounds like probably does. Yeah, I think it does, I think every school needs to be talking about eating disorders. I think often schools were so afraid of talking about it. And now they're kind of slowly stepping into that they need to talk about this, they need to understand about disordered eating and diet, culture and body image and everything like that, especially with like social media and things like I mean, the girls that we work with, we talk a lot about people that they follow, and that they don't have to follow these people that maybe make them feel not good about themselves. So it's sort of a quite a broad education, isn't it? I think we need to talk about the different ways that they might access these things. Yeah, definitely. And I think it's interesting to social media, because although it doesn't cause eating disorders, and eating disorders, on about kind of being a certain size or a certain shape. But because of social media, we basically normalise and put that additional pressure on ourselves to be a certain size or a certain shape. So even if someone hasn't, yeah, I guess even if someone's recovering from an eating disorder, you're recovering into a world where you're told that you shouldn't be putting on weight that you shouldn't be eating certain foods. And for me, I think with social media, there's just a whole load of education that needs to be done across the board. You just get rid of all of the unhealthy messaging, whether that's kind of nutritionists that aren't really nutritionist giving advice on sugar intake and carbs. And yeah, just getting everyone to a place where you've got a healthy relationship with food, but also a kind of neutral relationship as well.

Mel Manning 24:48

Yeah, I think through lockdown, you know, I've seen a lot of things where people are losing weight and you know, lockdown bodies and things like that. And you just think it's so dangerous, isn't it?

Hope Virgo 24:57

It's just appalling and even with the roadmap came out. I remember seeing it all over again, man, it was like, how much weight? Am I gonna leave? Before I see people, I'm like, No, like, this is not healthy, like, our worth is not wrapped up in our weight. We're all so much more than that. And we just, yeah, we need to maybe it's an individual thing as well, like we need as individuals to just not put that pressure on each other to lose weight and to have those conversations. Yeah, definitely. So part of our mission of freedom, too, is that girls will empower each other hope spring is your new initiative that you're you are seeking community crowdfunding for? And is advocating peer support groups. So you want to tell us a little bit about what what it's about? Yeah, so um, so basically, in across kind of eating disorder treatment, there's, there's just not enough services out there, there's a huge waiting list, and no one can really get support unless you fit neatly into a box. And everything, there isn't a lot of as either as peer support stuff. So it's hugely lacking across the board. And in right at the start of the pandemic, last year, I ran kind of like an initial six week course, like a peer support group online for people to get involved in if they wanted to. And and then we kind of agreed that we would check it and what every two months after that. And then just before Christmas, when we went into must have been I'm sure, I think when the lock, which isn't what the next lock or whatever locked down, we're on. Yeah. And yeah, when that happened, I was like, You know what, this is so difficult for people with eating disorders, and then the added stress of Christmas, and what that's gon na look like.

So I was like, I'm going to just do another peer support group and see what happens. And the number of people who wanted to join, it was just so big, that I obviously couldn't accept everybody, because it just wouldn't have worked. So we kind of initially started with this one group. And then from that one group, I was like, actually, this is a need out there, people need that additional support. And I think given COVID and the kind of flexibility at the moment around doing things online, it means that people are able to join from anywhere they want to. So we're in the process of just setting up a couple of more, to basically see how they go and then work out what we want to do next. But for me, it's actually I think there's so much power in supporting each other and recovery. And I know that like the people in the group that we've got already, like they absolutely love it. They love the fact that they can talk about anything and they're accepted, we will have little kind of an ad like nice little food habits or whatever. And we can support the through that. And the main kind of focus, like she we all we all want that full recovery, we all believe full recovery is possible. So creating an environment where actually you're pushing that healthy messaging and really supporting one another, I think is key.

Mel Manning 27:42

Yeah, I mean, I'm such a big advocate for peer support, work, the work that we do, we have girls that have been on our programmes, and they come back and support other girls that then come through some of the programmes. And I just think there's so much more power in that than maybe me standing and talk trying to, you know, talk to the girls, actually, by having someone who's been through something similar and can share that story. They can relate and have similar age, sometimes that can help as well. Yeah. Yeah. So is that what you is that the aim really that you think that that will be what it is?

Hope Virgo 28:11

Yeah, having that space where things are accepted and understood, and there's no judgement? Yeah, and where you're able to offer some personal advice, but also like good signposting. I think, like all of us have read so many books on eating disorders, and listening to so many different podcasts. There's just so much knowledge in the group. It's like, actually, how can we use that to be there helping each other get to that space?

Mel Manning 28:34

Yeah, definitely. It sounds really exciting.

Hope Virgo 28:36

Yeah, I think so. Yeah.

Mel Manning 28:39

And well, how can people support you in that? Is there any way that you know, do you need support?

Hope Virgo 28:44

Yeah, always, always looking for support? And yeah, so on my Instagram, there's a link to the crowdfunder. But also, I guess another another thing was the drama scouts campaigns that kind of links to that as well. Yeah, I tend to share everything on there, actually. But if people want to be more involved in that sort of stuff, or you're listening, you've had your own experience of an eating disorder, and you want to get involved in a group or running a group and things like that. And like, obviously, can share a bit more information with people as well on that.

Mel Manning 29:11

Yeah. Brilliant. So what inspires you to keep going on your down days? Because we all have those days where things aren't as easy. So what is there any Do you have any tips or anything that you that works for you.

Hope Virgo 29:24

Um, so I actually have a well being container, which isn't, it's not like a container, like an a4 piece of paper. We'd like this terrible outline of what I think a container would look like. And, and in it, I have a list of things that I do for my mental health every single week, every single day. And then I also have like an emergency section on it, which is what to do and those really difficult days. And I think for me, it's on those hard days. I tend to all like always make sure I get dressed and have a shower.

I always keep my teeth, which for some people, you're probably like, you have days when you don't clean your teeth. And I'm like, yeah, there are some days when things get really difficult. And I get to like half, three, and I'm like, Oh my goodness, I need to clean my teeth. But yeah, so kind of keeping up my hygiene on those days is really important. I also always make sure that I sit outside for at least 10 minutes, and even in the cold kind of wrapping up, get a cup of tea. Because for me, actually just having that downtime is really important. And I'm also very mindful on the difficult days of how much time I'm spending on my phone. I think so often, particularly when you get to the evening, and you've had a hard day, I have a tendency to just scroll and scroll and scroll. And it's ridiculous, because I know it's making me feel awful. But I'm still doing it all the time. And I'm like, why am I doing this? Like, come on, like, stop looking at stuff. And so just, I guess, being really mindful of that as well. And then I think as well, like a big thing to me is just remembering like, do you know what, like I've got through these days before. And it doesn't always feel nice, it feels horrible at times. But sometimes it's like, you know what, you just got to sit with those feelings. You just got to find a way to be kind to yourself, and and then it will pass and trying on those days. Like obviously, for me having had an eating disorder, I've made sure I'm eating enough on those days, I'm drinking enough. I'm kind of checking in with myself. But also just trying to show myself a little bit of compassion and being like, it's a really hard day. And that's okay, like these things happen. And normally then afterwards, I try and I don't always succeed, but I often kind of a few days later, we'll try and work out if something maybe caused that really difficult day as well or triggered those emotions. Sometimes there is no cause sometimes I just have days when life feels too much. But if I am able to identify that I think it definitely helps me then moving forward. I guess everyone's different, aren't they? So what I might do for self care, and you know, to look after myself

might be different from yours. But I think it's good to recognise what works for you, isn't it? Yeah. And I think like trial and error is just fine. Like, I've had days when I felt really rubbish. And I was like, I'll probably the best thing to do is just to watch Netflix all day. But it just didn't work for me. Like I guess was in my brain. I couldn't switch off. Maybe because I was just watching like trashy stuff. But then there are other days when I've watched Netflix and it works. So I think it's like just exploring what those options might be. And if you do, like I think for me, like something that I did a while ago, probably like three years ago, she was I wrote a list of things that I would do on a difficult day. And it's it's like the cup of tea. It's like, I don't know, sometimes I use my bedroom, or like a tonne of tidy stuff. I'm one of those people that I spend a lot of time tidying kind of cupboards and moving cupboards around, which I find so relaxing. My other half absolutely hates it, I think. But I find it very relaxing. So doing things like that. And I think actually, that's, that's okay, like it's a little bit quirky, but it's fine. Yeah, so actually making a list of those things, I think and also just, I just think, yeah, so I guess one more thing is like, just realising that on those days, like it's okay to not do anything. And like if you can't even like focus on work stuff or reading a book like that is okay, as well.

Mel Manning 33:20

Yeah. So it's going back to that sort of being kind to yourself, isn't it and not making yourself feel bad. So talking about your tidying, do you follow Stacey Solomon, then because she loves her tidying, she does a lot of tap to tidy and she will um, you know, show the cupboard before and then tap to tidy and then you see the cupboard afterwards when it's all nice and neat. So it's quite therapeutic to watch. I'm not a tidier so I don't feel the need to but I quite like watching her and Instagrams because it's quite a cool.

Hope Virgo 33:48

I'm gonna have a look at that.

Mel Manning 33:49

Yeah, do it. Maybe it'll probably make you feel quite nice if you tidy.

Ah thank you so much for joining us today. It's been really interesting to chat and good luck with all your book and your new venture as well.

Hope Virgo 34:02

Thanks so much for having me. It was lovely to talk to you.

Mel Manning 34:10

It was so interesting talking with her about her journey through her own eating disorder, and how now she's actively helping others who are going through similar difficulties. One thing stood out to me. More education and understanding is needed around eating disorders, so the individuals don't struggle to get the support that they need. For more information about hopes work, please go to www.dothopeburgo.com.

To get help and support for eating disorders, please visit [beat eating disorders](http://www.beateatingdisorders.org.uk), which is www.beateatingdisorders.org.uk. They have helped blinds that are open 365 days a year.

Thank you to all of the young people who've been involved in the making of today's podcasts 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 this podcast and follow us on Instagram at Freedom2UK or go to our website www.freedom2.org.uk.

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