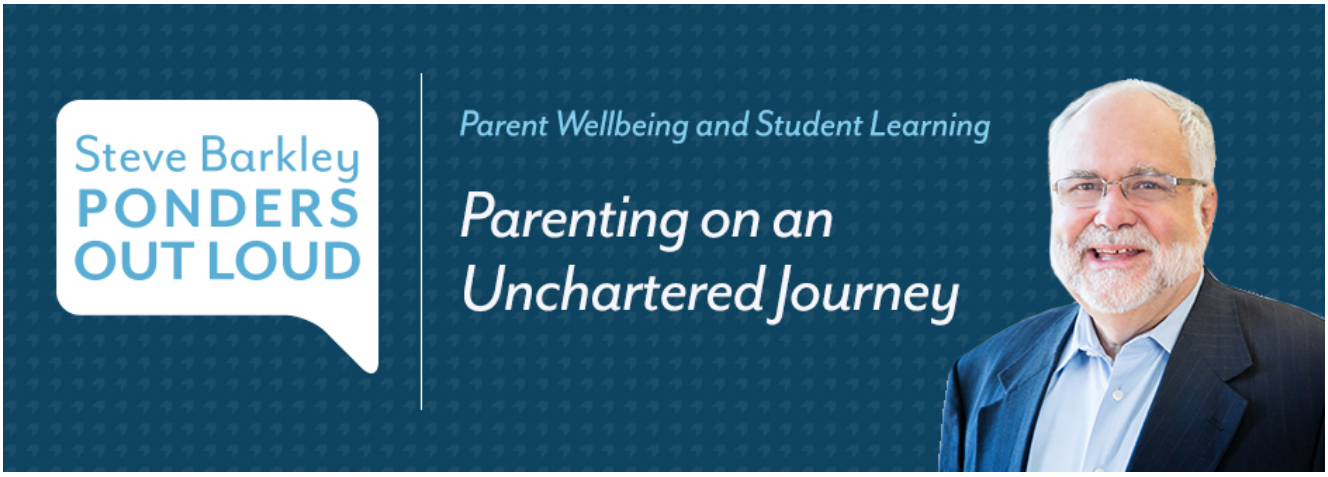
Podcast for Parents: Parenting on an Uncharted Journey



Jeff Kubiak, the author of, "*One Drop of Kindness*" and "*It's Me*" explores the impact of the quarantine on children and young people and how we as parents and grandparents can best support them. A discussion around building characteristics of kindness and compassion is included.

Find Jeff's books and resources here.

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PODCAST TRANSCRIPTSteve [Intro]: 00:01 Hello and welcome to the Parent Wellbeing and Student Learning During School Closures Edition of the Steve Barkley Ponders Out Loud podcast. With the extended closing of schools, we as parents have entered into a new territory regarding what we have known as "school learning." With this and future podcasts, I'll look to share my experiences as a teacher, educator, parent, grandparent, and continuous learner.
Steve: 00:33 Parenting on an uncharted journey. Today, we're joined on the podcast by Jeff Kubiak, a current school administrator, parent, and the author of children's books that

share stories of failures, success, resilience, and empowerment. Jeff, can you share a little bit about your background and the personal wishes or goals that you have for your engagement in the writing work that you're doing?

Jeff: 01:04 Definitely. First of all, I want to say thank you for allowing me the opportunity to hang out and chat with you. So, you know, as a current educator, a former teacher, a coach, a parent, a brother, a son, you know, I've experienced a lot of different things that people have, but perhaps don't share. And so, you know, I struggled with school as a kid. I was a bully. I was bullied. I was a successful athlete. I've had a lot of successes, a lot of failures, and I always believe that we can do better to help others do better. And, you know, kindness is such a kind of an easy word to use, but it's not as easy to find and we all do have kindness in our hearts. Some people have to dig a little bit deeper.

Jeff: 01:54 And so, I love blogging and I love sharing words and trying to help others become better. And so I decided to try to write a book and, you know, talk about failure – I sent out the manuscript to tons of different people.
Steve: 02:09 [laughter]

Jeff: 02:09 – lots of rejections. And then I was blessed to connect with Sarah – Dr. Sarah Thomas of edumatch and we took a chance with each
other. She really hadn't done any children's books and this was my first book. And so, you know, you go through all these iterations and months and months, and boom, you have a book. And "The Power of Kindness" was quickly embraced by a lot of people. And my second book, "It's Me" are true vignettes. There's 21 little vignettes, poems, stories written by real students, people, educators, that have been prejudiced, labeled biased, and you know, in groups that have been oppressed and trying to bring voice and empowerment and really see each other through the lens and get rid of our colorblindness. And so, my main reason for writing is try to

make the world a better place. You know, I make about 2 cents a book and that's not the reason I do it. I want to make life better so…

Steve: 03:12 So Jeff, as a school administrator and as a parent with your own kids in school, I'm wondering how you're seeing the whole pandemic quarantine impacting children and young people. And I guess along with that, how should we as parents and grandparents be consciously doing the best weekend to support our young people?

Jeff: 03:45 Yeah. You know, it's not been easy and it's been terribly difficult for many. And, you know, I see it through a lot of different lenses. I see it as a parent with both my children, a sixth and a 10th grader getting by, but struggling. I see it as an educator on campus every day with, you know, we have two small cohorts that actually come on campus, but the work that these teachers are doing just to – they work so hard. They're doing so much to navigate. The view of those students. You know, when a student puts their camera on and allows teachers and other students to view and be inside their house, it's not easy. What about the student that has 10 people living in their one-bedroom apartment with trauma going on, right?

Jeff: 04:36 And so, we have to be able to be really super graceful and compassionate. As a parent, am I going to yell at the teacher because they make a mistake or do this or that? Well, that might be a good venue to have a one-on-one conversation. Not in the middle of class. I need to help give my students grace. Look at our teen suicide rate right now is going through the roof. We have kids that can't connect with their friends, they can't hang out, they can't normalize, and we have to find ways to help them do that. Exercise, vitamin D, you know, humor. Like, we got to find different ways for them to kind of reach out. And then parents, let's educate yourself, talk to other people, reach out. And, you know, let's have some grace. Like, don't yell at people like, "hey,

I think schools should be reopened for students." And remember that there are teachers that are afraid, there are students that are afraid there are parents – there's no one way to do it, right? So the vaccine is going to help, you know, herd immunity through vaccination and other ways they're going to help, but we have to be graceful. We have to see our way through it because there's no one's done this and there's not one right way. And so…

Steve: 05:52 I'm hearing empathy all around as I listened to you. And I'm wondering about the critical role of the parent modeling that empathy that the young folks see their parent there with that as a model.

Jeff: 06:11 Yeah. You know, we model behaviors that are good and bad and desired and undesirable and we have to be willing to own our mistakes and say, "Gosh, darn it. You know, I shouldn't have yelled. I shouldn't have called out the teacher. I shouldn't have posted that blog or Facebook post." And so, you got to have that critical conversation with your children because you know what? It's okay to be afraid. It's okay to make mistakes. And it's okay to try new things, but you know what? We have to own our mistakes and say, "wow, I reflect on that. I'm going to grow and learn and hopefully not repeat it."

Steve: 06:49 Yeah. On your website, I noticed that you had a COVID kindness checklist and I thought that might be a neat piece to share with our listeners.

Jeff: 07:00 Yeah. So, you know, at jeffkubiak.com, there are lots of free resources and downloadables. You know, my wife is amazing. She helps with the website and does a lot of these things and just – they're kind of, you know, fun, different ways to kind of get out there and do intentional, random acts of kindness or intentional acts of kindness in our COVID world. And while things are hopefully heading to improved and you know, betterment, we still have to kind of be aware of our

challenges and so different ways to explore spreading those ripples of kindness.

Steve: 07:41 I, as a grandparent, was lucky enough to have my daughter share with me early in the pandemic happening, my grandkids went out on a walk and found rocks and painted kindness messages on them and had them delivered to the hospital workers near where they live and that it was great therapy for their grandfather. Maybe as much as it was as the kindness act to the people at the hospital.

Jeff: 08:18 Totally. That's the neat thing too – like, I had three fifth graders at my old school start a kindness club, right? And so, one of the things was, you know, they hid kindness rocks throughout the school and, you know, that's something you see within the community and schools, and it's just another opportunity to go like, "wow." You know, make a difference, make someone smile.

Steve: 08:37 Yeah. So as parents, we're certainly anxious to build kindness and compassion as characteristics in our children and I'm wondering if you have a few words of wisdom here for us.

Jeff: 08:53 I think a big part of that is facing our own fears, our own prejudices, our own biases, and failures, right? And so, if we give ourselves grace and are compassionate with our perhaps inability to be perfect and to not navigate in a way that we feel is the right way, it's okay. And so our kids, by having those conversations, they have to see that imperfection is perfect and we need to be okay with it and using our heart and taking time out and, you know, give yourself five minutes and turn the lights off and just really try to connect with yourself. But open and honest and being real with each other and especially the kids nowadays, you know, they learn in a different way than we did and that's okay. But having them explain and help understand while they feel, this is a great way for them to thrive or

learn is important too. So we share our fortunes and misfortunes and we have to be able to learn with them too. So that's the neat thing about being a parent.

Steve: 10:06 My wife is an elementary guidance counselor.

Jeff: 10:09 God bless her.

Steve: 10:10 And when she comes home and talks to me about the conversations that she's having with very young people, I mean, preschool and
lower elementary grades, I'm actually blown away by the depth of the kids understanding and conversation about what's going on in the world around them. Much deeper than I think I was as a kid. And just sensing – really important for the parents to be able to listen. And I guess question is the word that comes along with it. If you listen long enough, you'll get to that spot or ask the questions that get you there. But I'm just really amazed with the things that that these young people share with my wife.

Jeff: 11:10 Yeah. There's no doubt. You know, we have to be able to listen to our children and our students and kids are so much smarter than they're given credit for and let them drive the conversations. Let them, you know, navigate some of their own learning and different things like that. But they're amazing, you know, they really are.

Steve: 11:32 So Jeff, want to tell folks a little bit about the things that are on your website and how they can find you there and give them the names of your books again, so they can go looking for them?

Jeff: 11:41 Yeah. So my first book, "One Drop of Kindness," the second book, "It's Me" – those and other resources can be found at jeffkubiak.com. The books are available also at Amazon, Barnes and Nobles, and GoodReads. But you know, the website has different resources for kind of the themes of the books, you know, random acts of kindness and kindness

activities, and inclusion, equity, compassion, and focus. And, you know, I'd love to hear from you, I'm going to be putting up a forum soon so that people can write their own "it's me" vignettes and share them and send them in. And so connect with me. Let me know, can I help your school? Can I help your book group? I'm working with a group of 50 women tonight through their sorority and they're doing a book group and I'm going to kind of help them out. And so it's just fun. It's fun to share and I love to help out. Thanks for the time Steve, this has been a great chat.

Steve: 12:44 Well, thank you for everything that you shared here, and know that I'd like to stay in touch with you. So I'll be coming back to your site from time to time and maybe we can revisit and do another podcast on the road.

Jeff: 13:01 That'd be blessed, my friend. Thank you so much and God bless you and your wife and have a great day.

Steve: 13:07 You too. Take care.

Steve [Outro]: 13:11 Thanks again for listening. You can subscribe to Steve Barkley, ponders out loud on iTunes and Podbean. And please remember to rate and review us on iTunes. I also want to hear what you're pondering. You can find me on Twitter @stevebarkley, or send me your questions and find my videos and blogs at barkleypd.com.