

Ep. 58: The importance of mental health

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Good day Gladiators, thank you for listening to another episode of the Sword and Shield podcast. This is Frances Martinez, director of psychological health for the 960th Cyberspace Wing here with a special guest, Elizabeth Levy Nelson, who is a licensed professional counselor in Colorado. So good morning will be thank you for joining us today. Good morning. Thanks for having me. So um you know as we're wrapping up a maze mental health awareness month and transitioning to June which is PTSD awareness month, I felt like it was a great opportunity to bring you on and you know we're going to focus a little bit on trauma today and so um I will turn it over to you to give us a little bit about your background and how you ended up where you are today. I'm good. So as you said, I'm like professional counselor and also like addiction counselor in the state of Colorado doing this about three years and I do crisis work, so I don't do regular therapies. What I do is more of a risk management Have role and I work exclusively with law enforcement. So when someone called 911 to do a family member loved one being in a mental health crisis, I respond with law enforcement. Do you ever find my job is that number one, um I have a little more training in mental health, the ability to provide a more comprehensive assessment of people, but also I can help people stay in the home and avoid hospitalization. I can also help facilitate hospitalization if that what's called for in given situations. Another piece of my job is to trying to prevent people in mental health crisis from ending up in jail, I think just proportionate number of people experiencing mental health crisis and that's in jail and a lot of people have recognized that the state of Colorado in particular and really pushed for maladies to join together with the local law enforcement and the immediate mental health centers to develop programs like this and they exist throughout the country, the local co responders and I really enjoyed this work . Part of what led me here was fogged in the army for seven years, had two deployments to Iraq and I really saw the ways in which deployment um impacted the on a personal level also my soldiers and their family members um and would you think stigma for mental health became very important thing for me to do, especially with my soldiers and utilized was being the health resources. So the veteran population and active beauty population is one that I'm very passionate about, one that I think he's a higher level of trauma than a lot of people for obvious reasons. Yeah, there's a lot, you know, we had, so for a couple of your points um here in San Antonio they have, you know, the mental health units, we had Ernie and Joe who are part of the documentary HBO documentary come out and speak to our gladiators and talk about, you know these advertising mental health and decriminalizing it because unfortunately, you know

that is used to be the case here in san Antonio where people are just getting transported to jail instead of getting the necessary help that they need and so they've really transformed policing here and um I know they go out to different to different places across the country to help reform the police departments there um also as a head , oh I was just gonna say the agency that I work with so supportive of having us integrate with , I don't I don't work for the sheriff's office that I work with , I work for the community mental health center , but I'm very much feel a part of the team and I very much appreciate , I'm I think the culture is changing within that law enforcement there . It was really encouraging to see. Yeah and the biggest chunk of the cookie for me is the de stigmatization of mental health within the military. It's my biggest challenge, especially in a wing of cyberspace individuals um that you know are fearful that if they come and speak to anyone that they're going to lose their men or their security clearance and you know, there's that big myth just, you know, it just hangs on and there's like, you know, I can say it 10 different ways that, you know, 99% of people do not lose their clearance by seeking mental health. And so that's just, you know, old school thought and it kind of was, you know, no discussion that, you know, a long, long time ago and now we're here, we're trying to reform a change and you know, be proactive with mental health. Yeah. That's so encouraging to hear. I remember he um when I was active duty um hearing about I don't want to get clearance and trying to battle that. And it's encouraging that you think is getting better and um still disappointing that it uh so prevalent still when I can't think of any examples of soldiers. But I had that when they thought mental health help you know were put on light duty or lost clearances or anything like that. And I can't think of anything situation, which I've heard that actually happening. But the yeah the rumor mill still people is that that occurs which is it's disappointing. And honestly I think that those who seek mental health are it's not weakness. It's another thing that people are afraid of long that just means I'm weak. Far more complicated than that. And I think it's frank uh huh. Seek help and say I'm struggling. That's a that's a hard thing to say. Or wouldn't when people say I'm feeling suicidal um just saying that out loud can often be a relief for people. Mhm. Having someone they trust to share that with. Um it feels so much better. So I really encourage people to yeah, I find new ways to cope with those kinds of feelings. And if you secret help from a professional guide you along the way you can end up living a happier, more well adjusted life in which it shouldn't be a concern that you would lose your clearance. Probably be a better employees. Airmen, wife or husband, father, mother, you know, uh it's impact our license. So many ways. The exact kind of help. Absolutely. And I think that, you know, those that obviously don't seek the help are at higher risk of unfortunate circumstances or detrimental outcomes, right? Because sometimes it feels like there's no other way out, especially, you know, especially when you have, you know, constant thoughts and in flashbacks nightmares, you know because trauma really can take a toll on people. And as we talk about that a little bit more, you know, I think that people often forget or don't realize maybe that if you had a bad childhood, right, if it can definitely affect who you are today and it's not, you know, some people can, you know, manage and code and others have difficult, right? It's all how our brain processes that information when the trauma is actually happening or those, uh, you know, experiences are

happening to us and we all process information differently. We all react to information differently. And unfortunately, if we don't deal with some stuff, right, we can set ourselves up for failure in the future. Yeah, absolutely. Um, there's an amazing study of the adverse childhood experiences study That was done that shows it was 21 significant stressors that one can experience in childhood and the more of those you have, but more likely you are to have poor health outcomes. And I'm not just talking about mental health. I'm talking about higher of cardiovascular disease COPD and it can be really hard for people to look at those situations and can match them with how my operating in my life today is an adult. And I think that's where seeking help from a professional can help you connect those ideas. We, you know, we live inside ourselves every day and we think we know what's going on. But there are definitely things that our brain kind of keeps us away from, because it's a coping mechanism and its overall is helpful and it can impede our ability be happy and beat the life wildly. Absolutely. And a good um you know how we're talking about the brain kind of protects us sometimes from things that are happening, but can be detrimental Trudi Chase story. Um She's back in the Maybe late 80s, early 90s who came out and talked about her story of having think back then it was multiple personality disorder. Now it's called, you know the I. D. So talking about you know how you disassociate from yourself to protect yourself from the trauma that's currently happening. And she developed all these identities. Um and I can't remember the number of identities she ended up developing, but it was a very high number because of all the significant sexual abuse that she was experiencing. Yeah. And I think, you know, a lot of the more serious mental disorders that involve psychosis or it or delusional disorder, they all seem to stem from the brain trying to cope with what's going on and if we're able to develop healthy ways of the map, I think second all about prevent, but I definitely don't want to make the statement that people that struggle with those disorders aren't coping well enough and that's why they have that such a complicated thing. But you know, I delude myself on things certainly probably to a lesser extent than some of the people that I interact with are delusional and but that they can impact their lives more significantly. But I think on some level we all our brains are all protecting ourselves. I'm various things and I like in mental health, help to exercise, you know, if I work on my PT test, I'm gonna score better, but if I don't, then, you know, maybe I'm going to fail it and mental health is in the same way. No one, I can't force anybody to get better and I can't fix people. All I can do is provide people opportunities to look at their world a little differently in a way that might be helpful for them. And so if you work on your mental health, your goals and things, you want to be different in your life, come on. A mental kind of standpoint, that's like exercise hard work. Anyone can do it for you do intensive bucks. Yeah, sometimes, you know, you don't want to wake up at 5 30 to go work out how, yeah, how to get around that systems. I'll help it's the same idea. Absolutely. And, you know, mental physical health definitely are hand in hand, right? Like if your mental businesses strong, more than likely your physical fitness is going to be strong. If your physical fitness is weak, you know, your mental well-being can be, you know, faced with some challenges. Absolutely. And when you consider that when you're under a lot of strategy, you're more likely to get sick. It's easy to make that jump back into adverse

childhood experiences where the more those you have, it does make sense that you have a higher hard to see it. And that I think you can make a further jump into the world of Military and especially in the last 20 years, the Ops tempo has been really high, especially once here in that stress for a long time, you kind of get used to it. Uh huh. And so you don't really notice it anymore. But it's still impacting your body's uh you think is one reason that back from the cleaners conditions such a difficult change for people. I remember knowing that and then coming back and still being surprised at what a difficult transition that was for me personally. Uh, and you know, I think some people don't realize that daily stressors have more of an impact on us than one significant traumatic event. Yeah. It's the constant stressors that are, we're putting on ourselves, whether it's family work, finances relationships, whatever. But those constant daily stressors are more harmful to us than one big traumatic event. Yeah. And you know, you're feeling that bucket with more and more things and if you don't have appropriate ways to cope with those things that are going to help you empty that bucket thanks to the alcohol, they might be a short term coping mechanism, but they don't, they don't alleviate things in the long term and just help those things build up like exercise and heating well, do a much better job of how can I they replenished. Uh, and I'm glad you brought that up because you know, we talked about alcohol drug use, you know, all these maladaptive coping skills, There's also, you know, you know, prescription medications are great when you're seeing the psychiatrist and you're on Prozac or lithium or, you know, whatever types of medications are putting them on, that's great for symptomology, right? But it doesn't help the actual problem. It doesn't unpack what the trauma is, it doesn't unpack what that person is really dealing with. And so unless you're digging deep and working on what the issues really are, it's only going to mask it. Yeah, Yeah. It doesn't it doesn't change your pathway. It only put the blanket over it. Uh anti anxiety medication, especially, thank you now, and I think those things can be great in the short term to help stabilize people, but it should always be a goal of people anxiety too. Let's figure out what underneath this, because it's coming from somewhere, it means something, it's good, it's good information. That's the other thing, I don't like to put so much about negative spin on symptoms of things like anxiety and depression and I like to look at it from what, what's my body telling me right now? Right. Bean expects engine light is on now. We got to see where it's coming from. Yeah, It doesn't mean I'm broken. It means I need to learn something about myself that I didn't know and what is that thing And if I haven't figured it out yet, maybe any help figuring that out and I don't think there's anything wrong with that. Absolutely, and you know, there's always resources out there for people and we never want anyone to feel, you know, alone. Um, so gladiators, you can always reach out to me and we can, you know, get you to the right person um, and right resource um Libby I know you're out in Colorado and we have a unit out there at Peterson and what are some resources that you guys have out there in that area? Yeah, absolutely. Um and this is a nationwide organization. There's several clinics and Texas including San Antonio and also in Denver, but they do online and telehealth called Cohen Veterans Network, the Active duty and veterans and their families um provide mental health care. Another service was specifically located in Colorado Springs is called Mount Carmel Veterans Service There in particular, they

are able to provide low and no cost mental health services they utilize um interns to do that. That's how they can keep that cost low. But they can also see a wide variety of people that the that the military touches without, you know, people that aren't eligible for V. A. Benefits they will receive I think is great awesome. And then via that centers which focus on those who have deployed or have experienced military sexual trauma. Uh there are very specialist group that you only see the certainly type of veteran or active duty service member. But technically a great resource for people as well as they qualified. Absolutely another great resources. Military one source. And they are kind of all inclusive financial counseling, mental health counseling. They can point people in the right direction. So that's always another great option. So blood eaters if you or someone you know are contemplating suicide to contact the National Suicide hotline at 1 802 738255 levy. Thank you so much for joining us today. We really appreciate the conversation and your expertise and hoped to um speak to you again in the future. Thanks so much for having me. Gladiators out.