



### **Episode 13 (Season 2) - Dr. Kristen Jones: 3 Suitcases**

**Craig:** I want to thank everybody for joining us today. I am pleased to introduce our guest. She is Dr. Kristen Jones. Kristen is a counselor. She works with our friends over at cornerstone counseling. Thank you for being here today.

**Kristen:** Thank you for having me!

**Craig:** So, Kristen, tell me what inspired you to become a counselor.

**Kristen:** Well, every counselor has a kind of back story that leads them to do what they do. I grew up in Dallas. My parents divorced when I was two and I was in Dallas for 17 years with my mom. She is very unhealthy in addiction and so that led to some of my path towards counseling and in some of my later years, I moved to Memphis when I was 17. I moved in with my dad. He was going through a second divorce and I went to the university of Memphis and finished my bachelor's in psychology. I met my husband in Memphis and we eventually started dating. He is from Jackson and when we got married, moved to Jackson and I applied for the Master of Counseling program at Mississippi College. I ended up finishing that and I just didn't feel like I was done learning. I never feel like I am done learning. So, I continued on with my doctorate. My Doctor of Counseling at Mississippi college.

**Craig:** Lets back up just a little bit. You said your parents were divorced at two. So, you don't really remember any other way of being than your parents apart?

**Kristen:** Right.

**Craig:** Were you their only child?

**Kristen:** Yes.

**Craig:** So, you are the oldest and only for your mom and dad?

**Craig:** And you lived with your mom in the Dallas area until you were 17. Was it long distance having a relationship with your dad most of your adolescence?

**Kristen.** So, my dad married his second wife when I was three. They stayed in the dallas area and had two kids together and Dad ended up taking a job as an attorney in Memphis when I was 10 so I had several years where I was at my dads house every other weekend with my half brother and sister and step mom and then when they moved to Memphis that was hard because I had to transition from every other weekend to summer or every other thanksgiving or Christmas.

**Craig:** Were you close with your dad?

**Kristen:** Yes.

**Craig:** So based on what you said, you were in primary custody with your mom but you had a very active relationship with your father and at the age of 10 you were geographically separated from your dad, Right? So, what do you remember about that geographic separation as a young girl with her dad? Wanting that relationship. It must be a good 6 hour drive between Dallas and Memphis right?

**Kristen:** It was hard. I remember a grieving process. I remember feeling like there were nights where I would cry uncontrollably when I was 10 just not being able to see him as frequent. I made the best of it though. Called him every night at 8:30.

**Craig:** Was your mom supportive of your relationship with your dad?

**Kristen:** She was. My mom was not healthy. There is a lot of addiction and mental health issues going on so she was not present a lot of the time.

**Craig:** Not present emotionally or physically? Or both?

**Kristen:** Both. Not emotionally present and physically she was there but there would be times when she wouldn't get out of bed for weeks at a time.

**Craig:** We did a whole episode with your colleague Lee Smith on fathering and I am interested, for myself and for our listeners, talk about you, that 12 year old girl, who is geographically separated from her dad but has a close relationship with him. Talk about that bond with your dad.

**Kristen:** Gosh. I would say my dad has always been my best friend. He was the most stable and healthy person I had. Even though we were geographically separated, he was very emotionally present to my life. So, asking, "how did you do on your math test?" or "how did your dance practice go?". He was that involved party. He was present to what was going on in my life and I didn't have that at home even though I lived and was in the custody of my mother. When I was there full time, no one was asking me questions like that, but I had my dad who was in Memphis.

**Craig:** And you eventually left to go live with your dad. Is that right?

**Kristen:** Yes.

**Craig:** Talk about that transition.

**Kristen:** So, when I was a senior in high school, I was pretty depressed and just in a bad emotional state. I guess you would call it close to neglect. I pretty much raised myself and had to get through all the challenges of high school on my own. So, my dad was divorcing his second wife and when she left over Christmas, I left. I packed everything I owned in 3 suitcases and hoped on a plane and flew to Memphis.

**Craig:** Did you have your mom's blessing to do that?

**Kristen:** I did. I think she knew that she wasn't in a healthy spot and knew that I was miserable.

**Craig:** What was that season of your life like? Little Dallas girl packed up your life and moved as a senior which is really a big ceremonial place in the life of a young person and yet you left that behind and moved in with your dad after his divorce.

**Kristen:** That's is kind of when my dad and I joke that we started life over together. My dad always says "you pull your life up by your boot straps" and at this time we were able to do this together. He was in a place where his second wife left and literally took everything in the house. SO, when I moved in there were my three suitcases and my dad had his clothes. We had nothing else. It was exciting and it was scary, but it was so much fun to be able to start over. We made a big trip to Costco and bought groceries. We started over and two weeks later I started my second semester and senior year of high school.

**Craig:** As a young women and young professional, now as you look back on that season of life, how do you remember it?

**Kristen:** I remember it as exciting. It was a new start. I was so miserable and depressed and living with my mom was so unhealthy so it was great to have a parent where every night we would go to dinner or cook dinner. So, it was almost like I was a kid again and I could be parented.

**Craig:** That's really interesting and I am reading this book right now. I told you I just got back from my first meeting. I am doing an enneagram cohort in Dallas and for our homework for our next meeting it is to read this book called "Callings" and it is by Greg Levoie and I am 9 pages into this thing and I am highlighting and part of what he talks about, the book is about discovering your calling in life, a noble prize winning physicist that talks about friction being the main part of the universe. It requires friction to make mountains and pearls and to make diamonds, to make these things that we cherish and that also works in the human character as well because when there is friction in our life, a lot of times that is when the most growth happens. When you were talking, I was thinking of that part in the book because that is obviously a season of friction but also of growth and excitement.

**Kristen:** Yeah, I like that analogy a lot. I think as uncomfortable as the friction was and how miserable I was, it was all necessary to push me and get me and grow me to where I needed to be.

**Craig:** So, you had this chaotic childhood, is that what drew you into studying psychology?

**Kristen:** Yeah, I started out as kind of wanting to figure out what drove people to behave the way they behave. Why was my mom unhealthy and addicted and then kind of grew into the interest of human behavior and what motivates people to do what they do?

**Craig:** So, Kristen, then like a lot of people who are drawn to mental health and counseling, you were trying to make sense of your own life?

**Kristen:** Absolutely.

**Craig:** So, you said your mom was in an unhealthy place and your parents were divorce when you were two. Did you do your own therapy growing up?

**Kristen:** My mom took me to therapy as a teenager because I had depression, but I never related to a therapist because they were always older. I never felt like I belongs or could talk about what was going on in my house and some of it I did not know was unhealthy because it was normal. So, I didn't know somethings that went on in my house were unhealthy, so I didn't know what to talk about.

**Craig:** Are you comfortable enough to share maybe a story from your childhood that gives our listeners an example of the kind of chaos you were living in?

**Kristen:** Yeah, so I am not exactly sure how I would label my mom. I just know it was unhealthy. She was not present so she would stay in bed for weeks at a time and some days I would come home from school and she would be screaming and yelling and some days I would come home and she would have been in bed so I would kind of take whatever cash was laying around and walk across the street to Kroger, buy myself groceries. I'd find rides to school and home from school. It was very stressful because things that would normally be taken care of, created a lot of panic for me because I had to rely on other people and I really hated having to do that.

**Craig:** So now in your professional career, do you work with people like you who were in those types of environments?

**Kristen:** Yeah that is the passion that kind of drove what I do. To be able to help girls who are in similar situations but just having a very real relationship and knowing what that experience is like for kids and that their parents might not be in the best place.

**Craig:** Let's talk about girls. Those 14-18 Mississippi girls, what are their struggles?

**Kristen:** Anxiety, low self-esteem, depression. I think middle school and high school is hard enough navigating emotionally and then you have whatever your home life situation on top of that and having to make sense of that and being able to trust yourself and have confidence.

**Craig:** How would you define anxiety? Because I think that is something that people get confused about. What exactly is anxiety and how does that manifest itself in a 15-year-old girl?

**Kristen:** SO, a lot of the time I try to differentiate fear from anxiety.

**Craig:** and fear is when there is a real threat and anxiety is when there is a perceived threat.

**Kristen:** Right. It is a lot of futuristic thinking that may or may not be real. What I see in teenagers is a way of preparing yourself to be able to control whatever futuristic outcomes. For example, this is very basic but if you want a specific person to ask you to prom and you are fear as to what if he doesn't or what if someone else asks me first and so it is a way of trying to control what you can't control. So, I think that can look a little bit more basic and as you grow up it can feel heavier. We all want to control our environment to some degree, and I think that anxiety is a bad coping skill for trying to prepare yourself for what you can't control.

**Craig:** So, what tools do you teach specifically young girls to help them cope with their anxiety?

**Kristen:** One of the enlightening tools that I am using right now is the enneagram and surprisingly there are a lot of teenage girls who are getting into it and are really wanting to grow in where they are. That is just a tool in how they can see what growth looks like and gives them a sort of pattern.

**Craig:** So, our listeners who are not familiar with the enneagram, could you give them a basic intro to what that is?

**Kristen:** It is an ancient tool for empathy and the way we use it is to help uncover our unconscious motivations to what we are doing. Its uncovering what your motivation is under the table and having the awareness of this is why I am behaving the way I am behaving and what that looks like in relation to other people around the,

**Craig:** That is a great explanation. I would recommend a tool to anyone listening. Susanne Stabile did an audio called "Know Your Number" and I will put a link to that in the resources page but that is a way to introduce yourself to these concepts. For example, my number is the enneagram 8. So my core motivation is to avoid vulnerability. For an enneagram 1, they have an inner critic and that critic is the driving force for a lot of their actions and activities. An Enneagram 6 is very fear based so that either real or imagined fear is one of the driving forces and there is this constant underlying anxiety that is their driving point. So how do you use that tool with young girls?

**Kristen:** When a girl comes in and kind of knows her number, we just really start diving in and I think it is helpful for them to see what their subconscious motivation is and I think once they are aware, they are more aware of why they are behaving the way they are behaving. It is not a reaction or a need, it is a feeling and thought but let me pause because I have more awareness of why I am feeling this way.

**Craig:** So, what I heard you say was, it gives a person a language for their feelings and motivations.

**Kristen:** I think that is so helpful because in adolescence there is not a lot of awareness. IT is all feelings that are kind of stuffed and pushed down.

**Craig:** I can testify that a 14 and 15 year old girl are all feelings because I have two of them so put me on the stand and I agree.

**Kristen:** I think giving them some language as to why they are feeling that and what their language needs based on what they are motivated to get and the enneagram is just one of the tools that are helpful.

**Craig:** So, you are talking about the tools you use and your colleague Lee Smith jokingly referred to the time between 3pm and 6pm on most week days in a counselors office as being the plaid hour and that is when all the girls in their school uniforms show up for counseling. It is such a good thing though. We as humans stuff our things full and if we were a box of emotions, it would literally be bursting at the seams because we would be stuffing so much down but the great thing about therapy is that it gives our children and ourselves and environment to unpack that box.

**Kristen:** Yeah, that is the analogy that I use when people come in and they say "I just don't know where to start" and I say you just have to open a box and take out one thing at a time and I think in teenagers I think there isn't even an awareness that they are doing it so you have to bring awareness and say lets talk about it.

**Craig:** We were talking about the enneagram and what it is, it is a way of seeing. Its ancient because there are eight other ways of seeing things. 89% of people have a different way of seeing things than you do.

**Kristen:** yeah and I think that causes in a teenage year, what is wrong with me and creates a lot of unnecessary friction than I just see differently than others.

**Craig:** and they are also trying to fit in. It is also very important, you are the doctor I am just repeating what I hear and so a child is very egocentric and then there comes a point where they start identifying with a group but 89% of that group perceives things differently and so you are saying that can translate into anxiety.

**Kristen:** Yeah, it can and then it is internalized and then they stuff it and then they are in my office 6 months later just depressed and riddled with anxiety and so bring out the different perspectives and say it is okay to see differently.

**Craig:** you have talked to our listeners so bravely today and thank you about your life. Throw in family disruption and divorce. What does that look like to this group of girls?

**Kristen:** For me, it felt like, “where do I belong?”. my parents are not together, I do not belong. Where do I fit? I wanted to so badly as a teenager to be accepted and loved and I believe those kinds of disruptions create a lot of questions.

**Craig:** Lets transition and talk about another tool I know you use and that is breathing techniques for anxiety. How do you teach young girls about breathing?

**Kristen:** So, I always get some push back on that because it is just s simple but really it controls your emotions. Its like a remote control. If you turn the volume up, your heart is racing really fast and if you do some deep breathing, it slows your heart right down and lowers the volume and brings back the awareness of anxious thoughts.

**Craig:** It’s a tool in the took kit that when there is a triggering event that creates anxiety and chaos, they can pull out that tool and breathe through the chaos. One person described square breathing. In for 4 seconds, out for 4 seconds, hold for 4 seconds and it is a deep intentional breathing pattern in a square. Even for me, I am suppose to be this tough family law attorney and I get anxious about work and life and it is something I try to pull out in my tool kit and it is to rethink and resettle.

**Kristen:** It is just a focus from what you are anxious about to I know how space and, in that space,, I can have control on how I respond and how I can think about this.

**Craig:** That is very well put because it is almost like the fear creates perceived claustrophobia.

**Kristen:** Yeah, I have some sense of control in this fear-based thinking.

**Craig:** Well thank you so much for that and thank you for sharing with us today about your life and practice. How can someone who might want to get in touch with you, connect?

Kristen: Our website is [www.cornerstone.ms](http://www.cornerstone.ms)

**Craig:** Once again thank you!

**Kristen:** Thank you for having me!