

What does it mean to live with primary immunodeficiency? What does it truly mean to compromise? Throughout the spring of twenty twenty five, the Immune Deficiency Foundation will be hosting select online screenings of our new documentary compromised, life without immunity. Step inside the rarely seen world of PI. Through six powerful stories, discover how strength, support, and medical care can make life possible despite seemingly impossible challenges For viewing information on the Immune Deficiency Foundation's new documentary, visit idF dot primary immune dot org slash compromised dash twenty twenty five.

Emma Mertens: And now I am so pleased to introduce our presenter for this evening. Becky Lenning is the owner and clinical director of Yellow Lotus Clinical Services for Healing and Wellness, where she brings over fourteen years of clinical experience as a licensed professional counselor to her practice. Welcome, Becky, and thank you so much for joining us this evening.

Becky Lenning: Thank you so much for having me. I am so grateful to be here with all of you tonight and to share some space together as we talk about taking care of our self and our mental health during the holidays, which can be a very stressful time for some people. So I am very, very excited to be able to share this little bit of space with you tonight. Alright.

Emma Mertens: Alright. There we go. Your slides are at Becky, so take it away. Perfect.

Becky Lenning: So you can go ahead and advance, please. So I also have a similar disclaimer that this is for informational purposes only and does not replace any professional or medical or mental health advice and to always really consult your healthcare provider for guidance. However, I'm hoping that this will also provide you with a way to ask some of those questions if need be. So again, my name is Becky. I am a mental health therapist of over fourteen years.

I also own my own private practice, Yellow Lotus Clinical Services for Healing and Wellness. A few things just fun things about me. I am a lover of all things rainbow and glittery. I often joke that rainbow is my favorite color. I love Starbucks, and I am a mom of three adult kiddos who are between the ages of nineteen and twenty three.

And I have three doggos who are also kind of my children. And I threw in kind of a favorite or, like, a Christmas sort of idea for you about me. The Christmas movie elf is my absolute favorite, and I subject to my family's it multiple times during the holiday season. So with that, we do have a quick polling question. It's holiday related.

It's kind of a trivia question. This is to get you used to the polling. So this is sort of a question to touch to your knowledge. Which holiday movie features a young boy named Kevin who is left home alone. So this is your practice.

Go ahead and click the corresponding response that you think it is, and then it should show us the results. So go ahead and see if you can vote.

Emma Mertens: But we're gonna give it about thirty seconds for each question. So I'm gonna end the poll and share the results.

Becky Lenning: Perfect. Yes. The correct answer was hold alone. And so that's exactly how the poll works. So it looks like if I can see it looks like most of you voted and it seemed like we it was okay.

So that's kind of how we'll do the polling going forward. Throughout the presentation. You can go ahead and advance. So this is my connection to primary immune deficiency diseases. That's my son, Christian.

On the left, that is Christian at age five when he was diagnosed by his wonderful immunologist, Devang Doshi here in Michigan. And that is Christian just the other day on his twenty first birthday. As you can see, he is definitely a thriving young man at this point, but, you know, so he's twenty one now and we started his journey probably when he was about one year old, and it took us about four years for his diagnosis. And we, as probably many or most of you, we went through lots of trials and tribulations to get us there. So, you know, being here with you tonight and sharing this space, I'm really excited to be here. And to share not only my clinical knowledge with you, but also, you know, sharing a space as a mom, someone with some knowledge of PI and how that does impact us at the holidays and other times. So I just wanted to share that with you. And so the the next polling question is, what is your connection to PI? And so in a second, that will pop up, and you'll have the chance to answer, you know, one of the following options. So what is your connection to PI?

Either you have PI, you have a loved one that does, you're a caregiver to someone living with PI, or you might be a medical professional serving the PI community. Okay. So of the people that answered the poll, it looks like ninety five percent of you have PI yourself and then there's another portion of you that has a loved one that has PI. So always think it's important to see kinda gauge our audience. And so, you know, you all of the ones who answered have a very direct connection to PI and what that is like living with it either yourself or carried before or being supportive of a loved one who has it.

So I think that's important for us to know as we share this space together this evening. You can go ahead and advance the slide. So some of our learning objectives tonight some of the things that I want you to be able to take away is to understand how the demands and expectations of the holiday season can really make our mental health worse at times. And particularly for those of us who are in the PI community, We'll also learn about some evidence based strategies for how we can maintain good mental health and emotional health and well-being during the holidays. And then finally, I hope that by the time we're

done tonight, you'll develop some strategies to balance your social obligations and set healthy boundaries with people in a way that minimizes burnout and that sense of feeling really overwhelmed.

Let's see. I have a couple extra slides in there. So I wanna focus on a few PI related holiday stressors, although I know that there are many more than just these few categories here.

But I think we always have the the category of, well, you don't look sick. And so that can permeate a lot of different types of things, whether it's, you know, I don't feel that well, and I don't wanna go to, you know, some kind of holiday function.

You well, you look fine. I mean, we might hear that a lot. There's lots of misunderstandings. And invisible illnesses often lead to misconceptions about things like our energy levels and our capabilities. There's also increased social and family obligations.

This is a a time of the year where there it seems like there's a lot of people who expect a lot out of us. Like, maybe, you know, our family expects that we travel to multiple locations on Christmas Day to celebrate with everyone or, you know, there's x expectations around gatherings that you have, you know, socially at work or anywhere else. We also see financial pressures and gift giving stress. Right? Like, times are hard for many, many folks.

And And so it's it may be difficult for you in that in that realm as well. And then navigating cold and flu and other types of things, germs that are out there, seasonal risks. You know, there's a lot of that as well and having to make maybe some hard decisions about, you know, if I can go to certain things or if the person I love should especially if it's a child, if it's safe for them to go to things or for people to come over and that can be very difficult. And then also we have the family dynamics and expectations. You know, we might have some very well meaning relatives in our lives, but they might unintentionally add some stress by pushing participation and or even minimizing our health concerns.

So again, I know these just scratched the surface of probably the holiday related stressors that we all have and experience. However, I'd like to hear from you in in a form of another poll that based on these five different areas. I'm inviting you to share, like, which one of these seems to be your primary thing that stresses you out about the holidays. Is it navigating those family dynamics? Feeling run down, overextended, or over scheduled? Is it staying healthy amidst holiday gatherings, or even the pressure to be cheerful and festive when maybe that's really not how you're feeling? It looks like we have a pretty good mix of things there. We got the family dynamics one that's coming up, feeling run down, overextended. And then the biggest one we have is staying healthy but also there's you know, we you guys are pretty very equally almost divided on many of these. So again, these are all things that are very relevant at this time of the year.

And so, again, by the time that we're done hope that you will come away with some helpful strategies in order to manage some of these stressors. Let me go ahead and advance the slide. Go ahead. So how holiday stress impacts our mental health? First of all, I want to talk

broadly about how it impacts our mental health, but then we're going to dive into some of these things a little bit more deeply.

So overall, when we have stress about the holidays, whatever it is, it might cause us to feel more anxious. If we might feel even depressed, we might feel feelings of, like, guilt or inadequacy, like, not being enough. That can also lead to feelings of like loneliness or isolation. You know, if I feel like I can't go to that Christmas gathering because I'm worried that we might get sick, you know, that might cause us to stay by ourselves at home and not be celebrating with other people. And that can really make us feel very alone.

And then, of course, also that fatigue and burnout that's very common, like, this time of the year from, you know, just holiday preparations or you yourself or run down because you're not feeling very well or, you know, you're working a job and you're just ready for a break too. And, like, there's just so much going on here. So all of these things have a direct impact on how we function emotionally and mentally. So the physical and emotional impacts, when I think about these things, physiologically speaking, like in our body, stress can weaken the immune system. And so the more stress we have, the more susceptible that we are to sickness and illness.

And so by man and being able to manage our stress effectively will help us be healthier in the long run. And then also, of course, emotional distress can lead to things like maybe we're short and snappy or irritable with people or you feel really a lot of frustration or anger among other things. So those are the physical some of physical and emotional impacts of stress. So why is it important to manage our stress? Right?

So the impact on our mental health, as we said, chronic stress can exacerbate symptoms of anxiety and depression. If I'm living where in a space where I am stressed the heck out all the time, I might start feeling really anxious about things or maybe I have anxiety already and then we add some more to it and it just exacerbates that. Maybe we've not ever felt like we've experienced symptoms of anxiety or depression, but maybe we're starting to question that now. I think it's important to really take a look at how we're feeling and be able to talk to about that with someone who maybe can help us. As far as the physical impact, I'm sorry about that.

If you could go back one quick side. Yeah. So like the physical impact on our health is like I said earlier, stress hormones like cortisol are what get activated in our body when we're really stressed out and that suppression of cortisol can really make our immune system even less effective than it is when we have PI. Why it's also important to manage stress is I think about the impact of that on our relationship. So when we don't manage our stress very well, as I mentioned, it can strain our friendships.

It can strain our own partnerships leading to conflicts or feelings of disconnection. During a time, like, when it's really meant for connection and and celebrating with the ones that we love in whatever way that we can and is safe for us. In the long run, if we have a prolonged

period of stress, again, makes us more susceptible to getting sick and things like that. So that's why it's essential for us to develop some coping mechanisms to protect our overall mental and physical health, which we'll learn about here shortly. So I have another whole question for you.

And it's a question of, I'm good at managing my stress. And if you're gonna rate it on a scale of one to five or zero to five. I'm sorry. So zero would be I'm not confident at all with managing my stress all the way to five. Like, I'm extremely confident with managing my stress.

Of course, you can pick a number in between. Okay. So the majority of participants looks like it rated it about a three. So kind of somewhere in the middle, and then, of course, we've got some folks who are zero one, two, four, and five. So no matter where you are on this scale.

You know, I always think that we can get better and learn more strategies to manage our stress. And if you're feeling, like, you just don't have a lot. Again, I'm really hoping that you can come up with our take away from tonight's presentation, some really usable skills for you for the rest of this holiday season. So I'm gonna talk to you a little bit about some evidence based strategies for staying well. When I say evidence based strategies, these are things that have actually been researched and tried and true that can really help our mental and physical health.

One being mindfulness, one being self compassion, and one being stress management. And so when we think about these things, think about for a second, do you practice any of these things? Many of you in the stress management department said you didn't feel super confident in that some of you the majority of you said kind of somewhere in the middle, you know, self compassion. When I think about that, it's about kind of not being critical of ourselves as much as we tend to be sometimes and about you know, giving our space learn to grow or to learn to grow and to learn to heal and to just be gentle to our self and be mindful of, you know, our day to day. So mindfulness, what is mindfulness?

It's a mental state achieved by focusing on one's awareness on the present moment while calmly acknowledging and accepting one's feelings thoughts and bodily sensations. So to kind of put that in a nice neat package, it's just being present with ourselves in the physical moment that we're in right now. I was actually speaking to someone earlier day, and we're on this topic. And, you know, they had said to me, I don't think I'm very mindful during the holiday season, especially because, like, Christmas snuck up on me, like, the holidays are here already. I can't believe it's next week.

I have all the stuff to do, and then we have to move on to the New Year and do all these other things. And and I was, like, oh, like, have you have you thought about, like, enjoying or celebrating whatever with your family? And they're, like, no, I just want to get through it. And then they sort of reflected on the end of that, like, Oh, wow. I guess I just got from the next

thing to the next thing just to get through it, and I don't often stop to just soak in the moment and enjoy those kinds of things.

And one of the examples I gave today to someone else was do the dishes to do the dishes. And what I mean by that is, I know for me, like, dishes is my least favorite chore, and I'm so grateful that my husband usually does them for us. But what it means by that is, no, don't do the dishes till, like, just wanna get that done to go on to the next task, but, like, really immerse yourself in the idea of doing the dishes. You know, like, what does the water feel like? How hot or cold is it?

What does the dish soap smell like? You know, like talking to yourself about the act of doing the dishes while you're doing it, that's a great practice where you can just learn to be in that specific moment and you can also do that with pretty much any chore or anything that you do. One of the ways that there are many ways that we can practice mindfulness. One of the ways is simply just to focus on your five senses. You can do this anywhere that you're at. Whether you're sitting at a stoplight in your car going somewhere, it can be when you're at work waiting for something to happen and you're sitting at your desk. You can use it when you're stressed out. And you're feeling anxious because when we look at our five senses and start to just gravitate toward what am I what am I what can I touch physically? What can I so what can I feel? What can I see?

You know, what can I taste? What can I hear all those things? So for example, at any moment in time, you can just be mindful in the moment. Okay. What am I hearing? So if I'm sitting at a red light, what might you hear. You might hear another car pulling up alongside you. You might hear the beep of another horn. You might hear your favorite song on the radio. What might you see?

I see a red car next to me. I see a gas station on the corner. That's my favorite one. So the more descriptive you can be using your senses at any given moment the more mindful you can be. One of the my favorite places that I like to do that is when I'm cooking dinner. Sometimes I try to, like, fly through cooking dinner just as fast as I cancel again. I can get on to the next task. But when I really slow down a little bit and I focus on it and I'm cutting up vegetables, for example, you know, I can really focus on what does that vegetable smell like when I'm cutting it up? You know, what does it feel like when I cut a piece of carrot? Like, what does that actually feel like?

I don't know about you, but that's not a practice I had been accustomed to before I started implementing mindfulness. But again, really helps us to just slow down ground ourselves physically and be back in the moment. Another tip for us is to try guided meditation. Sometimes that can seem intimidating to some people because meditation feels like this big thing that maybe I, some are not familiar with. But again, it's just a mindfulness practice.

A guided meditation, often maybe some of you might be familiar with, like, someone talking

and and basically explaining to you what to focus on. Megan actually provided a link for you all in the chat. That's just one simple quick. I think it's even a one minute guided meditation. And your goal in the guided meditation is simply to focus on whatever the person is telling you to focus on.

So, you know, for example, there are ones out there where you can say, find me a guided meditation, like, about being on the beach. And so you can actually Google that, and it will come up for you. And then you just basically sit there and try to focus your thoughts simply on what the speaker is saying to you. And your mind may wander because that's very, very typical when we have lots going on in our mind. However, when you do that, you just gently if you if your mind wanders, you just gently bring it back to what the guided speaker is trying to say to you.

There are a ton of these resources out there on pretty much any topic. YouTube is one of my favorite places, but there are many apps that you can download on your phone or tablets that will give you free guided meditations on pretty much any topic. You could say you could ask for a guided meditation on gratitude or on managing stress at the holidays or guided meditation to reduce my anxiety. You name it. There's something out there for that, and that might be a good practice to integrate.

Another strategy that we're gonna talk about tonight is self compassion, and that's really the practice of treating ourselves with kindness and understanding, especially when faced with challenges or difficult entities. And so encouraging ourselves to reduce our our self criticism, you know, really looking at I did my best given the circumstances, even if it doesn't always feel like enough. So when we practice self compassion, how this might look for some people is, first of all, being gentle with yourself. Perfection isn't the goal. It's to do what I can with what I have, where I'm at, and feeling as though and that's good enough. So a practical example is instead of saying, like, I should have fill in the blank, You might say, I did my best given those circumstances. I often tell my clients don't should on yourself. So when we find ourselves saying things like, well, I should've, I could've, you know, all of those things that often leads to self criticism instead of self compassion. So all of us are doing the best we can in the circumstances that we have in our own individual lives. And not everybody understands that or can see that or knows what we're dealing with.

Right? And so if you have to decline going to a holiday function, for example, you know, other people might say, oh, so and so didn't show up. But you might say to yourself instead of feeling critical about that for yourself, you might say, you know what? Like, that was my circumstance, and I made the best choice that I could for me or and or my loved one, and and that's okay, and that is good enough. So really practicing how we can just be gentle with ourself.

If you find yourself being maybe more on the self critical end, See if you can't catch that

when you do it. Sometimes it's very ingrained in us and we don't really notice that we're doing it when we're doing it because it's common. So, really, the first step is trying to catch yourself when you might be self critical. And then thinking about how can I turn that around? How can I turn that statement into something where I can have more compassion for myself when I do it?

So the next little piece about managing our stress is thinking about both things out of my control and things within my control. So I often work with clients to create what I call a stress inventory. You know, and I have them write down a list of what their stressors are. Just make a random list, brainstorm, don't judge what you're putting on that list, just everything that stresses you out, just randomly put it on a list as you go. Once you get where you feel like you've got them all on the list, then you go through and sort them out. What are the things that are in my control? And what are the things that are out of my control? So this slide kind of shows you some of the things that might be out of a person's control. So how other people will act. Right?

We have no control over that. We don't have any control over what's coming, as you all know. We don't have any control over what other people think about us or our decisions or their opinions, no control for that. What happens around us? We don't have any control of that.

The outcome of our efforts, you know, you do the best with what you can, where you're at. Right? And so we don't have control of what happens after our best efforts are put forth. We don't have control over past mistakes. We all make them.

That's how we learn and that's how we grow. So dwelling on our past mistakes isn't very self compassionate. It only serves to usually hurt us. We do not have control over other people's boundaries. We only have control over ours.

And I do not have control about what others think of me or my situation. And so those are I understand those can be very difficult to say, okay, that is out of my control. I've gotta put that stuff over here and try not to worry about that as much so that I can focus on more of the things that are in my control. And so we're gonna talk about that for a second. So some of the things that we do have control of, especially when it feels like many things in our lives just seem very out of control, is being present in the moment, and that's where that mindfulness stuff comes in.

Like, really, I have control of where my thoughts are at or at least I can practice getting my thoughts within the moment. So just really working to be present and enjoying what you have. We have control over our words. In our mindset. Right?

How you spend your free time? The boundaries that you choose to set? Those are within your control. How you speak to yourself? How you move on from any failures that you have? And what you give your energy to. We are not required to give our energy to everyone in every place and everything that wants it. And I know sometimes we feel those

overwhelming obligations, you know, in order to, like, meet everybody's expectations of us during the holidays or at other times and, you know, it's okay to say no. And I often share with my clients that no is an answer all by itself. We don't need to offer everyone explanations for why.

We don't need to scramble to come up with something as to why. No is an answer in and of itself as as you try to preserve whatever energy that you have for maybe the people that are more in your immediate family, for example. So focusing on what I can control as opposed to what I can't can help us gain more ownership of the moments and of the time we spend with those around us. And so as I mentioned, you know, creating that stress inventory and identifying those factors that you can and can't control, and then, you know, delegate tasks if you can or practice saying no to certain things. And some of my clients will say to me, but no sounds like that's such a harsh thing to say sometimes and it might feel that way.

So instead, one of the things I love and I teach my clients to do is maybe I just don't want that in my life anymore or I don't want that in my life right now. Sometimes though that sounds a lot better than maybe just flat out. No. So it's a different alternative way to say that if you need that. But again, we don't need to offer explanations to everyone.

It's okay to simply just say, you know what? I can't attend that function. I'm really sorry. That's okay. You know?

And then, of course, the other area we're gonna talk about is about setting healthy boundaries. So a boundary is basically the limit in rules that we set for ourselves within relationships. That helps to prevent burnout and protects physical and emotional health. Essentially, boundaries are basically telling other people how we would like them to treat us. When I think about boundaries, I also think about that saying that many of us might have heard about you can't pour from an empty cup.

So if we're drained and we have no energy and we are burned out, we don't feel very well and yet we're trying to give to other people. It becomes really difficult when our cup is our cup is empty. And as I'm sure many of you know, when we push try to push beyond what our body is telling us, we often end up feeling sick or having physical consequences of that as well. So boundaries are really, really essential, but they can also be really, really hard to set up. So we're gonna share some different kinds of ideas about boundaries.

So we can sometimes set healthy boundaries with others, simply in what we say to them. So I've given you some examples here of some simple phrases that you might try to set a boundary. So one might be, I'd love to, but I need to rest. So you're acknowledging that you would really like to attend that function or to do that thing. And at the same time, you need to honor what your body needs, which is rest.

Simple. You might say, I can't host this year, but I'd love to help in other ways. You know? So maybe you're not gonna be the one that's hosting twenty people at your house and doing all

that work. But maybe you say, I'll bring the sweet potato casserole or What else can I do to help you?

That might be within your control and something that's not gonna overextend you. You might say, I think it's best if you don't come over since you've been ill. For some that might be really hard to say to a close family member or a loved one that I haven't seen in a long time. But as we all know, how critical that is, even if other people don't understand that boundary, it's okay to set that boundary. And, you know, I think we I think it's best to do that, especially when we know that the consequences can be very significant on those of us who have compromised immune systems.

You also might say, I'm not feeling up to it. And that could be because maybe if your physical health isn't doing very well, or you're just run down and tired and you need to rest, or maybe your mental health isn't doing very well. And so you don't have to explain that to anybody. You might just say I'm not feeling up to it. And if people wanna question you more after you try these simple phrases or or like push your boundaries, you simply then can become what I call a broken record.

You don't have to offer further explanation. If you so choose, you might just repeat the same thing. You know, I really need to rest. You know, I'm tired. And so that that's enough.

You don't have to give more or I'm not feeling up to it. You can keep repeating that phrase as a broken record. You know what? I'm just not feeling up to it, and then you decide when you leave that conversation depending on who it's with. So those are some really simple phrases that you might try out to set a boundary.

And so when I think about relationships and setting healthy boundaries, I try to put them into these three categories that I wanna choose quality over quantity. Right? I don't I might have invited and then invited to seven holiday gatherings, and I might like to go to all of them. However, there's, like, maybe one or two that really are important to me. Like, I really wanna go to my son's house and see my grandkids.

And so that's quality. If you can only choose to do one thing because you know doing multiple might stress you out or make you anxious or you might end up over exerting yourself, it's really okay to say no. Choose quality over quantity of things. I also say prioritize events in your life where you feel supported and safe. And so find those spaces where you know, if you go for an hour and you get really tired and you just wanna go home, then they'll be like, okay.

Like, we totally understand we're so glad you came. You know, prioritize those spaces where possibly people know about your PI and they understand what you're experiencing or, you know, if you need them to wear masks, even if they might not feel the need to do so that they would help you feel safe and supportive in those environments. That's how maybe we can choose the quality over quantity. And remember that your presence matters more than a perfect performance. And so as I was saying, you know, if you're able to do some

things or show up in certain places, just you being there matters more than how long you stay, what appetizer you brought, you know, just showing up matters.

And also if you're not able to show up being self compassionate and remembering, like, there are just times I can't, and that is okay, like, giving yourself permission for that. So there's a few, like, quick wellness practices that I wanna tell you about tonight. These are things that you can do also that might help you manage some of your stress that you can do even in short periods of time, and it can really help you to be able to manage some of those those stressors in in a little quick bits if you need. So one of them is just one minute reset. So I don't know if you have, like, an Apple Watch or some kind of other device.

Like, on my Apple Watch, I can set it to tell me every hour to do some breathing exercises for one minute. So it's a good reminder, like, every hour I try to do it. So it's my one minute reset where I might close my eyes, I take a deep breath for the cataphor, hold it for the count of four, and then exhale to the count of four. And I can do that multiple times. And so it does several things for us.

First of all, it helps us be in that moment to to relax our shoulders, to relieve a little bit of tension, to get some extra oxygen when we're feeling stressed out and even anxious.

Oftentimes, we breathe more rapidly than when we're not. So we're not getting the same amount of oxygen to our brain. So deep breathing like this actually encourages more oxygen on our bloodstream, which can help us to manage our stress a little bit better. One of the things I love to do is a gratitude check-in.

You know, you might, one time a day, you might think of three things that you're grateful for in a day. In fact, I actually have a gratitude journal that I keep by my bedside. And every night before I go to bed, I write three things that I was grateful for in that particular day. I'm actually going on now almost two and a half years of doing my gratitude check-in, and the rule is you can't repeat the things that you're grateful for. So you have to come up with something new every single day.

And what I find happens is, you know, a lot of people including myself when I started it, you know, I started with the, I'm grateful for my family, I'm grateful for my dogs, I'm grateful for my home, you know, for those things, of course, being super grateful for that. But after a while of doing this, you really start having to think beyond the stuff that is all around you, like, immediately every day. And it causes you to just really think of things that, you know, you're grateful for. An example for you of this is a fun fact about me. I used to work in a high security prison, working with those who have offended in many different ways.

And one of the gentlemen that I worked with asked me one time, what do you think about when you open your refrigerator door? And I was like, oh, like the food or whatever I'm going to get in in the refrigerator. And then he asked me, well, how many times a day do you think you'd go to your refrigerator? I was like, goodness gracious. I don't know.

Maybe, like, twenty, thirty. Yeah. I don't know. He was like, do you think about anything

other than, like, what you're going to get in the fridge? Or if you're hungry, like, what snack you're gonna have?

And I was like, no. And I wasn't sure where his questioning went. And he said, you know what? I'm I would be most grateful for about that. The light that turns on when you open the refrigerator door because those who are incarcerated can't go to the refrigerator, can't see that light turn on, and that really blew my mind.

And then I started to think about other things that, you know, prisoners didn't have, that I that I do have the privilege of having, you know. And so I really caught that experience, really caused me to think about other things that I'm really, really grateful for in my life. So I challenge all of you to maybe get your own gratitude journal and to challenge yourself to come up with three new things every day that you're grateful for. And then finally, movements. Right?

So that's a great wellness practice. Sometimes we sit and our sedentary can be more sedentary and maybe that's because of our physical abilities or things that we're not able to do as much. But try to do whatever you can do in the realm of movement. So you might not be able to do a whole bunch of jumping jacks or go for a long walk, but maybe you can sit in the chair and try to stretch your arms out. You can roll your shoulders.

You can tilt your neck from side to side. You can just work on stretching each martial group out to the best of your ability. If you can, like, I'm a work from home person. I don't know how many of you are too, but if I myself sitting at my desk all day and I really have to make myself get up frequently so that I can do the stretching or just walk around my house a little bit or go check the mail. Movement really helps to reduce stress sometimes and it can reduce some of that trend tension in our body as well.

So at this point, we have, I think, another pull for you, that will pop up. And so I've shared quite a few little tidbits with you tonight. And so I just wanna pull and see, like, I've learned at least one new way to manage my stress during tonight's program. Yes or no. Okay.

So, like, eighty five percent of you said yes. And this those things are just like the tip of the iceberg things that you can try. And I, you know, I always think when we feel stuck, or we don't know what else to do when we're stressed out, go back to some of the basics, some of the things that we learned tonight. And even if you're somebody who already knew these strategies, sometimes it's a matter of remembering to use them and going back to those foundational things like movement. Like, setting those boundaries, like, practicing self compassion.

And so that can help us sometimes get unstuck as we move forward. So some key takeaways from tonight's session is holidays don't have to be perfect to be meaningful. Nothing is usually purpose as you know, and things happen all the time. And so try to adapt your expectations. Like, it doesn't have to be exactly perfect.

It can you can still find meaning and joy in whatever your holidays look like for you. And I

think remembering that boundaries in self care and self compassion are actual strength. They take a lot of courage. Self care is not the same as being selfish. Taking care of oneself is essential so that we can continue to help take care of the other people in our life so that we can be good for ourselves emotionally and physically and setting boundaries is a very strong and important thing to do so that we also can continue those same exact things. And remember, most of all, you are not alone. If there's anything I've learned in my involvement with the PI community, over, gosh, when I saw him twenty one now, and I got connected with the IDF when he was five. So over all of these years, what I've learned most is even though it feels very isolating at times, I always try to remember. We have this huge community here and you are never ever alone. There's always somebody to reach out to whether it's someone at the IDF.

You know, it can be you reach out to your own therapist. You could call or text a crisis hotline if you need to do that, but you are never, never, never alone. And so I've included some resources here for you, but there are many, many, many more. And if anyone ever needs or wants more resources or wants to talk more about any of this, I am certainly open to that. But, of course, primary immune dot org, as you know, there are so many resources out there I can't tell you the number of times I called someone at the ID app, and I'm like, I need the help with developing a plan at school for my son, or I didn't I really need this connection or resource. Like, somebody there will usually always have an answer for you. YouTube is also a really great place to find those guided meditations that I was telling you about, but there are many free apps that you can download on your phone that can help you with that app. And then there's another website, mental health first aid dot com, where it talks a lot about your mental health then explains things like depression and anxiety and how to reach out for help. And then, of course, nine eighty eight is a number that you can call or text. If you need immediate assistance and you don't know where else to go, there will be someone on the other end of that line who is trained to handle crisis and things like that. You can also do a live chat at nine eight eight lifeline blind dot org. That's another place where you can get some free help in the moment if you're in crisis.

Interestingly enough, I'll share with you briefly as we're wrapping up here. That picture of the word hope in the corner that's an important picture in my life, and I have that on the wall in my office. And the reason for that is my son, again, who's now twenty one, who has PI. He had a make a wish trip. I think when he was about nine. And we were going through a lot of trial and error with subcutaneous infusions versus the ones in the hospital, and we were just going through a lot.

Our family was going through a lot. It was a very challenging time and his make a wish trip was to Disney. And one of the days that we were there, you know, my son was not in a good emotional space. It was hot. We were just like, oh my goodness.

You know, we're really struggling that day. And at that exact moment, a sky writer, a plane

had longed over where we were at in Disney and wrote the word hope in the sky. And so forever more, that will always remind me, you know, to have hope even in the midst of some of those most challenging situations. And again, to remember, you are not alone in this, there there is someone you can connect to, and I'm also happy to be a person that you can connect to at any point in time. And I know the idea of has my contact information. Be happy to help people get connected to any resource that you might want or need. And then there's my contact information for you, my website information as well. I'm sure the IDF would be willing if you don't remember these things or can't find it again. This is how you might be able to reach me.

Emma Mertens: Alright. Well, thank you so much, Becky. I love that note that you ended on with the Hope Vision. That was really nice. Thank you so much for your wonderful talk. And now everybody, we are going to get into some Q and A. So friendly reminder, if you have any questions, you'd like to ask Becky to put them in the Q and A box and the control panel on your screen. And with that, we'll jump into Q and A. So we've gotten some great questions so far, Becky. And the first one we have is about sharing boundaries. And this person shared you know, as we know, unfortunately, the holidays also coincide with the height of COVID flu and RSV season. So we know that that's a major concern for a lot of our community members as they're heading into holiday gatherings. And one of our people in the Q and A box shared that they feel a lot of stress related to communicating their boundaries, particularly around COVID and flu, especially now that we are as the world sees it kind of past COVID, we know that that's not how it is for folks in the PI community, but it's not very common these days to be seeing masks. There's not everyone's necessarily going out and keeping up to on their COVID shots. So this person is basically expressing that they feel a lot of stress around communicating their personal boundaries and kind of why they need to still be adamant about masking. Or social distancing or having concerns about ventilation in the spaces that they're going to. So I guess I want to go back to some of your points about adhering to healthy boundaries. And maybe could you talk us through how maybe some example situations of where someone might be able to effectively communicate these boundaries even in a time when they're not necessarily feeling supported by the folks that they'll be spending time with.

Becky Lenning: Absolutely. You know, this is something I even struggle with or work on myself personally because we have some immediate family members who also are kind of like, well, that's done in October and we don't, you know, but we don't have to worry about that. And you know, I always remind them that while you might not have to have that worry, you're very fortunate because we do. And so, you know, gently reminding folks that it isn't over for us. And you know, these things are very important because it I guess, it depends on

who, you know, you're trying to talk with.

But, you know, my family has seen how sick. My my son has gotten and the implications of that. And so, you know, making sure that if there are people in your life who have maybe experienced sickness or the results of you, you know, maybe you did have COVID and it was really bad for you in a really tough time. Like, you know, reminding them, like, that's not okay for me. And depending on how comfortable a person is with sharing their health information with other people just depending.

Right? Like, if it's a coworker, maybe you're more private about that information and maybe you just stick to you know, I just can't I just can't come to that. Like, I have other obligations. You know, maybe there are some people that don't need to know all the details. And in that case, maybe it's just a simple, like, I'm so sorry, I have a conflicting obligation.

You know, maybe you you say something like that or but if it's the people closest to us, it is so difficult to set those boundaries and to stick them especially when others don't understand. And they may not ever fully understand. You know, we I will live with a lot of people around us too who just don't get it. And even though they don't get it, for us to still feel okay and secure in setting our boundaries because they are healthy and safe for us and for our family members. And so, again, I appreciate how difficult this is.

It's so tough. But I also know, like, to trust in your own instincts and, you know, to stick with it. Stick to your guns about those things and, you know, to to work on, like, any residual guilt you might feel that you get from your family members about that if that makes sense. You know? So, like, just said, setting those boundaries by saying, like, I'm really sorry we can't come.

I don't feel safe. X, Y, and Z. This is why if you feel like you can do that and just sticking with it. You know? They don't have to understand.

They don't have to appreciate that. And you can feel good about keeping yourself and your family safe. However, that works for you.

Emma Mertens: Thanks, Becky. Alright, next question. So We talked a lot about our own feelings of stress and how that can impact ourself. But looking beyond that, what are some signs that maybe a loved one might be struggling? I know there have been times for me where I've been like, that person was a little was a little testy at the at the Thanksgiving dinner table.

And you're just kind of in the moment thinking, like, oh, they're just seeing a little off, but then down the line. It's like, oh, no. They were actually really struggling. So what are some things that you can kind of be on the alert for in others while you're, you know, taking care of yourself and keeping track of your own mental wellness, but also, you know, keeping in mind the loved ones around you.

Becky Lenning: Definitely. That's a really great question. And, you know, first of all, I I always say, like, everyone is fighting a battle. We know nothing about. Right?

And so, like, everybody has their own stuff. And, you know, most of us are not sharing everything with the whole world. So you know, we really I think, first of all, just appreciate that we're going through things as our other people. And so to be very mindful of that, and I think the same things apply to what do we look out for other in other people as and in addition to what do we look out in ourselves through the same things. They can also look a little bit different between children and adults.

And so if we're talking about children, for example, if we're talking about very, very young children, like, between the ages of, like, you know, zero in you know, five, six, seven, oftentimes what you look for is, you know, changes in appetite, changes in behaviors. A lot of times, big big behaviors in kids are usually a sign that some need isn't being met for them at that moment. It might be a need for Apple juice. You know, it might be a need for comfort. And so, you know, when I I know it's easy to get very frustrated.

I remember when my son was in the process of being diagnosed. He was going through millions of tests and pokes and bras and there was a lot of behavioral stuff and, you know, like, sometimes it manifest in different ways. And so trying to be as patient as possible, but, like, I think behavior changes, mood changes in children or adults. If you see someone isolating, you know, like, maybe they were a little bit more social and all of a sudden they're not showing up at different events. Like, we don't know why, but we can also check-in with them.

Like, hey, I noticed that you haven't been coming to I don't know. Our our church events, like, every week, like, you used to, is everything okay? Or you might notice people maybe just not, you know, as chatty with you as they normally would be or maybe, you know, people are not sleeping well. You know, not sleeping well is a great sign or a great indicator. Our body's trying to tell us something.

You know, maybe we need more rest first and foremost because we're you know, we all I think most of us probably do at this point. But, you know, if you're seeing someone's need for sleep increase drastically or decrease drastically, Like I said, appetite changes, mood changes. You know, just like maybe if someone was more maybe a little bit more positive and all of a sudden, you know, they're like, they just really feel like they're down in the dumps. You know, you haven't heard from that person in a while, you know, things like that you wanna look out for. And I always say, like, you're never gonna put an idea on somebody's head that isn't already there.

So, like, for example, if you were to you were worried about your friend. And you said, hey. Like, I noticed that you hadn't been coming to, you know, knitting every week anymore. You know, I'm worried about you. It's everything okay.

I just wanna check-in with you. Like, that's a really kind thing I feel like to do it for someone.

And, like, it's not gonna make them feel like, oh, like, they think I'm, like, in a really bad emotional place. They'd be really grateful. I'm guessing for the check-in.

And, again, like, I can't tell you the number of times throughout our struggles that I would it would have been so nice for someone to say, hey, like, I noticed you guys are struggling.

Can I help by bringing over a meal or something like that? You know, you those are things you can do too. Like, you can offer if you're able within your own, you know, means and resources. You know, maybe you could offer, hey, like, I noticed that you're having a really hard time this holiday season.

You know, hey. How can I help? Or here's some cookies? Or, you know, there's lots of things that we can do just to check-in on each other. And I think that's really critical.

Can't hurt to check-in. Right? They might say, I'm perfectly fine. I'm good. And okay.

Like, leave it at that, but, you know, later, you can check-in again, you know, if you need to.

Emma Mertens: Definitely. It's always good to check-in. Alright. Next question. So this person I guess this is more of a comment, but they said, you know, I don't really mind the holidays.

They can sometimes be stressful. But for them, it's actually the act of sort of closing out the holidays and getting back, kind of segueing back into everyday life, that's challenging for them. Do you have any sort of advice that you can give on how to make that transition a little more seamless or a little less overwhelming for some folks?

Becky Lenning: Sure. Yeah. Transitions of many of any kind can be really tough. You know, sometimes for the holidays, maybe you're in a situation where you're around a lot of family or friends or, you know, you're at work. There's parties and jubilation.

And so then, you know, after it's all done and if you if you're a person who celebrates Christmas, the tree is put away and, like, it's just, like, now we have to go back to normal life. Like, it just didn't happen, you know, a few strategies I have for that. One being trying to be very mindful again in the moments. And so there we there is joy anywhere if we just look for it. Right?

In those small moments. And so I actually have a tattoo on my arm that says remember to let the joy in. And that's always my constant reminder of, you know, like, we can find it. So maybe the tree is packed away and our family has gone home and, you know, maybe it's just us again. Where can I find those pockets of joy?

Maybe it's, you know, I had the best long shower with, like, today and I felt really good after I, like, got dressed and, like, like, my normal everyday clothes and I just felt really good about myself or man, that cup of coffee was amazing. So, like, looking to find those, like, joy in those moments. The other thing one of the things I do to reset every year is I and I encourage my clients to do this as well is maybe pick a word for what you want twenty twenty five to embody for you. So, like, thinking ahead in, like, on my side of what do I want

this next year to be like? For example, one year, I picked the word intention.

And what that meant to me was I wanted to every choice that I made to do something that year or to not do something. Wanted to make sure I did it with intention, not just saying yes because I felt obligated or not feeling bad because I said no. But to do everything with intention. And so that word, I tried to, like, embody throughout my year. Another year, I picked joy.

So my goal was to find joy and everything and write it down. That's how my gratitude journal kind of started actually. So seeing if you can't pick a word that you want to embody the next year and putting it in places that it will remind you, there are actually really cool places online. You can find that you can get your word inscribed on a little bracelet. Every year I get myself a bracelet.

They're usually pretty inexpensive, but I wear it all the time and it just reminds me of my word so I don't forget it and that I practice it throughout the course of the year. Another strategy that I like to do to help me transition back is sometimes I with my family on New Year's Eve, whether we're apart or far away. We can share that space, like, online or something, and we all create a vision board. And a vision board, me, it can look different for every person. But again, it's kind of like, what do I want for my life in this upcoming year? So, you know, on my vision board, for example, this last year, I had a picture of the state of Florida that was really cute because I wanted to be able to move to set in motion my plans to move to Florida in twenty twenty five. And I put some key quotes that I wanted to live my life by for the year, and I put oh goodness. What else do they put? Like, I put things about, like, being intentional about spending more personal time with my family. So it can look however you want it to look.

There's tons of examples online. But again, that was sort that's sort of like my like changing my mindset from, you know, putting aside this year and entering the new year on a nice foot.

Emma Mertens: I love that. Thank you. Alright. My next question, so we're getting a lot of questions about setting boundaries. So I think that's a real heavy hitter with with our crowd tonight.

Do you have any suggestions on how to kindly tell family and friends that I just don't want to go to all the get togethers this holiday season? I have PI and, you know, getting sick, of course, is a concern. But also, it's just been a crazy couple of weeks at work closing out the end of the year. And I don't want to become even more rundown and I just want a low key relaxed holiday season. How do I effectively communicate that to friends and family members without causing major guilt or discipline?

Minutes?

Becky Lenning: Man, that's a great question. And I think we could probably do a whole session about how do we set boundaries with people because it there is not an easy answer to this because it's hard and it depends on who we're talking about. Right? It might be much easier for us to set a boundary with a coworker, for example, who it doesn't matter so much as opposed to it's an immediate family member. Right?

Those how we set those boundaries and how we feel about setting those boundaries might look differently depending on who it is. Right? So one of the things I think of it's it's not always about setting the boundary because we I think we can set the boundary. It's how I feel about setting the boundary that often causes the problem. Right?

Like, you know, my mom wants us to come to her, you know, rambles function and her function and, you know, go date of dysfunction and, like, there's a lot of pressure to do that. And I don't I simply don't want to do it. PI aside, I try to remember we're not obligated to do anything, though I know we feel that and pressure. So I don't want to is a perfectly okay response. Whether somebody accepts that or not is I always tell my clients it's it's their responsibility to manage their feelings about that.

And so we don't have to carry those with us. And so, you know, when I say, like, I think that actually saying the boundary might be the easier part of then managing how do I feel about having set that boundary when I feel like I'm being guilted possibly by family members or not or oh, come on. Like, you can just come for a little while. It's not gonna be that big of a deal. Like, it's only an hour.

Right? But, like, okay. I don't want to come. So, oh, okay. I can say, you know what?

And we can say it gently. Right? We don't have to be super direct or assertive if that's not where our comfort level is. But, you know, we might just say, you know, I'm really, you know, burned out and adding one more thing right now. I don't think would be good for me or my mental health.

I hope you understand. Right? And something in a response like that might be help someone else be very clear. Like, how could you like, well, you would probably never say to someone like, oh, heck with your mental health. Do it anyway.

Like, you're communicating to someone like, this isn't going to be okay for my mental health or my physical health, and I hope you understand. Right? And whether they do or don't understand, that's just something for them to figure out. We have to work on how do we not carry that response with us, if that makes sense. You know, some other things we might try to, like, say to set a boundary might be, again, as simple as, I'm just not feeling up to that right now.

Or I thank you so much for your invitation but I have another obligation at that time. Right? That might be a good one, especially. Maybe you really do have another obligation. And I'm all about being transparent with folks, but I also recognize for some people that don't don't need to know all the details and I don't wanna share.

So it might be okay to say, oh, I'm sorry. I have another commitment during that time. And maybe your commitment is watching Netflix. I don't know. You know, maybe it's that or you know, maybe with family members, for example, some of the things that I have to say or it's not safe for us to come.

And they might say, oh, yes, it is. It's fine. We'll wear masks, whatever. I know with my family not everybody does that even if they say they will. And so, you know, I might just say, you know what?

It's really it's really not just safe for us to come or, you know what? In our area, there's a lot of flu and germs going around and I think we're gonna stay home. And then again, being okay with our decision, I think, is the bigger battle, even though other people might not respect our boundaries. Because when others are guilted us, that's them not respecting what we need to be safe and healthy. And they may not understand that's okay, but your boundaries are never wrong.

Stick with your boundaries always. They will never steer you wrong. I can tell you from personal perspective, anytime I've kind of caved on it and going, well, we're gonna try it man, sure as heck. Like, either one of us got sick from it or, you know, we were just tired and we came home from it. Like, man, why did we do that thing?

We should have just said no because now we're just drained and don't wanna do the next thing. So you know, remember past experience and, like, I always say rely on your gut because you know what's best.

Emma Mertens: I love that. I need to remember your boundaries are never wrong. That's great. Alright. So the next we got a couple of questions that I'm kinda gonna merge here. I know in in this day and age where people are so focused on social media and they're constantly posting what they're doing or they're year end review or what a year twenty twenty four has been. I think a lot of people, if maybe it wasn't a great year for them, maybe they don't feel like they went out and did a whole bunch of stuff. Maybe they weren't able to go take that big vacation or they weren't able to you know, see friends like they wanted to. I think that that can leave a lot of people feeling isolated, feeling bad about themselves, or maybe feeling like, oh, I didn't, you know, I didn't accomplish all that much this year. What advice do you have for sort of clearing through the clutter that is social media and just, you know, feeling like you still contributed something and, you know, you still had a year that's worth celebrating for yourself, not just for putting out for cloud or for others to see. How do you how do you sort of mitigate that?

Becky Lenning: That's a great question. Because of the day and age that we live in, we're like social medias, like everything. Anymore is everywhere. You know, a couple of things. One is I always remember that what we see on social media is the the highlight reels or the low light reels, typically speaking.

So, you know, what we see posted is everybody's like, oh, my family is perfect and great, and we're going on these vacations. It's like the highlight reel. That's five percent of life, right, for people. And then for some people, we see a lot of the low light reels or the people who are really, like, complaining or being very negative or everything, you know, all the things. So there it there's like five percent of the highlights and five percent of the lowlights. What we don't see is the ninety percent which is everyday life for every person. No one is posting, like, hey, I got sick and I went to the doctors today and I picked up antibiotics and I got to go pick my kids up from school and then make dinner and give them a bath and then do homework and then put them to sleep. No one's posting that stuff. But that has literally everyone's everyday life for the most part. And I think it's important to remember what we're seeing are the highlight reels.

And what I have come to learn and know about that is, like, behind everybody's highlight reel, there's more there's always more. And you know, when we when we measure our successes or our gains for the year based on somebody else's, we never feel good about ourselves. Right? There's there will always be, I think, someone who seems like they have more money, they have more time they don't have it as hard as that. Like, we can always find that.

And at the same time, like, we're comparing apples to oranges. Right? Because they don't have to deal with what we have to deal with or they, you know, maybe they have means differently than than I have. And so you know, comparison is always the thief of joy, I say. And so, you know, I try to remember like, I can't measure myself against using other people's measuring sticks.

Right? I have to measure against my using my own. In my own measuring stick, looks different than other peoples because I have to deal with things that other people don't. Right? So I remember, especially the years before my son's diagnosis and it was really tough and we had a lot going on.

Right? Like, what I could accomplish in that year was, like, maybe making sure my kids were fed and keeping everybody alive and, like, trying not to lose my job and, you know, keeping my marriage somewhat functioning. Right? Like, it was the bare minimum. And at that time, I felt like, man, I'm failing at every single thing.

I am not living up to those expectations. And then looking back, I was like, who is measuring stick was I using? Right? Because if I'm using my measuring stick, the things that I did, man, good for me because that took every ounce of effort and everything I had to get through that year and to get my family through that year. So that is a win.

If I'm measuring that, I guess somebody who doesn't have the same challenges that I do, then it's never gonna look like a win. And but, like, we don't have to do that. Right? We don't have to do that. Use our own measuring stick.

Right? And if the only thing that we did today was survive, that's a win. If the only thing I did

today was get out of bed and put on pants, That is a win sometimes. Right? If I just made it through another day, right, that is a win because it is really hard and really challenging especially during this time when it seems like everybody is joyous and everybody has a family and everybody's having all this fun that we might feel left out on or we can't participate in.

Not to mention that the holidays aren't a happy time for every person, for every reason. Maybe we don't have family to celebrate with. Maybe we are strange from them. You know, there's lots of other things. Right?

So you know, we see lots of stuff on social media. So, like, a couple of things. Again, like, use your own measuring stick. Right? And and sometimes just saying, you know what? Like, I survived today is good enough. And being okay paid with that because it truly is. There were days when I'm not sure how we survived, and I am so grateful for however it was that we did that now. And looking back, I wish I would have given myself more credit for those days because it took everything we had. And we were doing the best we could with what we had at that time.

The other strategy I'll offer you is, you know, being mindful of your time on social media for many reasons. Right? Not just holidays, but there's lots of reasons why it's important, I think, to give ourselves social media detoxes from time to time. You know, if we start to find ourselves feeling really down or depressed because we're just like, it's everybody's joyous time in line and I don't feel joyous, it's okay to, like, not look at that and take a little break from it. I'm actually trying to do that pretty regularly where I'm like, no social media. You know, I'm not only that, but sometimes that helps me to reconnect in the present moment to be really focused. Because when I'm on social media, I'm looking at people's past, people's future, and I'm not really focused on where mine today. So, again, that could be another social media detox and just listen to our body, you know, sometimes if I'm scrolling and mostly on TikTok or whatever, I'm like, man, I don't really feel that great doing this. And so, I just have to be aware and, like, so I'm like, okay. It's okay to put that down, step away from that.

And so be just being really mindful of how you feel when you're engaging.

Emma Mertens: That was an awesome answer. Thank you. Alright. We have time for a couple more. So this one's interesting.

So this person has a close friend who they know cares deeply about them, but they just don't understand their illness. They just don't understand what it's like living with PI. So from your professional and personal experience, you know, working with the PI community, being a mother to an individual of PI, how do you get someone to take that step further, like, please try to understand what I'm going through. Like, maybe go to primary mean dot org and look up what I have so that you understand what my life is, like, every day. Like, I know

that you care about me, but how do I really get you to understand what it is that I'm living with and what I'm going through.

Becky Lenning: That's a really great question too. And, you know, it's so important to try to find those folks in our circle where they at least empathize with what we're going through. And, you know, and I think here it's important also to temper our expectations a little bit because our friends may care about us very deeply, but they may never they will never truly understand what it is like to live, what we all live. It would be impossible for someone to truly get it. However, the need for people to want to have an understanding, I think, is, you know, like, how can we help them if they want to be helped?

Some people, you know, some people just aren't as open to that as other people. But some of the strategies I've used is I've invited people to, like, sessions like this, for example, where they might have a great there might be a great forum where, you know, I do care about somebody with PI and maybe I can learn some more about it. I've had friends and family come to certain things and they're like, wow, I never knew. Or it makes it more real to them because they can see other people who are like, yeah, this is also what they struggle with. I think for a lot of people, it's so abstract.

They can't even imagine what that's like. It's so it's pretty, you know, PI is rare. And so a lot of people have never heard of it. It doesn't it's complex. I've also gotten a lot of resources on the IDF website.

And even if it's, like, more of, like, the children's resources, the Zebra book in particular. Love the Zebra book. Like, I have gotten some of those resources and I'm like, you know, this is the best way I can really describe this. And for some people like breaking it down like that, can be super helpful and they're open to that or there's like the immune system book that kind of explains the immune system pieces and little characters. You know, like a lot of my friends have been very open to being educated and it makes a lot more sense to them in that way.

I'm like, oh, I see. You know? And so I you know, I think it's also, like, with our friends and family members that we really want to understand us better. It's having patience with them sometimes that is a lot to grasp. People cannot fathom for one second, you know.

And they can't see it always. Right? Our illnesses are invisible illnesses most of the time and like they don't really see that much or Also, maybe sometimes we're not good at sharing with other people what it's like to live, like how we have to sometimes, you know, maybe we're there was a time in our lives. I know when we were kind of, like, protective of that and, like, know, we just wanted to be like, okay. We got this.

We're gonna you know, we've got this. We're gonna put on that. Like, we got it all under control, but really we were struggling. And so people thought we were really doing okay.

And, like, it doesn't give them much chance to want to learn or understand more because

they think we'll work fine and they don't need us to do that.

So maybe sometimes it's just simply asking our friends like, hey, do you wanna go to this IDF event with me and you can learn more and meet some other people? Or do you wanna go to one of these online programs with me or I don't know. Maybe even, you know, just kind of inviting. I don't know. Like, sharing in with them a little bit about what you do, man. Have you what have you managed in your life as far as, you know, your illnesses and things like that? And so, you know, just hoping that they want to learn more. And if you've got folks in their life that are receptive to that, I think that the IDF resources are a great place to start as a building block.

Emma Mertens: Thank you. Alright. We have time for, we'll do maybe one or two more questions. So this individual shares that they live in a situation. They don't have a loving and supportive family environment.

But they can't afford to live on their own at this point in time. And it can be hard during the holiday season, but also just throughout the year. What sort of language or tactics can I use to take care of myself and my PI despite having to also navigate sort of challenging, unsupportive relationships? It sort of goes beyond just setting a boundary when you're in you're in you're living in this situation, you're in the setting all the time. What sort of advice might you offer as far as navigating a challenging living environment?

Becky Lenning: Laura, that's also a great question too. In recognizing that not everybody does live in a supportive household or environment, and you may have to deal with that for a while. So, you know, I look at things like self preservation. How do you protect yourself in whatever ways that you can in spite of that situation? So know, I don't obviously know super a lot of specifics about that.

But for example, you know, maybe you take the time to go get out of the house once in a while if you're able to do that, you know, even if it's going and sitting at your local coffee shop for a couple hours or something or going to your local library. Just getting out of the physical space sometimes and taking a break can be very helpful. You know, when it comes to I mean, it could be maybe you don't go anywhere if you don't have to, but maybe it's taking a walk or maybe it is practicing some mindfulness exercises so that you can be okay while you're in that space. You know, and depending on, you know, how supportive or unsupportive they may be about taking care of your physical health you know, that's an important one in in making sure that you're able to, like, take care of your own physical health despite what support you might have. And maybe if you don't have that within your household, seeing if there are places or people that you can find some more of that support in, whether it's in your community or, you know, online.

There's a lot of, like, online support. I think that is out there too that if you need some of that and can't actually go somewhere else to get it. But maybe trying to find that support that

you need outside of that household when you're able to do it and, you know, again, going back to self preservation and, like, what can you do to be okay in spite of being in that environment? So, you know, maybe you listen to music and kind of try to drown out some of the stuff, maybe you, you know, find a craft or a project that you can do to kind of help, you know, bide your time a little bit while you're there, you know, just working on maybe working on you. And then if you can if there's room to maybe help the folks around you, you know, to understand, maybe there is room for that, you know, maybe but maybe there isn't.

And I my heart really goes out to folks who live in that kind of environment and appreciate the challenges of being in an unsupported environment when you just need to take care of your mental and physical health. But again, sticking to that no matter what the folks around you think or are trying to, like, impress upon you, that's really tough. But listen to what you know is best for you and your body. And, you know, also, in in all the answers to all of these things, like, seek outside help. There are great therapists out there, and I know several great therapists around the country who work with folks who have PI myself included.

Like, find yourself a great therapist. Even if they don't have knowledge of PI, I find that there's many of us who, like, want to learn and want to learn from our clients experiences and are willing to help us navigate these situations in our own communities and things like that. It's so helpful to have, like, an impartial person that we can talk to on a regular basis that can help us navigate all of these issues. We only had a short time tonight to sharing some of this stuff, and you've got the bare basics. But if you want more about how do I set healthy boundaries in my specific situation.

How do I deal with this when I'm struggling to get by day to day? You know, how do I navigate these challenges? Man, seeking an outside therapist. So important. I think everyone should have a therapist, but I'm probably biased.

But there are many of us, you know, no matter of insurance status. There are plenty of people out there who see folks even on, like, a very small sliding fee scale. Lots of us do accept insurances. And so if you need help finding a therapist, I'm happy to help you with that. Anything you need, but I can't impress enough.

Like, that is a great resource to do more work around all these topics. Like, spend more specific to you and your situations.

Emma Mertens: Thank you so much, Becky. And with that, I think that will be our last question for this evening, but I also want to share. We got a lot of comments of appreciation for the tactics that you shared and the advice that you shared. Folks really loved that don't shoot on yourself. I also really love that.

I'm going to try to implement that into my own life as well. And we just got a couple of notes of people really appreciating these tips and and sort of the Zen that you are helping to bring to what we know can be a hectic and stressful time of year. So thank you so much.

Becky Lenning: Well, thank you all. I have appreciated sharing this space with you this evening. And again, if there is anything I can do to help anybody, please reach out to me. I am more than happy to help.