



Episode #142:

**Kayce Stevens Hughlett's Unexpected Journey of Her
Differently Wired Son's Drug Addiction**

January 29, 2019

Debbie: Hey Kayce, welcome to the podcast.

Kayce: Hey Debbie. So good to be here. So good to be here.

Debbie: I feel like this is a conversation a long time in the making because you and I have talked about what we're going to talk about today many, many years ago before Tilt was even in my mind and when I was kind of in the throes of it with Asher when he was a little guy. So I'm looking forward to bringing your perspective onto the show.

Kayce: Thank you. Me Too. I remember, I remember he was nine, he was nine when we met.

Debbie: Yeah or even younger, I think.

Kayce: Even younger maybe.

Debbie: Yeah. So I guess as a way to get into our conversation, because this is going to be more of a parent chat, and really I just am happy to share your personal journey with our audience because you're kind of, you've been through this. Your differently wired son is grown and launched and it's just so helpful to hear kind of your journey. So tell us a little bit about who you are as a woman, as a mom and then we'll use that to lead into telling us your story.

Kayce: Okay. Gosh, such a big question, right? So you know, when I describe myself to people it's, I say I went from accountant to author and good girl to risk taker. And from Oklahoma to Seattle and now I'm this person who explores the world. And I have a background, I have a masters in counseling psychology, so I practiced for several years as a psychotherapist. You and I met when we were in coaching training, so I'm a certified life coach. But really how I got to all those things was by being a mom. And by especially by being a mom of this young man, who is now almost 30 years old, who broke open every paradigm I had in my life through his being him and really me trying to make him be something else. And in the process though, I found that I wasn't being true to who I was either.

Debbie: Why don't you tell us about your son then. Tell us what, you know, you probably know that most people listening to this podcast, well you know, kids are all over the, the age range. A lot of parents who are listening to this have kids who are in those elementary school years. Where things are just really, really becoming challenging and they're getting more information about what's going on and you know, the choices that they may feel that they have are looking more and more limited. So can you tell us a little bit about your journey back in those years?

Kayce: Yes. Yes. So, um, my son is, I call him Jonathan. Now that he's a grown man he goes by John. But I, I still, he's like, mom, it would be weird for you to call me anything else. And uh, so Jonathan came along and he was very artistic. Like he

could draw from the moment he could hold a pencil. And I was from this family that was very structured, like, you know, you color within the lines and art wasn't a part of our life. And so from the beginning there was this frustration because he was messy, he was wild, he was creative and I'm trying to keep the kitchen counters clean and, but I didn't know anything else. And so I think about some of your calls with, the calls you've had with Derin and this idea that, well, this is how we were raised and it worked for us. Which is like, oh, it so didn't work, you know, I mean, it was how it was.

But, but so we found that he was, he was pushing these boundaries and like we would, when we would ask him to do something, he, he pushed back. And we were frustrated with what to do and so we didn't, we weren't impressed with the public school system close to us. And so we were in a, in a church community and they said, oh, he needs, he needs structure, he needs structure. And so everybody kept telling us that he needed structure and so what we realized was that, it was probably fourth grade, he got an ADD diagnosis. I'm still, you know, I, I still don't even really know what to do with that diagnosis, but it was helpful for us. And, but I remember when I was reading *Differently Wired* and I came to this section and it was these kids that they just don't quite fit in the classroom. And the teachers are calling, we're getting the teacher call, and he's that kid. You know he's that kid.

And then the parents start to look at me sideways like, oh, she's the mom of that kid. And so he started to get this label. And you know, when I read Asher's story, it brought so much back to me because I was still so unaware at that time of what was, what was going on and what was probably going on in his little body. Where he just wants to create and the other thing was he doesn't transition well. And so if he's into something, he's really into it, right? And then somebody says, okay, time to stop, clean up, put the stuff away. And so we were just meeting these battles all the time and it was happening at school and then it came at home because we didn't understand what was going on.

And so things began to escalate and this anger from him and then from us. And, and there were times I was just like, who, who am I? I'm like, who is this person? Because he, as he got bigger, you know, I couldn't just pick him up and put him in time out. And I don't know how, you know, how much further to go into the story. But ultimately, long story short, he ended up turning to drugs and alcohol to, to kind of soothe his discord with the world and with himself. And that was when he was, it probably started when he was 13. We found out right after he turned 14.

Debbie: Wow. Wow. So, you know, I can imagine this is a, these are painful things to be talking about, but I also know that this is something that I think so many of us listening to this conversation, including myself, we've read the articles, we've read the click bait, this, you know, the headlines about that there's a higher risk for differently wired kids. Specifically kids with ADHD, ADD, you know, to have problems with drugs and alcohol. So can you tell us a little bit about just what was that like for you? How did you move through that? And I know it's not a, it wasn't a quick fix, but tell us a little bit about your, your journey through that.

Kayce: Yeah. So what happened was when he was 13, he, we had tried everything school wise and, and ultimately when he was in sixth grade we brought him home and I homeschooled him for a year and a half. And that was really, it was really a sweet time and I started to learn how he, he learned. And then at the end of that time he so desperately wanted to be a normal kid. And so we made a deal with him that if he finished all of his schoolwork at a certain time, he could enroll in school at the end of the year and go to the public school. And so he was seventh grade, this was seventh grade. And he went and it was a disaster. It was just, I mean, you know, putting a kid in at that time of year, you know, everybody's bonded there, you know, and it's middle school.

Right. So, so his frustration, our frustration, escalated. And so he went away for a year to a, it was basically a behavior modification school. And it was like a step program where if he, if he behaved this well then he got these rewards and I don't recommend it, you know. And, and so but what happened was we didn't have any tools and so when he came back we said, well, what are we supposed to do? And they said, oh no, you just set boundaries. You just set guidelines. And well he defied them. Right? But then they kept saying, what they told us was, they said that you sent us a young boy, you have a teenager now. So what happened for us was we started to see these signs, but we ignored them. I didn't trust my own internal instincts. I didn't trust that something was bad.

Debbie: Why do you think that is?

Kayce: You know, that's my, that's my bigger story, Debbie. That that's my bigger story of I was raised that everyone else had the answers. That, that there were the experts. And so these experts were telling me that these were normal teenage behaviors. And my gut, which I hadn't started practicing listening to on a consistent basis, was telling me something totally different. And that's why, you know, I, I hesitate even, you know, I go, oh, I'm going to be on this call. I had this experience and I, by no means am an expert on anyone else's child. Right. But I had this experience of believing that, I believe in good too. And so, so I didn't want, I didn't want to dive into the fear of, like you said, like the click bait, the things. And I thought, no, no, no. And this example that keeps coming in my mind was like, he was very fastidious. And he, and he loved shoes. And you know, the Michael Jordans they used to be or all these things. And well he was kind of obsessed with cleaning his shoes. Well, he was huffing. He was inhaling the shoe cleaner.

Debbie: Oh wow.

Kayce: He was killing his brain and it was happening, it was happening right under my nose. And I feel so foolish and I, you know I, believe me, I've gone through hours of the what ifs, if I had done something differently. But we were in this place because he was, you know, 13, 14 years old and, you know, they start to change. And so, but we, we didn't have this. I think what it was, he didn't trust us and we didn't trust him in a way to communicate on it on an authentic level. And so, and, and I think the reason for that was because I wasn't communicating with myself on an authentic level. I was just, I kept believing that if I follow these rules, if I

follow these rules, if I follow these guidelines, if I do what everybody else is telling me I should be doing, then it's going to work out.

Debbie: There's so many pieces of this to that I kind of want to dive into. But um, I think, you know, what you're speaking to now is, is something that I'm certainly connecting with. And I think that it's not even that it's denial, it's just, it's kind of not knowing how our experience really fits in, it's not trusting ourselves, it's not even having other people to talk about who can identify with our experience. So we really are kind of operating in a vacuum in many ways and there's a lot of just crossing fingers and hoping hoping that things work out.

Kayce: Right, right. Well, and it was a really scary time for us. It was, it was really scary. It was really frightening. And what we found was that we were making a lot of the decisions that we were making out of, out of fear. We thought we were doing it out of love.

Debbie: You know, that's something I talk and write a lot about is choosing out of love rather than fear. Can you give me an example of a decision you made out of fear?

Kayce: Yeah, I gave it, I have one that I use this a lot because this is what, this was the one that someone gave to me that finally made sense. So we, ultimately Jonathan ended up going, he was in several different programs. We tried everything because that was where the fear was coming to keep him safe. Because he became, he became a danger to himself and to other people because he was, he was very erratic. So we, we sent him, we found a wonderful, uh, it was a therapeutic boarding school and they required that the parents be involved and the parents do their own work. And that, that they weren't there to fix our boys. That our, that our boys aren't broken. And I think if that's what I can say to your listeners is our kids aren't broken. They don't need to be fixed. They need to know that we love them.

But what happened was we, we sent him to this school and we said we, it was because we love him because we wanted him to be safe. And you know, we're doing this because we love you. But mom and dad, I don't understand. I don't want to go. But we love you and we're doing this because we love you. And we were in this training with this very wise woman and she said, yes, I know you love your son, but I think you did this because you are terrified. And she was right. And it doesn't mitigate. That doesn't mean we don't love him. It doesn't mean it didn't come from a loving place, but the deep rooted thing was from fear. And what we learned from that was that he could sense that fear and we weren't, we weren't owning it. And, and, and so he could feel that incongruence in what we were saying and what we were doing. And he's very sensitive to that. So.

Debbie: So it sounds like, if I'm understanding you correctly, the decision would have been the same, but it was the way in which you were presenting the decision that was inauthentic and that's -

Kayce: Yeah, we would have made this, I think we would have made the same decision. Yes. But, but he, he was looking for, he was looking for real connection. And it looks weird that you think it's real connection while he was disconnecting with

drugs and alcohol and that what he was really looking for was real connection, I think. And we were giving him this parental mumbo jumbo that he couldn't connect with. I mean, and I'll, I'll tell you a flip side story, Debbie. Because it, I mean it got really, it got really ugly at times. And we were, later on, I mean this was a, this was a mini year.

I mean, we still take it one day at a time. He's doing well now. Let me just say he's doing very well now. But a few years later he was a little bit older. He was probably 18 by this time and he was, he was in another like inpatient treatment center here locally and we were in a session and he started to scream at me. And he said, mom the only thing you're all about fear, you know, and he's cursing at me and he's like, you just live in fear and you know, we're in there and we're with a counselor. And my daughter's there and my husband's there. And there was an intern whose eyes are like, oh my god. They don't know what to do with us, right? And so I got up and I left the room. I just had to leave. I was just like, oh, I couldn't breathe. And I went and I went into the restroom and I cried in the ladies' room. And I'm just like, oh my god, how? How is this my life? But I went, all of a sudden I got this calm because I understood this sense of, of love and fear. And I thought, okay, he's sensing something, right? He's sensing something.

And so I went back in and I looked at him and I said, you are absolutely right. But I said, my biggest fear is that I'm going to stop loving you. And for a brief moment I saw immense clarity and relief in his eyes because he felt that was true. It was this terrifying, absolutely terrifying truth. And, and I feel like something shifted for us that day because our relationship now, he knows I will be honest with him. Even when it doesn't necessarily look pretty or, you know, he knows, he knows my actions and words. My intent at least. I don't always say, I fail. Absolutely. Absolutely. I fail. But my intent is always to be truthful with him and so that, that love and fear, they're tricky in there, right? Because they're, they're connected. Because if we don't fear, I mean if we don't love, who cares?

Debbie: Yeah, absolutely. Yeah. Yeah. It's tricky and it's, it can be really hard to know what's what. It takes often a lot of soul searching and reflection to really get honest with yourself about what, what's really going on here.

Kayce: Yeah.

Debbie: So would you say, you know, was that moment where you shared that with, with him, you know, in that honest way, was that a turning point for you? Or you know, how did you come to terms with what was happening and be able to make this shift so you could have a more honest relationship with him and, and with yourself?

Kayce: Right. Well, lots of therapy. Therapy and I was training, what's funny is I was in the midst of my training to be a therapist when all this was happening and so, um, I was, I was, you know, he was immersed. He was immersed in these programs on how to get healthy. And so what I ultimately did was I immersed myself, but from a, a life giving viewpoint for myself. Which was different than this running around with my hair on fire. Like, oh my gosh, I have to do something for him. I have to do everything for him. This was this sense of as I do

this for myself, it is going to benefit others. And so, you know, you asked how I did it. I mean it was this conscious constant and is this conscious constant decision of how, how I'm going to be in the world and who I'm going to be in the world. And one of, what I realized was that I grew up with this kind of disingenuous in this kind of disingenuous environment where I grew up in the south and it was all about being nice.

And so I grew up with people that they would say one thing to your face and, and my mother was my prime example of this. And she, I would see her in the grocery store and she would be so nice to someone, she'd be so kind and then she would turn around and she would say, oh my goodness, I can't believe she doesn't have her lipstick on. And, and I was, I was kind of left reeling from that. And what I realized is one of my core values is truth and integrity. And so when I make decisions on how and when I'm going to speak to, you know, to my son, my hope is that I come from that place. And you know, I can give you example after example. I mean one of the examples is we decided a long time ago that there is, that he cannot, he cannot live with us.

He can't live in this house with us. It's crazy making. It's crazy making for him. And he knows it. It's crazy making for us and we know it. But he realized that it wasn't that we were being mean, but it was just like, no, it's not good for our relationship. And so we think, you know, I think as parents we think, oh my gosh, we're supposed to do everything and it's supposed to look a certain way, like support is supposed to look a certain way. And what I found sometimes with, with Jonathan, my best support is not being in his physical presence. Like my best support comes from sitting by the ocean and offering prayers out onto the waves. And so I think with our children it's, what happened for me in that moment when I stated my fear, was that it was my greatest fear that I would stop loving this child. And I said it out loud and we all survived. And I think that was a turning point for me. And I would say we not only survived, but we have thrived as a family. It was scary.

Debbie: Yeah I can imagine. I mean, when we first met, you were still very much going through a lot of these things. And, and it's big. I mean, this is big stuff, this is the stuff that I get emails from parents. Or if I'm doing conversations with parents and, and we talk about this, you know, getting real about your deepest fears, getting it all out on the table and the fears are big. They're self harm, they're suicide, they're drug addiction, you know, there are these really big issues. So, you know, just knowing that there are people listening to this conversation who have those kind of fears about their, you know, maybe their kids are much younger. Maybe their kids are in those years where they're, they're starting to think that wow this is happening or they're dabbling or they're using negative you know, either talking about self harm or, or doing it. What thoughts do you have for them or what advice from your experience can you share with them to help them wrap their head around how they can move through this in a way that supports them and their family?

Kayce: Well, I think that the number one thing for me was that I found a community that could support me where I could actually say these things out loud. And that's not always easy. And I was just, I was working on a piece for another venue the other

day and it was this idea of how I, one of the things I started to do, I just start, I started to write. And I just put it all down and, and just there's this physical act for me, writing, writing saved my life. Because I didn't, I had all these thoughts, like I would wake up in the morning and I'd have all these thoughts and all this energy and I didn't know what to do with it. And then I'm supposed to go down and fix breakfast for my family. You know, I was at, I'm going to lose my mind.

And so I started to write and I did. I did, you know, the classic Julia Cameron Morning Pages. And so it was this active release. And I'm a big believer in pencil and paper, like really old school and uh, because there's something of that connection. So there's this sense in this way and I guess the suggestion or the thing and that is finding a way to expel that out of your, your body, if only for five minutes. If only for five minutes and finding that way. And I mean I have this whole bag of tools that, I mean I still to this day, it's like I wake up and I'm like, what do I need? Because there are things that still frustrate me and that, you know, you don't want to walk around saying to people, well, you know, I really hate you. Or you know, some of those hard things to say, but we need to find a way to express them.

Whether that's in a, in a support group, whether it's sending you an email. I mean, just the sheer act of saying I am feeling this way. I know I'm feeling this way. Without judgment. Without having to decide what the next step is. To just say I, this is how I feel and I don't like it, or gosh, it feels kinda good. Or, you know, there's, there's something about truth and whether it's you speak it to your cat or your dog, you know, and you, you find a place. Whether it's a person, whether it's a, a place in nature, whether it's just between you and your notebook. A place to release some of those things. And I used to think that if, you know, if you said something or if you wished something or if you wrote something down, it was absolutely going to come true. You know, like it's jinxing things and you know, and so I'm a bigger believer in, in releasing so that we can make room for what we really want. Which is really to love these, these people that are in our lives, even though in some moments that is the last thing we want to do because they're making our lives hell. But finding a way to support yourself if there's no one else that can help support you.

Debbie: Right. So, so important. And let's talk, you know, I want to just as a way to kind of bring it full circle. Um, I know this is the case for you. And I talk about this as well, that, you know, even though I'm raising a child I didn't expect and this journey is going way off course than what I thought it was gonna look like. It's also, you know, being Asher's mom has enriched my life in ways I could never have imagined and it's helped me grow so tremendously. So kind of to take us where you are today. I'd love for you to share what you've gone through with your son and you know, all those hard years and the work that it's forced you to do on yourself. Like how has that actually enriched your life?

Kayce: Oh my gosh. It didn't only enrich my life Debbie, it saved my life. This journey saved my life. And I've, I say this and I say this over and over again. I would not wish this on any other person and I cannot imagine my life without being Jonathan's mother. In the best, in the best possible way. And so I, I indicated and I said, I came from this very structured, very, very narrow, very small vision of

what life could look like. And I was raised to be very practical and there were things that I was never going to be able to do. And my life now I, I literally, I have to pinch myself every day to go, this is my life. I, as I said, I went back to school in the midst of this and I studied counseling psychology and so I started to do that. And then in the midst of that I started to write and I had some other teachers and I learned this idea of being present. And then when I was 45 I got my first passport. I never had a passport. And anybody that knows me now is just like, what?

Debbie: Yeah, I'm surprised by that.

Kayce: Yes because you and I have met in Paris and Italy and I, I travel the world and I write books. And I have this amazing four year old granddaughter that is Jonathan's daughter.

Debbie: Adorable.

Kayce: Yeah. Yes. And I wasn't ready to be a grandmother and so I'm not, I'm Yahya. And Violet and I picked it together. We loved it because it said more, it sounded more like yes, it sounded like yes. And what I've learned through this journey with my son is ways to define 'yes' in my life and 'no' in my life and really crystallizing each, each moment. And I laugh as I say that because some of my moments are filled with binge watching Netflix, but. And so and, and then there's this idea of grace and offering myself grace and saying, oh my gosh, I can't believe that when he was nine years old I had to sit on him and hold his shoulders down and I screamed in his face.

I'm like, who does that? And I go, oh, but here we are. And I just, I just wrote this book that you know, and, and it starts with the moment we found out he had overdosed on drugs. And it's, it's his story but it's really my story. And I've watched him and I've talked to him about it. I'm like, I'm writing the story, I'm writing this. And he's like, that's okay mom. I trust you. It's good. And, and so to see him send me like on Instagram or Facebook and things and he write, he writes me these notes, he says, I'm so proud of you mom. And when he was in the midst, the beginning, kind of the beginning of the drug piece of it and he was at this school where we were still untangling love and fear, you know, all of those things and which we're still untangling. But, um, he looked at me and he's just like, mom, you're a firecracker. And I remember looking at him and I was going, no, I'm not, you know, no, I'm not. And, and so he saw something in me before I did that I couldn't see in myself. And, and I think that's some of the inauthenticity he was bumping up against.

Debbie: So interesting, right? What our kids, you know, the mirror they are to us and what they show us about ourselves. It's incredible.

Kayce: Yeah. And what they perceive and we can't even begin to try to guess that. I was meditating this morning, I've been in this place right now with my daughter. And I'm like, I don't know how to be with her, but I don't know. She's 26 and that's a whole other story. But I kept coming back to this just be. Just be. You don't have to have the next step. Because if I had planned what my life was gonna look like,

no way would any of the hardships have been included and but more significantly the joys and the successes and the just sheer delight would not have been there either.

Debbie: Absolutely. I mean when you just lean in and go, you know, and really go there. As low as the lows can be, the highs can be that much higher and so much more meaningful. You know, the bright spots so much brighter. And it is a, it can be such a fuller experience. Just a fuller life. Well Casey, thank you so much for sharing this. I really think this is going to be one of those conversations that is going to really impact people listening to this show because it's so inspiring to hear just where you are and what your journey's been like and what's possible. Even when it can be so hard to not live in that fear space and to just think this is all going to be bad and even if things are really dark to think there isn't a light and you know, I encourage listeners to check out your book.

Kayce's book is *Soul Stroller, experiencing the weight, whispers and wings of the world* and actually she's written several books so when you look her up on Amazon or I'll actually list all of Kayce's books on the show notes so you can check them out. But it's very inspiring and it'll give you more, more of the sense of peace and calm and possibility, which I feel like this whole conversation has been infused with and it makes me feel so hopeful. And so can you tell listeners the best place to connect with you and to tap into where you live online?

Kayce: Yes. All you have to know how to do is how to spell my name and then you can find my website, you can find me on Instagram, you can find me on Facebook, you can find me on Twitter but I don't really hang out there. But it's Kayce, k a y c e h u g h l e t t . c o m is my website and that has my email address. I love getting emails. I am here. I mean it's, it's my hope and I really come back to this idea is helping people find their own best answers. I'm great at quick conversations and emojis. I'm an emoji queen.

Debbie: A badge you wear proudly I assume.

Kayce: A badge I wear you know. And, and I can hold, I can hold the hard stuff and so I have people you know, if you need it, if you don't have that person and you say I'm having a really hard time and I just need to say that right now I hate my kid., you can send it off to me and I will hold that and I will bless that and I will not judge that. So find me. I'm here in the world and I think that's why I'm here.

Debbie: That's awesome. Thank you so much. Listeners again, I will leave links on the show notes. You can easily, if you didn't jot down the spelling of Kayce's name, you can easily click through to that. And thank you so much for this conversation. I think just hearing from other parents, it's so important to all of us because we can get so wrapped up in our own little silos of pain and fear and suffering and uh, you know, and all the other, and confusion and overwhelm and all those things and it's really powerful to hear stories from other people. So thank you for sharing yours today and for coming on the show.

Kayce: Thank you so much, Debbie.

RESOURCES MENTIONED:

- [Kayce Stevens Hughlett's website](#)
- [*SoulStroller: Experiencing the Weight, Whispers, & Wings of the World*](#) by Kayce Stevens Hughlett
- [*Blue: A Novel*](#) by Kayce Stevens Hughlett
- [*As I Lay Pondering: Daily Invitations To Live a Transformed Life*](#) by Kayce Stevens Hughlett