THE RESILIENT KID PODCAST

Season 4 – Episode 6

Decluttering for a healthy life with Janine McDonald

Have you ever looked at that pile of post on the side and thought, oh my God, I've got to deal with that. Have you ever walked into your kid's bedroom and thought, geez, I I've just got to close the door again. Well, our guest today, Janine MacDonald is really going to help us declutter our life so that we can live healthier, so we can live, more kind of space free in our mind, you know, really, really give us that healthy attitude rather than closing that door or ignoring that pile of post.

So, hello, Janine. Welcome to the Resilient Kid podcast.

Thank you so much. It's an absolute delight to be here.

So I'll tell everybody how we met and then you can kind of introduce yourself. So Janine and I met at the big festoon, festoon, festoon, the big festoon, which is Danny Wallace's big speeches.

She does she puts on an incredible event, doesn't she?

She absolutely does.

And Janine was one of the speakers and I was there for the full two days. I was helping out on Danny's flight squad and I was, when I looked at the program, I was really keen to come and hear you speak. And I remember thinking, oh, she's coming.

She's coming on. She's coming on. Because if you're not watching this, Janine has. The most beautiful, vibrant blue hair. And I seen a coming towards kind of where the entrances is to go on stage. Cause there's a bit of a, a walk up, isn't that? And you have like special walk on music. What music do you have?

I can't remember.

It was the magic number. So three is the magic number by Della Soul.

And you will know why in

a moment. So I seen the blue hair, the beautiful outfit, and I see, and I started to hear the music. So I thought, right, I need to get myself in a position where I can see Janine and I can see her magic in action and absolutely blown away.

And I have said to her that, you know, one, her talk was one of those, and I always think this is a really good measurement of how good a talk is, is when you come away talking about it, you know, after the event, I came home, I told my sister, I told the kids, you know, I was chatting to friends about it.

And that for me is a really good talk. So that's how we met. And we met at the little after party as well, then we had a little bit. So that's how we met. So Janine, tell the audience, tell the listeners. What, what it is that you do and yeah, tell us a little bit about you and your story, please.

Okay.

Yeah. Thank you very much. So I, I run a decluttering and organizing business. It's my own business. I set it up three weeks before the pandemic and we went straight into not being able to go into anybody's house. So, but before that clutter had actually been part of my journey in the.

In fact, I did a post on Facebook the other day. It's 10 years since I was made redundant. And at that point, my marriage wasn't going well. It was breaking down, had two very, very small children at the time. And my mental wellbeing was horrendous. So I'd lost all confidence. I'd lost the ability to hold a full-blown conversation with somebody.

And what I was finding was that as my mood got lower and lower was that the stuff started to build up. So there was some toys in the corner of the room and I'm not saying a big mound, I'm saying there's probably like less than 10 toys. And part of my brain was going, come on Janine, it's only going to take five minutes to tidy those away.

Not a problem. The other half was, you're not going anywhere. And that was where my brain was fighting with each other. Each side was fighting with each other. And then what I found myself doing was sweeping things off surfaces when somebody was coming round and putting them into a spare room. Thinking, I'll sort that out afterwards.

And of course, that afterwards doesn't come. And the next thing you know, you've got seven of these bags in there. And These became known as doom bags, which is didn't organise, only moved. And I got to the stage where I was so overwhelmed that I knew I needed to take some form of action. And I started saying to myself just three things.

And literally I would close my eyes, pick up three things that were in front of me, because that took out a decision process. And then all I had to do is make a decision on those three things. Did I throw it away? Did I pack it away? Or did I recycle it in some way? And that continued for quite a while.

And every time I went upstairs, I would repeat this, just three things, just three things. And my confidence increased. And then. I managed to get a tidy home and then we sold our home. I split up and I actually couldn't find somewhere else to live. So I stayed with a friend with my two little one’s um, on a mattress on the floor for six months, and then we were with them for 12 months in the end.

And as I came back to my, the home that I'd bought, everything came back from storage. And I was like, wow, what do I do with all of this? The kids had grown out of stuff. I had stuff that didn't even belong to me because he didn't want it. It was again, the overwhelm just started again. And I'd not been able to find a job.

So previously I was a bank manager and circumstances had fully changed and employees didn't seem to realize that in that I still had my skillset. I still had lots of, lots of skills that I could give to companies, but because I now needed part time hours. So within school hours, and I also needed. term time holidays because I didn't have child care readily available.

I couldn't get a job. And I helped an elderly friend who was downsizing. And we talked about the memories behind the things that she had. And she actually said to me, she said, you know, she said, I prefer you doing it than my family because they just tell me what to do. And that sparked that little idea in my mind that actually she needed help.

I needed help previously, so I'm sure other people need help as well. And that's, that's how Clear the Clutter now was born.

And I love

that. So there's so much there that I want to kind of unpack as it were, but like one, how simple is that three things? Because I think you know, lots of, and I said to you this before the podcast started, before we started recording, a lot of my parents get overwhelmed.

You know, when you think about what you've got in a day to do, you know, it's a lot, isn't it? But just, you know, just being able to sort out three things at a time and not worrying about the rest, just whatever's in front of you. So I think that's really good. Although I have got to admit, when you said, bag of doom, I'd remembered that, that you told me about that before, and I Immediately went to, you know, those blue Ikea bags.

I have got paperwork in my garage because exactly what you said. My mother-in-law was coming round and I put it all on the table. I think I'm going to sort this out and then just sweeps it in. And it's still there. Yeah. I forgot about it. You know, so even though it's out of sight, it still causes me stress.

Cause the minute you mentioned it, then I was thinking, oh, I've still got to do that, you know, so you're right, you know, just doing that and the thought of having to open that bag again, kind of stresses me out, but the thought that I only have to do, pick three things out of it, I can do that. That's, that's doable, you know, in my head, that's doable.

So that's brilliant. I really love. And I want you to kind of, because I think when we talk about decluttering, we often think, oh, we've got to throw everything out. And I know my mother-in-law is very, she gets very stressed. She's about to dime size. She runs a hotel in Scotland and she has a big house next door.

So she's going to, she’s going to go to like, one, two-bedroom place near us. She's really scared that we're going to throw everything at me specifically. I'll say. She's scared that I'll throw everything out because I'll be like, oh, you don't need that. You don't need that. So I love the idea that we don't have to throw anything out.

Like you were talking about your elderly friend. Yes. Like, tell us a little bit more around Okay, we've got these three things. So what do we do with them? You know, because it's not just about

throwing, is it?

No, it's not. Decluttering isn't about throwing everything away and living a minimalist lifestyle.

It's living in a home and in an environment that brings you joy, makes you happy, and you feel comfortable in. So, for instance, if I went into somebody's home and there was piles of things on the sofa, if I suddenly went in and like, whoosh, that was it, the sofa was now clear, that could scare them. Because actually that clutter that's been next to them on the sofa has been their little comfort blanket.

So it's a matter of chipping away at things rather than doing it en masse. But for me, it's about passing things on for others to enjoy. I can always find a purpose for virtually everything. And I actually challenge members of my group to come and say something that they would find hard to recycle or use for an alternative purpose.

And I've not yet. Not being able to come up with something.

Wow. Okay. Give us an example of that. I'm like, I'm really excited about that.

Okay. I had a client who had an excess of plastic teaspoons.

Okay. Random. Yeah. I like it though.

And she didn't want to throw up, throw them away, which understandable. So because they weren't in their packaging, they couldn't be sent to the charity shop or anything.

So we spoke to the local allotment group. And they use them as seed tags. Brilliant. You stick them in the soil and write the name of the plant or the seeds on the spoon bit. Or they do it the other way around. They stick the spoon in the soil and then write on the handle. Depends which way they do it.

That's a brilliant idea. And do you know what? I, I had forgotten this. But when my kids were little, before Christmas or before kind of a birthday, I used to put a bag at the front door and we would have a race around what toys we were going to take to the charity shop to make room for obviously Father Christmas coming or whatever.

And I'd forgotten that and it was kind of a way of getting them to sort through because I, again, a little bit like you're saying about that pile next to you on the couch, I didn't want to just go in and whip them all away. And what I found was there would be some that they'd want to play with again.

And some that they didn't want to part with, but there was always some that when I said they were going to go to other kids, they'd be happy to part with.

And that's to do with, yeah, it's, it's, we love to help and support other people and it makes us feel better as well. at the end of the day, it makes us feel good.

And for children, they're the same. They love helping others. They love seeing other children smile. And this is where it comes to talking to the client or your family or the children and finding out about what they enjoyed about that particular item. So for instance, it could be a book or a toy. So have a little conversation around it.

Do you know what? I remember you. Doing this, this and this with it. What can you remember? Oh yeah, I remember that! Alright, so, but you've not played with it for a long time now. Imagine what it would be like if we passed it on to another child who hasn't had it before. Can you imagine the happiness it would bring them?

Yeah? Shall we pass it on to them then? Yes, yes, they can have that now. And you find That it's, it's a more positive interaction rather than saying, well, do you want this? Can we get rid of this now? Because it's their stuff. And the same with like you were saying, your mother-in-law downsizing in the, you may be quite happy to say, you don't need this, you don't need that.

But what is it for us to say to somebody else, you don't need that? Because you don't know what meaning it has behind it.

Do you know, that is so, I hadn't thought about it before. I mean, I have tried to involve the kids in decluttering or, you know, sorting out the wardrobe and stuff. But I, but what you're saying is, is more than just involving them.

It's like respect, isn't it, really, for their possessions. And actually we talk, we bang on about it all the time. Don't we about, Oh, respect this, respect that, blah, blah, blah. But actually we need to make sure that we're respectful when we're asking them to let go, to pass on, as you say, really, really lovely way of thinking about it, because I, so I have a younger nephew, he's younger than mine.

And so my son often hands down clothes, you know, we talk about passing on clothes to, to him. But actually, what I haven't thought about is kind of books and toys and things, you know I haven't thought about doing that really, which, you know, yes, I can take them to the charity shop, but actually having my older one showed my nephew how that works or how to play this or, you know, yes.

Talking about a book they've read. You know, that's lovely, isn't it? I hadn't thought about it in that same, that same way.

Yeah. And also as well, what, what my two have enjoyed, and we did it during lockdown, was that I try and do games with client's kids, with my kids, and you do need to have the time available.

That is the big thing. It's not a rush job for this. And., I sent 'em on a race around the house to collect as many books as they possibly could that were theirs. And then they had to stack them in a pile in the lounge, but they weren't allowed to put 'em in any order. It was just whatever they came with, they had to put it on top of the pile.

Right. Okay. So then that came to how high could, was the pile. How many books were in the pile? How long did it stand up as a tower? So you've got in there, you've got maths, you've got time telling, you know, you've got all these different skill sets coming into it as well. And then we separated them out into the different categories and we talked about them.

But what, what we then did was the ones that they didn't actually find that they read and they wanted to pass on was we put them into a box and during then we had to quarantine things, didn't we? So after the relevant time, we put them outside with a sign saying, if you're bored or you fancy a new read, please take one.

And they loved watching the kids come down the pavement and have a look in the box. and go away with a book. It drills them.

That is so

lovely. And you know, because I talk about how important it is that our kids have a sense of community but are part of the community. Yes. Because it helps build our resilience and that's a perfect way, isn't it, of, you know, very safely, very um, altruistically getting them to do stuff for the community and really helping others.

That's such a, you know, and, and for them to have that from an early age, that kind of foresight, I guess, into helping others and what can I do with this? I don't need it anymore. Rather than it just going in the bin or rather it, do you know what I mean? They've already thought about that.

Yeah.

So why do most people, Janine, bring you in?

Because I mean, you know, you've just told us we can do three things and we can do that over it. You know, if we're consistent enough, we can probably sort those piles off. In my case, that like bag of doom in the garage. Why do most people bring you in to help? Because like for me, when they bring in me as a therapist, it is because they get to a point where they're just really struggling and they've tried lots of things and they can't.

They just feel like they need some support themselves to do it. So is it similar for you?

It's very similar. Yes. In the, doing the just three things is great for the smaller piles and for chipping away at the things that are annoying you. But when you come to say your wardrobe, it's amazing how much emotion is attached to clothes and also how many clothes you actually have.

Because we get everything out. And by having me there, it makes their decision process quicker. Because I talk to them about things, so it might not be that quick to start with, but within 15 20 minutes, I can feel the decisions are coming quicker. I'm very hands on, so we get stuff done. But I talk about the mindset, I talk about emotion, about how other people can benefit and it's not even things like clothes that aren't fit to be resold in the charity shop can still go to a charity shop in a separate bag because they weigh them in.

So by weighing them in, they still get money for them.

So I talk all, all around these aspects of things and it's to help free up their mental load because when you're surrounded by stuff, that stuff is filled with negative, some of it will be filled with positive energy, a lot is filled with negative energy.

And releasing that frees up to give you a clear home, clear head and a clear heart, which is my business motto.

Oh, I love it. Because

I fully believe. That by having a clearer home, it's got so many benefits. It reduces stress in you and your home. It improves your relationships. It improves your relationships with the kids, your partner, your home, and ultimately yourself.

It helps you sleep better. And people just feel just hemmed in. And sometimes feel like the walls are closing in. And everybody's perception of clutter is different.

So I may go into somebody's home, or they may show me on video, if I'm doing it online, and I might think, actually I wish my home was that tidy.

But, that's their perception of clutter. And then I could go into somebody else's home where you can't open the door to the lounge properly because of the amount of stuff that's behind it. So everybody's version of clutter is different and it's acknowledging that and working with that and how they start to release things to free them up to start living a life that they love with those that they love.

And bye. Sorry, go on. Yeah, go on, sorry. I was going to say, and, if you add any neurodiversity's into the mix, as well, it can be very, very hard to actually do it yourself. I find it hard to do my own decluttering. A friend came over for me on Friday

to body double.

Brilliant, and that's what I was going to ask you to talk about.

So, we have neurodivergence in our family. And I think it's really, I heard you mentioned body doubling and I came home straight away and said to my sister, oh

my God, have you heard of, and she was like, yeah. And I went, oh, how come you've, you know, and it was one of them like, how, and she was like, yeah, yeah, I've heard of it.

And actually it is something that she uses a lot. And it's something that we do together. So sometimes we'll batch cook together because if we do not on our own, we'd be like bored. So just tell us a little bit around body doubling, because I think anybody who's so it's very easy, isn't it? As parents for us to go in and say, clean your room.

That's what we do. We go clean the room and we expect it done and then it's not done. And, you know, some of our kids really struggle with that. So I think body doubling would be perfect. So will you just explain a little bit about what body doubling is and why it works so well? Because I think it's great for kids.

Body doubling is where you have somebody else there in the room. Now that person may help or they may sit and just talk to you. Or do something different. It's just the pure fact that somebody else is there, registers something in your brain, that goes, Right, I can now focus on this task. I can now get things done.

And then when that person leaves, you can go back to being a bit, oh, well I don't know what to do now. And it's, it lifts you up. And, you have that communication, but as you're verbalizing things, so it may be the, say in a child's bedroom, it may be, you know, you go and sit on the bed. Whilst they're doing the thing and cleaning your bedroom is a very sweeping statement because dependent on how their brain works Depends on what level instruction, they interpret that as so it may be clean your room so that can go from Well, I've just moved two things out of it to Actually, I've got everything out from under the bed, you know, the whole room is out on the landing and they've cleaned it all.

So it's, it's having that instruction level as well. So you could actually be sat there saying, right, let's find all the dirty washing. And then they do that first. And then. Can you find this? Oh, let's pick up that. And so the difference in the Body Doubling is that you can use it as to help with instructions to break the task down.

But also you can use it as the fact that just somebody else is there and you've dedicated that time. And you're more likely to get the task done, whatever that may be. And it may be that somebody's just on video call with you as you're doing it.

Yeah, and I find my teen does that a lot. Like my older daughter, she's in Sixth Form College.

And there's, she's had exams. A couple of weeks ago and I was telling her about body doubling after the conference and she said to me, oh, but that's why I do. And I said, oh, when do you do? She said, I hadn't realized, but when they're revising her and a friend or go on FaceTime and you don't hear them talk, like they might chat at the beginning and.

You know, blah, blah, blah, but they both then are quite focused in what they're doing, but then they'll stop and go, have you done this one? Or what did you get for that? You know, but then the back at it and she said, it just really helps me focus. And I think, I think psychologically, I think quite often when kids get to a certain age, we think they can do all this by themselves.

And actually it's really difficult. If we walk into a room, that's a tip. We're a little bit like. Oh, can't wait. So what are they going to be like? So just to, you know, given that bit of, I'm going to help you, whether that's psychologically by just sitting there or physically helping them. I think sometimes it's, it's too much.

It's, it's a lot to ask them to just go and clean the room. But so by body doubling, what you're saying is not only do they get the benefit of it. But actually for me, it probably causes less rows as well. You know, like, oh, you've not done it. You didn't do this. You didn't do under your bed. You didn't tell me to do under my bed.

You know, that's the kind of like arguments. I think we get into it. Whereas actually, if we're sat there, we're going to, you know, we are going to say stuff like, oh, did you get all that? Have you got the socks as well? You know, they're usually lurking under the bed, aren't they? You know, we have that conversation as well as just catching up and chit chatting with them and, and things like that.

So I think, yeah, it's amazing. And how fabulous that if we you know, like you say, carve out some time to do that with them. I think not only do we feel better that, you know, that room in the house that we shut the door on is in a better state, but they mentally are in a better state because they're in a nice, clean, fresh room and they've had help and not just, you know, we've not just nagged them into it.

Exactly. It's not where it's just, okay, can you do this? It's not just all instructions all the time, how they may interpret it as a demand. Yes. And sometimes if it's an

instruction or a demand, if somebody says you need to do this, I know that I go the other way, you know, but if somebody would say, Janine, would you help me with this?

Yeah, I'll help them. Not a, not a problem. So sometimes how we, how we as adults and how we as parents ask things, sometimes I think we need to reel in a bit and think actually if somebody asked me in the same way, would I do that thing that they're asking

me to do?

Absolutely. And I think sometimes just, just looking and being more mindful around the language we use with our kids and thinking if somebody, if they, if they said that to us, what would our reaction be?

Yeah, absolutely. So just before we finish, I wanted to ask you, so, there's kind of two things that are running around my head. So one, it's not, it doesn't have to be a whole house project. You just come and help with like a wardrobe or a garage or a, A

room.

Yeah. And, and it, it's in various stages as well.

So it may be that someone does need help with their whole house. Yeah. And we discuss that. It, it's a long process. Other times it can be, say I do a one to one online with somebody and they'll be decluttering, I'll be encouraging them, I'll be talking about what they're finding and everything and, and then it'll be like, oh yeah, can I book another one in for next week?

Not a problem. Or somebody may go weekly for, or fortnightly for six months and then go, right, I'm okay now. And then a month later or two months later, it might be, can we just have another session? Yeah, not a problem because sometimes it's just some people just need a kickstart to get that motivation.

Other people need more hand holding, and I do not use the same approach for everybody. And my approach will change even within one session, if I can see something that's actually struggling with, or there's a difficult decision to be made, or that they are, they are getting a bit overwhelmed.

Yeah, absolutely.

And I think that's so lovely. And that's one of the things that really attracted me to you when we was at the after party and I said, of course, I said, I loved you. I loved your speech, but just the way that you talk about it and the passion that you have for not just the people that you're working with but the memories, you know you really like we were talking about us being respectful of our kid's choice.

You're really respectful of their Belongings and, and their experiences behind some of those items. I think is really beautiful. Janine, anything else that you think our parents, our educators that are listening to the podcast that might need to know, or alternatively, where can we find it?

Okay. So what am I, I'll give a top tip.

Would be put things into smaller containers. So I think as parents, a lot of people have got the IKEA Kallax units. Well, boy, do those pull-out drawers hold a lot. So things like use takeaway containers, use biscuit tins that you've got for Christmas, put So say if it's crafts, you can split the crafts up, put them in separate containers, label them with what's in them, and then put them in to the bigger container.

That really helps the kids to tidy up as well. And it's also less overwhelming for you that you open the box and you think, oh my goodness, I'll just close it again. So it's a lot easier.

So labelling is so important as well because different people look at things differently. Some are pictures, some are words.

You know, if you think, if you're asking somebody to go and find the butter in the fridge, you know exactly where it is. And the other person can go and they're looking straight at it, but they can't see it.

Absolutely. And I think that's really important with kids. So my youngest, who's 14 now, when we got his new wardrobes, we labelled everything.

Because I know that in his mind, if I say, put your clothes away, they're just going in. Like, and the door is shut. Whereas on his drawers, it's got like, you know, socks and PE kit and blah, blah, blah. So that when it comes up, he knows where it goes. I love it. And that is not because I'm kind of trying to control it or anything.

That's so that when it's Tuesday morning and he's got PE, he knows exactly where his kit is. Otherwise, everything's out of the wardrobe. So I think that, and its only kind of, to be fair, we're recording this on a Tuesday and it was PE today. It's only on mornings like this that I thank myself. I kind of thank.

You know, my past self are thinking about that. My oldest, she, she's the kind of, she's at the supermarket. She rearranges the chewing gum. You know what I mean? She really is organized and likes that. But even just when you were saying label, I thought, why have I not done that in the garage? You know, why have I not labelled up in the garage?

And actually that'll be my job for this weekend, I think. So yeah, that's a brilliant one. I really like that. Janine, Before I thank you and we say goodbye, where can we find you on the socials?

Okay, so on socials, I am clear the clutter now on all the socials. So it's just the one name. Clear the clutter now and the website's the same as well.

But do co uk

Please go and follow. I will put all of, I will put, I'll do show notes and I'll put all Janine's links there for you, but please go and follow her because she, I have been following her since the big festoon and she comes up with some amazing tips that you haven't thought of, like today, like some of them, like, you know, like, picking three things like labelling up, you know, body doubling.

So, you know, if you have got time with Janine, if you follow her, you will see the benefit in your life for that head space and that mental clarity that just clearing out the clutter really helps. Janine, thank you so much. I can't tell you how much I've enjoyed the podcast today and having a chat.

Thank you.

It's been a delight.

Take care and hope to see you soon.

Thank you very much. Thank you.