

EVEN MORE THAN THIS

Audio Transcript

Episode 2 - Alex

- 0:00 ANIKA We acknowledge the custodians of place, the traditional owners of our lands, waters and skies, wherever you are in this moment.
We created this podcast here on the lands of the Wurundjeri people of the Eastern Kulin Nation and pay our respects to the Elders and Culture Leaders past, present, and future.
- 0:20 ANIKA Content warning. This is a quick heads up that this episode explores themes, such as managing physical conditions and mental health.
- 0:27 [Theme Music]
- 0:45 ANIKA Hey and welcome to episode two of Even More Than This, my name is Anika and my pronouns are She/Her, and I'm joined by Ling
- 0:51 LING Hey everyone I'm Ling and my pronouns are She/They.
- 0:54 ANIKA Today we're going to be exploring the second episode of the series More Than This, and it's titled 'Alex' and we're going to continue exploring the theme and piecing together what does it mean to be an adolescent today.
- 1:06 LING Yeah, so just a little overview of what the second episode is about. We really delve deep into Alex's life. And we learned that he has to repeat year 12 due to his epilepsy, which unfortunately caused a lot of mental and physical stress to his life. And to cope with this, he started smoking weed which is supplied by Sammy, and he's actually nearly caught by Mr. E. But then plot twist, they ended up bonding over music, which Alex uses as a de-stressor.
- 1:33 [Clip from More Than This]
Music
- 1:38 ANIKA So that right there is a track that Alex compiles and essentially shows to Mr. E. And I think within Alex's storyline, it brings up a broader conversation around having an outlet to reduce stress and anxiety, which is so important for anyone, but particularly young people.
- 1:53 LING Yeah 'cos I also completely relate to Alex in the sense that I definitely use music as a de-stressor. You know, I've got my headphones, listening to music all the time. And I'm such a big fan of music. And it's just, I think it's a very teen thing honestly, it's also used as a way for people to find similar people.
- 2:13 ANIKA Yeah, I totally resonate with you Ling, 'cos music definitely soundtracks, like every single moment of my life, and I think, yeah, it's really important to have that outlet.

Because obviously, we're faced with so much in our everyday lives and having an outlet to kind of really just unplug and just relax, is obviously really helpful to have.

2:30 LING Yeah, and I also think, you know, the connection that came from Alex's music, he showed it to Mr.E and they formed like this whole new connection just because of that, and just because of Alex's passion. And also, let's talk about how Mr. E is such a good teacher. Like he actually cares about his students.

2:49 ANIKA I agree. I think Mr.E shows that like, for good teacher, the job exceeds the classroom. Does that make sense?

2:56 LING Yeah, yeah. Because he like goes out of his way to actually talk to Alex, you know, after class and like, check in with him. And it doesn't even come off as like, oh I'm your superior. And I'm trying to govern you kind of way.

3:09 ANIKA Which I think is so important, isn't it? It's like having somebody who's just like, kind of down to earth. And just being like, hey, like, I do have more life experience than you, but not saying it in like an outward kind of explicit way. But just being like, if you need a chat, I'm here. And that goes a long way. And I think having that from somebody who has like, obviously had more life experience, and has been on this earth for longer. I think yeah, as I said, that just goes a long way. And I'm sure like you Ling, and like people listening in at the moment, it's just like, you would have had that one person, whether it's a teacher, whether it's like a family member, whether it's an older friend, or a relative or a family friend, or somebody like I think everybody has got that kind of Earth Angel, in a way

3:50 LING The Guardian Angel, yeah and Mr.E is a very good guardian angel, in my opinion, because he's very guiding. Yes, very, like, calming. And he kind of showed Alex, it's okay that everyone has their own thing going on. [Anika: Yeah]. And that school might not always be for everyone. Yeah, because I feel like, yeah, in today's society, it's almost as if like, oh, school is like you have, you've got to go to uni. You've got to do this, this and this. It's just like, that is a quote, right track in life. But that doesn't always work for everyone. And I think this is very well portrayed in Alex's character, because he's clearly not that passionate about school, but he's so much more passionate in other things and because of how academics works, that's very, like skipped over, but Mr. E really, you know, highlights that about him.

4:40 ANIKA Yeah. And I think it's important, especially as a creative person, to have that nurturing to have that support. Because obviously if you want to pursue something in a creative field, you need that support, like self belief, but also belief from other people, because that really goes a long way. And I think yeah, as you said, like, school isn't everyone's scene and that is totally okay. And I think like, especially when you come to the end of like year 12, or if you come to the end of like your schooling experience, there's a lot of emphasis on like, oh, what Uni you going to? And it's like, that's almost like the default. And even in myself, I've had to when I was finishing school and all that kind of thing, I had to reprogram my brain. And even when I speak to people who are finishing like high school at the moment, like, I'm really conscious about asking, like, reframing the question around, like, what uni you're going to?, to What are you doing now? Or what

are you pursuing outside of school? Because not everyone goes to uni. Not everyone does that. That's not everyone's like life path, as you said. And so I think it's important to acknowledge that, yeah, some people might get straight into work. Some people might take a gap year, some people might be volunteering, or like, be kind of exploring different avenues. And like, that's totally fine. Like, there's no, if you Yeah, I feel like there's a lot of pressure on young people when you finish school to go to uni. And I don't think that that is a realistic, like, portrayal of what actually happens, if that makes sense.

5:54 LING Yeah, no, I actually never thought about it that way, like asking people, you know, instead of saying, yeah, what Uni you going to, What are you doing now? Yeah, that's a very supportive way to look at it, I think.

6:06 ANIKA So I think the relationship between Alex and Mr. E is a really positive representation of support, especially from older people in a young person's life. And as he's like a teacher who really genuinely like cares for Alex and also has a really good balance of like giving him space, and allowing Alex to like, come to him in his own time, which I think is really important, and something that isn't shown with other characters and other people in Alex's life.

6:30 LING Yeah so let's just look at the other support systems that Alex has in his life. Firstly, the counsellor

6:37 [Clip from More Than This]

Counsellor Yes, exactly. Which is why I want this whole year to be positive. The last thing we need is for you to get stressed. I know that doesn't help with the epilepsy.

6:51 LING She was an interesting one, because, you know, she was trying her best, I assume. And she,

6:58 ANIKA I assume, hahaha.

6:59 LING I mean, I don't know. She wasn't featured very much, but from what I could see, she was trying her best. And I remember this, like specific line that she said, that was like, I can see you're a little bit stressed. And it's like, yeah, no, kidding.

7:16 ANIKA Yeah. Has that happened to you before Ling? Like, that's definitely happened to me before.

7:19 LING Yeah. Like, when I tell somebody, like all this is happening in my life. And they're like, you're just a little stressed out. You need to calm down...

7:29 ANIKA Yeah, or like when people I don't know, I feel like this happens a lot when people make a statement about like, what you're feeling. And it's like, okay, yeah, we're just like pointing out the obvious. It's like, I get it. I'm stressed. How can we like, how can...

- 7:41 LING How do we move forward from this? We acknowledge the stress. (*ANIKA Yeah, exactly*) Let's find a solution. (*ANIKA Exactly*) And that's what the counsellor is for, but she's just not doing the job correctly.
- 7:51 ANIKA Exactly. And you could see Alex was so uncomfortable in that he was like, rubbing his like legs, and he just kind of wanted to get out there. It felt like a very forced interaction, in my opinion.
- 8:00 LING Yeah. Like he was so stressed out about a conversation that he clearly did not want to have and he didn't know how to handle it. And it's clear that he doesn't want to think about it at all, even because I feel like the support systems around him, they're there, but they kind of, they kind of defined his character and his personality as simply just somebody who has epilepsy. And when the counsellor speaks about his condition, she speaks about it as if it's this like, really bad thing that shouldn't be talked about, because I think she like whispers it as well, which was, like, so demeaning to him, and obviously made him really uncomfortable. And even like, the way his mom treats him, is more of a patient than a person, in my opinion, because, like, it comes from a good place, obviously, because she's his mom, and she wants, like, what's best for him and it's clear that she's worried. But they're kind of just like defining him as someone with epilepsy, rather than just his own person. And they kind of disregard His interest with that as well.
- 9:04 ANIKA Yeah, it really occupies your mental space when you're kind of battling with different health conditions. And I think that like simply just like getting up doing things like going about your day, sometimes, when you're battling with, like, different health conditions, that is enough. (*LING Exactly*) Like do you know what I mean? And like, I think sometimes when people like, and I recognise that his mom is like, trying to be really supportive and like, trying to also just like, be really like, helpful in terms of like, trying to make him better and stuff like that. But sometimes it's like, this is a reality. I have this condition. I'm trying to live with that. And sometimes it's gonna be good. Sometimes it's not and that's just like the reality of it. I think sometimes just giving people space is actually very supportive, if that makes sense. And I think that's the difference between like Mr.E's approach, and the counsellor and Alex's mum's approach because I feel like they all have good intentions. Obviously, they all want to help Alex however, Mr.E really gives Alex space and he allows him to kind of be himself rather than kind of treats him as a patient.
- 10:03 LING Yeah, and also another character that I think actually really helps Alex is Charlotte as well, because they're really good friends. Yeah. Right. And they have such a good relationship. And even though they don't necessarily talk about his condition all the time, it's like a given that, you know, they're vulnerable with each other, and they give each other space and everything. Yeah, like you said, going back to space. Yeah. And I think this relates to, you know, the topic of vulnerability, and how this is used between Alex and Charlotte, versus Charlotte and Leon. Because it's clear that Charlotte and Leon have a very dysfunctional relationship. And even though Alex and Charlotte are vulnerable with each other, but it's used to construct the foundations of their relationship. It's used to make them stronger, and have a better friendship, because they know more about each other. They know how their minds work. Whereas with Charlotte and Leon, it's more like, we're trading secrets that we can use against each

other. The vulnerability is used as like a divisive technique, rather than to bring them closer together. And yeah also relates to how the counsellor was just horrible and not finding the right people for Alex, and kind of just forcing the vulnerability on to Alex, rather than letting him have the distance to say it for himself.

11:33 ANIKA Yes, I totally agree Ling. And I think that's a very important like sentiment and very important discussion to have because it definitely happens in day to day life and day to day relationships with people whether on like a kind of minor scale or on like a kind of more like amplified scale. It's definitely exists. But you wanted to spotlight the situation between like Alex and Charlotte, and the dialogue around that. In this particular episode, episode two, tell me more about it.

11:58 LING Yeah. So the reason I brought it up in the first place was because I remember the scene after the whole Charlotte and Leon thing. And then Charlotte and Alex were talking about it. And Alex, kind of got mad at her for kind of, quote, letting it happen. And then Charlotte's response to that was, she said that she was, quote, weirdly vulnerable, and it gave him even more power. And she didn't get closure. Which I think was very interesting, because I think a lot of people are afraid to get into relationships, because you have to be vulnerable with them. Like you have to be honest with them about who you are. But then if you're scared of that, it's like, how is this supposed to function? Like, how are you supposed to make that real connection with somebody else?

12:45 ANIKA Yeah, it's so true. And if you boil it down, like what a relationship is because I feel like it's commonly overcomplicated. Like, yeah, and so I think if you boil it down, it's just like, you have a connection with somebody. And naturally, you're learning about one another. And that's kind of how vulnerability like comes into play. And it doesn't have to be this big, like, gesture, where it's like, you have to be really vulnerable with somebody. It's just like, literally, Charlotte and Alex just literally say hello to each other, and the way that they greet each other and acknowledge each other. It's so like, colloquial, it's so wholesome. And it's just so you can tell how comfortable they feel with each other.

13:21 [Clip from More Than This]

Alex Hello Hello

Charlotte Hello sweet cheeks.

Alex You look like shit

Charlotte Very observant of you

I think your mom likes me more than she likes you.

Alex Yeah, I think she does too

Charlotte Speaking of, how was meditation? Do you need me to rub your temples for you? tell you to stay calm.

13:39 ANIKA It's just like that kind of, those little moments like can be little moments of vulnerability with somebody just like feeling comfortable with yourself and somebody else. We really encourage you to think about maybe people in your life that you can be

vulnerable with whether it's like you feel very connected to them, or you just have little moments of vulnerability and just like, yeah, just little moments. That's essentially what vulnerability is. And we really encourage you to think about people in your life that you can be vulnerable with.

We ask some young people who they feel comfortable being vulnerable with.

14:10 [Background Music]

Participant 1 The last time when I felt vulnerable was when I opened up to my best friend of all this really personal secret of mine that I told no one but only her.

Participant 2 I think really the one that I can recall of late definitely is the start of uni. My first year. I think my mental health was at a really interesting phase where I just started seeing a psychologist for the first time outside of the school counsellor. And in that process, you really have to open yourself to somebody who's a stranger to you at the beginning and you sort of have to trust them that vulnerable side of you and I remember sitting in that office and filling out that mental health plan, and kind of getting the results back from that and just feeling like oh my god, this is kind of the start of something different entirely, than how I'd been dealing with my mental health before,

Participant 3 I'll probably say, during year 12, or year 11. Because at home, it wasn't the best place to be, and even at work, but it was probably the only time I had time to myself, if that makes sense. There was a lot of dramas, but like, we went through it, so and it made.. at the end of the day made me stronger.

Participant 4 So I felt very vulnerable in the sense that you there wasn't a balance in my life. Well, there wasn't a bounce in anyone's life, really. But there wasn't a balance. So I found in the first lockdown, I was like, more motivated, like exercising during my work, going to bed at reasonable times. But in the second lockdown, I was sort of over it. So like, emotionally and mentally, I was a little bit fragile.

Participant 5 If I could describe a time I felt vulnerable, it would probably be right now because currently just going to university, and the fear that you will not meet people of your interest and you will fit into the culture that is in your uni is kind of scary. And it's, I do feel vulnerable because I'm at a point of weakness where I don't really have a safety net. I think once you accept you're in a vulnerable position, I think that's when you can move on, and not let the pressure get to you.

Participant 6 The most vulnerable I felt was when I transitioned into year 11. So at this stage, I had moved from country Victoria to Melbourne and I had gone to a new school, I had moved cities, everything had completely changed. And I just remember, like, yeah, being like, you know, taken away from friendship groups, where you feel really comfortable and you're confident in and being thrust into something new, which was really exciting to start with. But then when I actually got into it, I was like, oh my god, this is, this is awful.

Participant 7 I mean, anytime I have to talk about my feelings to anyone, I feel vulnerable. Like if I have to ask for help, especially. One particular example is when I had to get tested for a learning disability in like year 10. And that was really, really like I felt so exposed because it meant admitting that I needed help. And I thought that was a weakness. Like,

I don't think that anymore, but at the time, it was a big step for me to reach out and say, Hey, I think I might be struggling with something. And could you please help me?

Participant 8 I think I feel vulnerable all the time. But particularly the last couple of years, the late sort of teenage years, there's been a lot of confronting things that have, I guess, happened, given, you know, COVID, but also just, you know, doing year 11, and year 12. through that period. It sort of forced me and the people around me to be vulnerable and talk about our emotions a lot more, and really sort of feel the things that maybe before we would have pushed to the side. So I'd say yeah, particularly the last couple of years, it's been really, really vulnerable.

18:26 ANIKA Awesome responses there. Thank you to those who contributed. And I guess tying this back into that overall question of what does it mean to be an adolescent today from this episode, what stood out most to me was the concept of growing up and learning about yourself and your well being. I feel as though in your adolescence and all throughout your life. To be fair, it's all about learning how to live and manage with different health conditions or different hurdles that you might encounter, whether it be physical or mental, etc. Also, I felt as though in this episode, we learnt a lot about how to support people with varying health conditions, which is something that can be instrumental, especially in growing up and navigating these forms of identity. What did you find insightful Ling?

19:08 LING Yeah, so from this episode my main takeaway, which you could probably tell, but for me, it's definitely vulnerability and even watching the scenes and having to think about it as a concept made me like reevaluate all my relationships with people because being a team today or like just a human today is a process of opening up and finding space to let people really know you.

19:30 LING So that's a wrap. Thank you all so much for listening, and we will see you next episode.

19:35 [Theme Music]

20:07 LING If any of the content in this episode raises any issues for you, Kids Helpline's qualified counsellors are available via web chat, phone or email anytime and for any reason. Kids Helpline is Australia's only free, even from a mobile, confidential 24/7 online and phone counselling service for young people aged five to 25. Visit www.kidshelpline.com.au or call 1800 55 1800.

20:35 End