

Love Meets Joy Podcast
Episode 3: Dating and Relationships with a Facial Difference
Transcript

Ashley Barbour: Hello, everyone. Welcome back to the Love Meets Joy podcast on the Smile Train podcast network. We're super excited about our episode today. My name's Ashley. I was born with a bilateral cleft lip and palate. I'm the creator of CleftLove. And by day I work as a teacher consultant with students who have hearing loss.

Iva Ballour: And hey everyone, I'm Iva Ballou. I also was born with a bilateral cleft lip and palate. I'm the CEO of RealSophisticatedJoy and a cleft confidence coach by day. So today's episode, we are talking about dating with cleft. We know right now dating is, is hard. Like there's no other way to say around that but dating with a cleft takes on a whole other level of challenges and hurdles that we've had to jump through. And we're really excited to bring that topic here for you guys today. So before we get into that, Ashley, what's going on in your world.

Ashley: Um, so I just have to tell you, since we're talking about dating today, okay. Okay. I recently saw a video and it was a woman who was sort of talking about her current dating stories. And she said her goal for this summer is that she wanted to challenge herself to go on 55 different dates.

Iva: <laugh> Nope.

Ashley: She said that they didn't have to be first dates. So like they could be, you know, a date with the same person, if she met someone that she was interested in. But I just thought that was wild, because I was like, okay, so they're roughly 12 weeks, right? 12 weeks in the summer. So would you ever do something like that

Iva: 50 days? No, not in the summertime. <laugh> cause I'm sitting here like, um, when I'm going to sleep during this time, that is a real question that I have, I, I got stuff to do, but that also might be, you know, maybe she's onto something, but because as I really sit here and think about it, you could do like maybe a coffee date in the morning, catch lunch. That's true. And, and then do dinner. That's true. And then maybe on the weekend you stack your dates of, you know, we get dinner and app, we get drinks and appetizer and then another date I have dinner and a good ice cream date is always good. So, I could see how, but that's a commitment. That is a huge,

Ashley: It's a commitment

Iva: Commitment. And it just seems a little, it seems a little scary. Um,

Ashley: Yeah, for sure. And I don't know about you. Like I have kind of taken a little bit of a hiatus from dating. I think something about the wintertime just makes dating. I don't know. Less exciting. Yes. And so with summer upon us, uh, dating has been on my mind a lot. Mm-hmm <affirmative> and so I know you mentioned

Love Meets Joy Podcast
Episode 3: Dating and Relationships with a Facial Difference
Transcript

when you first sort of open the episode that dating is hard for everyone, but when you have a cleft, it adds an additional layer. And when I was growing up and I guess even in my twenties and, and even now, sometimes I have a hard time talking about dating with my friends or with my family because there's a part of me, not my, you know, my adult mature self, but there's a part of me that's sort of worried that someone might laugh or think that it's weird that I would want love or that I would be worthy of love. I, you know what I mean? I get,

Iva: Oh yes, I get that completely first off. It's just human nature. We all want love in some form. I don't care who you are. I think it's just a human thing. We all want love and some type of understanding. And I have to admit I was the opposite. Especially growing up. I was so boy crazy that I always had a crush. I always had someone that I liked, but it did have the same undertone of, I wanted someone to like me to validate how I felt about my cleft I was always searching outwardly because I just, I did not like that feeling. I didn't like the cleft and because I was so boy crazy what I actually ended up happening sometime. I don't know if you ever had this experience where it was like secret love, where they would like me or date me in privacy, but you never out in the public.

Ashley: Do you have a specific story where a guy actually told you that he was doing that? Or is that just your perception?

Iva: He didn't tell me that this is what he was doing. So the situation was, we were consistently dating. I mean, Ashley, we all the time, like my friends knew him. Yeah. We were going out every day, all day, hanging out. He would pick me up from work. Yeah. He would go have dinner. Just we were always together. Yeah. Yeah. And then around the three-month mark, I was like, oh, what is this? Just, and it was a casual question because there was something that we were going to go do. And I was like, oh, well that seemed more of a relationship-type thing. And he yeah. Sits me down and he's like, you know, I like you, but I can't. Yeah. I can't be your boyfriend. Oh, okay. Well why, why is that? Because you're going to have to tell me more than that. He didn't want to say it. And I was like, oh, because I had the inkling that it was because of my cleft, but I again wanted to make sure that's what it was. So I did make him say like what, why is it? And eventually, he came out and he was like, I just can't be with you because I don't know how to handle it. And I just remember thinking like, this is not new. We've been hanging out and dating for three months. Yeah. This did not just appear. Yeah. So that's what I mean.

Ashley: Yeah. And I think that something that's so disappointing about that is that he didn't want to show you off. He was embarrassed or something, which is sort of a deep-rooted fear of mine is I don't want someone to feel embarrassed of me. Same, but the long and short of it is that no matter who you are, what you look like, where you're from, you are worthy of love. And I am interested to have this

Love Meets Joy Podcast
Episode 3: Dating and Relationships with a Facial Difference
Transcript

conversation with you today because I think it touches on everyone's need to be loved and to want to find their person, you know?

Iva: Yeah. Cause I feel like it's and correct me if you don't feel the same way, but you get taught early on that, you know, part of, one of the joys of life is having a partner and you know, I grew up seeing my parents and they were very much in love. And so you just innately feel like, okay, one, I'm supposed to have that.

Ashley: Right.

Iva: But did you feel like, because of your cleft, you were going to be denied that?

Ashley: I, I think sometimes now I worry about that, but I think that what you said is true, there just, aren't a lot of examples of mm-hmm <affirmative> single independent people. Yeah. And for kids to look up to, I, I definitely think that, but I, at this point in my life, most of me feels confident with who I am and the cleft is part of that. But I do think that there's sometimes a part of me that's worried about it. So when you've been in relationships mm-hmm <affirmative> or here's another question, have you okay. Ever been in a relationship where you didn't ever talk about your cleft

Iva: <laugh> yes. It was actually that guy from the story that taught me a very valuable lesson because prior to that I was like, don't ask, don't tell, we don't have to discuss it. It's it's not there. Yeah. And I think that was another reason why I was so hurt by what he said, because I really thought that I had achieved getting around that. Does that make sense? Like you,

Ashley: You achieved your camouflage. Right? So now everybody's on the dating apps and so something that has been a learning experience for me related to that, because I also have had relationships where it just never came up. I never talked about it. They never asked about it and we just pretended like it didn't exist. Mm-hmm <affirmative> which at the time I was like, this is great. Like I don't have to talk about this. I don't have to be vulnerable. You know? Yeah. So then when I started being on the dating apps, when I first started, I didn't used to say anything about it because I was used to having relationships and not having to talk about it and right. You know, it was just more comfortable that way. And I think it's interesting because a lot of times I feel like in pictures and on video, mm-hmm, <affirmative> my cleft doesn't show up. So really I do feel like that. And so while I never mentioned in my profile that I had a cleft I wasn't intentionally trying to hide it mm-hmm <affirmative> in any photos or anything, but I do think guys would miss it. And then when I would show up to a date, they would be like, oh, and taken aback. Yeah. And not every guy, but I definitely do know the look I'm talking about once

Love Meets Joy Podcast
Episode 3: Dating and Relationships with a Facial Difference
Transcript

Iva: I know exactly that. Oh, oh, oh. And see, that is why

Ashley: That's a little different

Iva: Thought different. I feel the opposite about online dating. That was why I never really got into it because I feel like in pictures it is very obvious and I just didn't want to go down that road. So I actually, I, I, I can agree. I probably, when I was online dating, I never disclosed it either. And you would have to ask, you would have to blatantly ask me.

Ashley: Ah, so, and so what do you do now in relationships? Because you said that you sort of regret not bringing it up, especially in that situation, in the first story. So what is it that you do now?

Iva: That experience taught me the power of three. In fact, I remember the very first guy that I dated after him. It was almost like word vomit. I was within the first 10 minutes <laugh> I was like, Hey, by the way, I don't know if you can tell. Yes, but I was born, I went down the whole list because I was just like, never going to do that again. And with time I have learned to just do it a little bit more subtle and you know, a little bit more gracefully, but I go under the, the power of three and what that is anyone. Yeah. Whether it is platonic, romantic business, anyone mm-hmm <affirmative> within three times of engagement with me, you were going to know, Hey, this is a part of me. This is what I do. So there's no question. Yeah. Because it's almost, it's helped me show up authentically because I no longer have, as you said, like passing, because when you're passing, you're not even being true to yourself. So it's like, no, this is me. This is how I'm showing up. Right. You can take it. So what are you

Ashley: Doing now? Yeah. And I was just going to say it's a large part of our experience. Mm-hmm <affirmative> right. And so to, to not share that is to the detriment of, of us and the relationship. Um, what am I doing now? So, uh, I said initially I didn't disclose it ever. Now I actually put it in my profile. So I usually have a line that just says, you know, cleft affected and proud. So, uh, guys who are interested might Google it or whatever, when they're thinking about swiping, I'm also on Hinge. There's a prompt that says, have you been on Hinge before?

Iva: No, because it came out right when I was like, oh no, but this is how you get

Ashley: Off of here. Yeah. Okay. So on Hinge they have little prompts and you have to pick three and answer them. And one of the prompts is a cause that I really care about mm-hmm <affirmative> and I usually write something to the effect of, uh, creating a kinder and more inclusive world for people with cleft and craniofacial differences. So I put it in that prompt and then just in case they missed it in the pictures or in the prompt or in the profile, I'm

Love Meets Joy Podcast
Episode 3: Dating and Relationships with a Facial Difference
Transcript

Iva: Not

Ashley: Sure to bring it up just in conversation. But I also think you and I have a leg up kind of, because what we do on the side is cleft advocacy. And so in talking about what we do, uh, on the side, it, it sort of naturally comes up and I'm really grateful for that.

Iva: But I think I am going to have to take that tip if I do ever decide to get back on the dating app, I will have to take that tip because like, would you say that you've had, I would say that it probably is a great way to weed out people, wouldn't you say?

Ashley: Oh, a hundred percent because I have had it happen where I was talking with a guy we were going back and forth having really good conversation. Mm-hmm I don't know if it had been a couple of days, something like that. And I brought it up as I do. And the minute after I brought it up, he said, oh actually I just, all of a sudden I'm not feeling the vibe anymore. And I think we're not going to get along. And I was like

Iva: Long,

Ashley: You didn't even try to hide that know, but you know, thank goodness. Right? Because then we didn't actually make it going out on a date. I didn't spend the time getting ready. I didn't, you know, waste my time, going out to a restaurant for someone who isn't going to be supportive of that. And my hope for everyone with cleft and other facial differences is that they love themselves enough to, you know, show other people how they need to be loved as well. And so that guy just wasn't worth my time, you

Iva: Know, at all at all, because it kind of talks about how we want to get into making sure that you have your own self-acceptance of your cleft. And once you do that, it can really help change how you approach dating. Right? Yes. Would you say that? Yes,

Ashley: Totally.

Iva: Especially now with what you do and the work that you're doing, that you kind of approach dating differently, especially online.

Ashley: Yes. A hundred percent. So I have something that happened to me two different times and one was several years before the second time it happened. So the first time I was on a dating app and someone matched with me and their initial comment before they said anything else was "joker from Batman is that you?". I remember feeling like I just sort of dissolved into a puddle. I felt really hot and I

Love Meets Joy Podcast
Episode 3: Dating and Relationships with a Facial Difference
Transcript

could feel my face getting red, even though I was by myself, I just was utterly humiliated, sitting alone in my living room. And I immediately deleted the apps. I deleted everything because that fear I talked about at the beginning yeah. Where I'm worried that people are going to think that I'm not worthy of love or that it's laughable that I want love, like that all came out in that comment because he was like, why are you looking for it when you look like that? Mm-hmm

Iva: I don't like that. But I

Ashley: Just, on the other side of it, he, he was, and again, we did weed him out, right? Yes. But a few years later it happened again on a dating app where a guy messaged me and asked me if I was the joker from Batman. Never in my life had I ever heard that insult before, but those dating apps, man, they get you.

Iva: You're a brave soul Ashley, because I'm I don't, that's why I don't get

Ashley: But this time when it happened, I'm not going to lie. I still didn't feel good. It didn't feel good at all. Yeah. And I still felt embarrassed and, and I still felt those feelings, but I didn't feel them as deeply. And the thing that had changed was I knew in my heart that I am worthy of love. And so I didn't let his comment deter me from trying to meet someone else who might be a nicer, kinder person, you

Iva: Know? Yes. Ashley, I'm so proud that you had that moment. I'm like proud of you because little things like that when you realize like you have your own self-validation, it's easy to brush off what he said. And yeah, I get that because that's kind of where I I'm at now. So totally opposite of younger Iva who was completely boy crazy because she didn't like herself. It's like, now I'm like, oh I right. I really like me. I like Iva. You know, she's a little quirky. Yeah. But I have

Ashley: Joy. I like Iva too. Thank

Iva: You. Thank you. And so it just, because you now have that own sense of self when other people because like we want to be clear to the audience, we still have days where people will say things that are like really dude, but it doesn't affect us as much. And I think also because we now have our own sense of self-validation and where we stand with our cleft it also helps talking to other people about it. Would you like, how do you do that now?

Ashley: So something I will admit despite where I am and all the growth that I have made mm-hmm <affirmative> if I am somewhere and someone just asks me about it out of the blue, I do have a response planned like you and I have talked about in the past, it's important to have those planned responses, but I need a planned response because I still feel a sense of dysregulation. Okay. Around having to answer that on the fly. And so I do feel a lot more comfortable talking about it.

Love Meets Joy Podcast
Episode 3: Dating and Relationships with a Facial Difference
Transcript

Iva: Oftentimes with us having a cleft, we are made to feel like we are the ones that are uncomfortable or out of control or, or, you know, you get to ask that question, what's wrong with you. And so yes, by you bringing up the conversation, it allows for you to be like, okay, I'm comfortable enough with me. Yes. To bring this conversation. That is a hard conversation up to you now, if you're uncomfortable. Yes. That is on you. Am I correct? Yeah.

Ashley: Yes. I have found though that sometimes when I talk about it, it seems to make other people uncomfortable. It's just kind of a, an interesting thing. Because I think people are taught when you're a kid, you know, don't stare. Yes. Don't say anything about that person who looks different. So, it's ingrained in us to not say anything. Yes. And so I do think that sometimes it makes people uncomfortable, but again, like you said, it's on them. If it does, you know,

Iva: One of the biggest things that was helpful for me was saying affirmations, like I would say positive affirmations about, you know, I am whole, I am worthy of love. My love is full and deserving of the love of others. Because you just feel like I have love to give, I have joy to give and I just feel like nobody was going to receive it. And then one of my favorites that I've been saying lately and that's been working yeah. Is love is coming with all that you want, welcome him in with a smile. And so that's kind of like my, my main one right now. And like I said, it's, it's kind of working. Yeah.

Ashley: I love that. One of my affirmations that I started using mm-hmm <affirmative> in my dating journey is love exists without ambivalence because something I've run into in dating a lot is guys who are kind of wishy-washy and then they'll be super hot. And then all of a sudden disappear and the real love that's waiting for me will not be ambivalent. So that's one of the affirmations I take with me, for sure.

Iva: I like that. So I, I like to attach like he's firm in where, in his feelings for me, like, yes. There's no wishy-washy. We don't need that over here.

Ashley: No ambivalence. We don't do ambivalence in love. Nope.

Iva: Gotta be clear. Gotta be clear.

Ashley: Here's a question that is related to dating that. I'm curious if you've run into, in your relationships is kids. Okay. Has that been a topic that has come up before?

Iva: So you've, you know, when we did Cleft Con last year, I was completely against having kids. Yeah. And thanks to therapy, which we always talk about is actually a really great thing. I have worked through that and I am now okay. With admitting that I wanted kids. And it really was the fact of me being fearful that if I were to give birth to a cleft child, and again, I don't want to offend anyone when I

Love Meets Joy Podcast
Episode 3: Dating and Relationships with a Facial Difference
Transcript

say this, this was just my opinion, my belief and my fear that my husband would be disappointed. Yeah. In me.

Ashley: Because it was your fault.

Iva: Because it was my fault. Like I did this and it was like, my, my therapist was like, the man that you keep talking about would know that you would not have done that. Like you don't, no one gives their child totally. That you like, why are you putting so much pressure on yourself?

Ashley: Yes. It's so complicated. Because I've definitely heard both sides where some cleft affected people are like, I don't want kids because I don't want to have to put them through everything that I went through. But then I also think there's something powerful about someone cleft affected, raising a cleft affected child. Mm-hmm <affirmative> who can say I've been there, you know?

Iva: Yeah. It's one of those things where I can say now if I have a child, I know that there are others in the community that can help me along in that journey. But I want to know for you, are you open to having children? Because again, in this world of cleft you might be on either side.

Ashley: If I had a cleft-affected child, I would think who better to do it. You know? Because I've, I've ridden that journey before. Right. And I, I have been in a relationship though with a cleft affected man. And he had similar feelings that you did before, where he didn't want kids because he was worried about passing it on. So mm-hmm <affirmative> it, it is definitely complex though. And again, I want to say that no matter where you are on this spectrum, your feelings are valid and okay. Yes. And it's just an interesting conversation for us to continue. I think

Iva: It always is. Because we could actually still get into the fact that you've dated someone else who was cleft affected. But I, yes. Okay. We'll talk about that at another time. I might audience, you let us know if we need to have a whole separate episode about that, but now we have to go to break. Okay. So come back after hearing from our wonderful sponsor and let's talk about what does dating look like for us now.

Speaker 3: We are happy to tell you more about our sponsor: Smile Train. Smile Train pioneered a sustainable model of partnering with local medical professionals in more than 70 countries. In 22 years, it has supported more than 1.5 million safe cleft surgeries, more than all other cleft charities combined. And as many people in our audience know, children born with clefts often need more essential cleft treatments than just surgery. Because their partners provide local, year-round care, Smile Train is also able to fund nutritional support, dental care, orthodontic treatment, speech therapy, and psychosocial support for those who need it. Smile

Love Meets Joy Podcast
Episode 3: Dating and Relationships with a Facial Difference
Transcript

Train invests in their partners, providing them with the state-of-the-art equipment and training they need to make safe and quality care possible for those who need it most. To smiletrain.org/donate/lovemeetsjoy today and donate \$21 a month to make sure that every child with a cleft can receive the care they need whenever they need it.

Ashley: So now that we've talked a little bit about how acceptance of our own personal clefts have affected dating Iva, I'm curious, are you currently dating or what does it look like for you right now?

Iva: So I am currently dating and it's fun. I will say that it's

Ashley: Fun. Are you on the apps?

Iva: I am not on the apps in real life. I, I, I told you like, I don't know. I just, but I'm still not opposed because I'm dating and for me right now, dating means going out, having fun, enjoying, and it sounds like a shameless plug, but I'm just waiting for love to meet joy. And so he will meet me while I'm out and being about. Um, but I do know that at this point, one of the things that I am looking for is like the best way for if, if a man's going to show that he's interested in me, he has to be able to stand up for not just himself, but he has to be able to stand up for me. Like I grew up seeing my father being very vocal in his love for my mother. So there is no more room for secret love or kind of sort of love or confusion. Mm. Now I'm not saying audience that like you would see him all over my page and I'm going to be all over his page. That's not my idea. Like

Ashley: Social media.

Iva: On social media. That's just not me, but I cannot like, I need to know where you stand. You need to be firm. Yeah. In the way you stand. Um, and also being able to stand up to other people if they are not accepting of my cleft you know, um,

Ashley: Have you run into that before I have where someone hasn't done that

Iva: I haven't had someone not do it? Well, no. I would say because back when I was like the secret love phase, I would maybe be dating a guy privately, you know, little elementary school, high school type things. Yeah. And his friends would say things and he would never correct it. But I've also had the other way where we've talked about before, where one of my ex's actually confronted his mom about something that she said. And so now I want my men to be like that.

Ashley: Yeah. That's so important that they are not only accepting of who we are, but also willing to be advocates for us as much as we are advocates for ourselves

Love Meets Joy Podcast
Episode 3: Dating and Relationships with a Facial Difference
Transcript

- Iva: In a way they are almost going to have to become, <laugh> a spokesperson for it as well. Would you not agree? Like right.
- Ashley: <laugh> where we're open in on the cause. So if you're going to date me, then you got to be on the cleft and craniofacial advocacy train<laugh> you
- Iva: Gotta be, you got to be <laugh>
- Ashley: It's so true.
- Iva: What is, what are you doing now? I know that you've said that you're kind of taking a break, but like what is something that, you know, once you're ready to do it again, that you're going to be looking for.
- Ashley: I've had a couple of serious relationships in my life, but it has been several years now since I've been in one. So I have taken time to embrace who I am and find my independence. I bought myself a house. I, you know, I know that I can be just me and happy. I know that that is true. However, something I haven't intentionally worked on, I think because it's hard is healing. So actually the guy I dated who was also born with a cleft, we were together for four years, we essentially lived together. Uh, yeah. And when we broke up, I was devastated like yeah, totally ruined. And because of who I am and that I have a hard time dealing with those sorts of feelings. Yeah. My way to quote-unquote deal with it was to not, and to just super busy myself with everything and, and not think about it.
- Ashley: Right, right. So I started volunteering for things and, and I, because I couldn't sleep at night. So I would just do, do, do all during the day so that I could sleep. But because of that and how I did not deal with it at the time, I think that there's a part of me that is actually afraid of being in love and being with someone again. So there must be an energy in me that I'm putting out that is attracting men who are also resistant to relationships and love. Yeah. You know what I mean? And so I feel like I got to heal that part of me and tell her like, look, listen, we're grown now we're mature. Mm-hmm <affirmative> we can handle so much and we can be ready for love. So I just feel like I need to give her a little extra care before I move on. Have you ever found that you've needed to heal too?
- Iva: Yes. So after a guy said, I can't be with you because of your cleft. I dated two other guys after that. And that last one, it was great on some levels. Yeah. But I realized that there was something, a part of me that was not healed and whole yeah. And I was like, okay. Before I even tried to be with someone else, I might want to make sure that I'm okay. Yes. So I did the same thing. I took some time to really make sure that I was okay. And that's where my affirmations came from of saying I am healed. I am whole, I am ready. Yeah. And so now it's like, okay, I can confidently say, you know what? I'm I trust myself because I know myself

Love Meets Joy Podcast
Episode 3: Dating and Relationships with a Facial Difference
Transcript

and now it is safe for me to usher in love because I also know that I'm going to choose someone who is going to reciprocate that vulnerability and that safe space for me.

Ashley: Yes. Reciprocating vulnerability is so important.

Iva: Yes. Do you think maybe if you could decide on who brings up your cleft would be a better way for you to like feel a little bit better about dating or seeing his interests?

Ashley: Yes. So if I, I am dating someone, especially early on, I want to be the one who brings it up cause I want to be the one who's in control. You know what I mean? And it's really important to me that they react with interest as well. Like I said, sometimes I think when I bring it up now guys are inclined to maybe feel a little bit of discomfort around it just because of how a lot of us are raised around difference. Yeah. And I'm kind of hoping the current state of the world and the current energy of the world is that we're starting to become more aware and understanding and accepting of differences. So I'm hoping maybe that won't be the same in the future, but I would always prefer to be the one who brings it up. And I want a man who reacts with interest.

Iva: Well, Ashley, I'm a firm believer that that is possible for us. You know, I've said it to you before and I'm going to keep saying we miraculously made this podcast happen. So there's no way that we can't make love happen for us in the way that it's intended. And the way that we deserve like love is going to meet us.

Ashley: <laugh> yes. We're just going to manifest that. <laugh> but when we manifest it Iva, we are going to come from a fully healed space fully and we're just going to bring it in and there's again, not going to be any ambivalence.

Iva: None of it. None of

Ashley: It made it

Iva: Happen though. And we are just pulling it into us and again, remember love is coming, welcome him in with a smile.

Ashley: Yes. And that brings us to our favorite end of the episode segment that we like to call Smile and Slay where we talk about questions that we've heard from friends and family. So this one is particularly appropriate for right now. And sort of the pandemic that we've been living through over the last couple of years. Yes. How did you feel about mask-wearing Iva?

Love Meets Joy Podcast
Episode 3: Dating and Relationships with a Facial Difference
Transcript

Iva: So I think that I'm one of the few cleft-affected people that that might feel the opposite way. I was very afraid that if I continued to wear the mask, I would get too comfortable in hiding again, growing up, I had several techniques to cover my cleft such as like wearing a really long bang, um, looking down so never looking up, just I had a lot of different techniques and I really started to realize, oh, I was getting too comfortable in the mask, what? It was like a disguise. And I was like, and so I did not like wearing the mask. I did it because it was needed. And then for my protection, of course. What about for you?

Ashley: So I loved it really especially, well, okay. Let me say in the very beginning, I didn't like it because I think it reminded me of surgeries and medical stuff at first. Okay. Yeah. So I think in the beginning it used to like kind of bring up kind of a weird thing. But soon after I started wearing them out in public and going to the grocery store, I realized that I was able to be in the world, exist in the world as if I was a person who didn't have a difference. So I was like, wow, this is really wild that I get to experience this for the very first time that I get to experience how people would treat me if I didn't have a difference at all. Mm-hmm <affirmative> so that has been largely my experience. However, something that does make me a little bit uncomfortable is the idea that I still work in a school district where I work with kids and yeah, we still have mask mandates in place. Yeah. And so I have some kids who I think have never seen me without a mask before mm-hmm <affirmative> and so I don't know, that gives me a lot of anxiety. If I have to think about seeing someone I haven't seen before without it on because then they'll be like, oh,

Iva: And see, that's why I was like, I don't want to get too comfortable wearing this because I knew that we were going to go back to not wearing them. And that was just the whole thing.

Ashley: Yes. And then you have to get back into finding, establishing that confidence. Mm-hmm

Iva: <affirmative> exactly.

Ashley: For sure. Well, I have totally enjoyed talking to you about dating. This is something that I love about our relationship is that we can talk about stuff like this. Mm-hmm <affirmative> where no one else literally no one else in my life. Who can I talk to about this sort of thing? Who gets it? You know, so I just so appreciate that you get it. And for our listeners, we would absolutely love to hear about your cleft-affected dating experiences and also your opinions about having to wear a mask. Yes. If you found it comforting or not. Um, but overall that's our show for today and we're so grateful to all of you for listening. And again, we'd love to hear from you. You can find me on Instagram at CleftLove IG or on TikTok at CleftLove

Love Meets Joy Podcast
Episode 3: Dating and Relationships with a Facial Difference
Transcript

Iva: And everyone, you can find me on Instagram and TikTok at RealSophisticatedJoy. We absolutely want to hear from you let us know if there was something that we missed because with dating there's so much that goes on, right? Let us know. But also don't forget to go to smiletrain.org, to learn more about all of the wonderful things that Smile Train is doing for the cleft community and around the world. You can find us on your favorite podcast streaming site while you're there. Don't forget to leave us a five-star review. Thanks for listening. We'll see you guys next time.

Ashley: Bye.

Speaker 3: If you like this show, be sure to subscribe, leave a review, follow us on social and tell all of your friends to listen. Please reach out with any questions or episode ideas by emailing us at lovemeetsjoy@smiletrain.org. We can't wait to hear from you. Love Meets Joy is a product of Smile Train. Our hosts are Iva Ballou and Ashley. Our Senior Producer and Editor is Ariel Nachman. Our Smile Train Producer is Adina Lescher. Love Meets Joy is presented by Smile Train the world's largest cleft focused organization. One in 700 babies is born with a cleft, a potentially life-threatening birth difference that can cause difficulties eating, breathing, hearing, and speaking. The good news is that Smile Train developed a sustainable model that empowers local healthcare workers around the world to provide lifesaving cleft treatment, to all who need it everywhere on earth 100% free. Learn more at [smile train.org](https://smiletrain.org). The information provided in these recordings is meant to be helpful to you and is provided as is for informational purposes. Smile Train cannot guarantee it is accurate up to date or error-free. We are not responsible for the content and disclaim all liability concerning actions taken or not taken based on these recordings.