

## About IBD Podcast Episode 94

### Single Motherhood and IBD With Brooke Abbott

Motherhood comes in all shapes and sizes. The intersection of inflammatory bowel disease (IBD) and motherhood is often left out of the discussion and single motherhood and IBD is pretty much ignored altogether. That's why I asked my close friend and co-founder of IBDMoms, Brooke Abbott of The Crazy Creole Mommy Chronicles, to tell me about her challenges and her successes living with IBD, a j-pouch, and being a single mom of a young son.

Concepts discussed in this episode:

- [What Are the Five Love Languages?](#)
- [An Overview of Asacol \(Oral Mesalamine\)](#)
- [How Does Implicit Bias Influence Behavior?](#)
- [Black Women Suffer Most From Restrictive Reproduction Policies, Study Shows](#)
- [Racial Disparities in Maternal Health May Be at a Pivot Point](#)
- [Motherhood Unplugged on Lights, Camera, Crohn's](#)

Complete show notes and transcript found at <https://aboutibd.com/?p=1965>.

Find Brooke Abbott on [Twitter](#), [Facebook](#), and [Instagram](#) and on her blog, [The Crazy Creole Mommy Chronicles](#).

Find [IBDMoms](#) on [Facebook](#), [Twitter](#), and [Instagram](#)

Find Amber J Tresca at [AboutIBD.com](#), [Verywell](#), [Facebook](#), [Twitter](#), [Pinterest](#), and [Instagram](#).

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#### [MUSIC: About IBD Theme]

#### **Amber Tresca 0:04**

I'm Amber Tresca and this is About IBD. It's my mission to educate people living with Crohn's disease or ulcerative colitis about their disease and to bring awareness to the patient journey.

Welcome to Episode 94.

IBD already brings challenges to every aspect of life, including parenthood. However, being a single mom living with IBD presents some unique circumstances, including everything from managing doctor's appointments, to financial stability, to health insurance.

My guest is my friend and frequent traveling partner, Brooke Abbott of The Crazy Creole Mommy Chronicles and IBD Moms. You have heard her on this show before, discussing topics such as public policy and racial equity.

Brooke has a son, Jaxon, and as she'll tell you, she started out with a live-in parenting partner, but he now lives in another state.

That's why for this episode we are discussing what it is like to be a single mom living with an IBD. The intersection of IBD and the motherhood journey is already not often discussed but the perspective of single moms are missing from the conversation altogether.

A heads up on the content: This is a candid conversation and includes a mention of pregnancy loss. Please take care if you find this topic uncomfortable.

In her seventh appearance on About IBD, let's welcome Brooke Abbott.

Brooke, welcome back to About IBD

**Brooke Abbott 1:27**

Thank you for having me.

**Amber Tresca 1:30**

This may be your fifth or sixth or seventh time, I think I'd have to go back into the archives. But this time, I want to get into your journey in single motherhood while living with the IBDs. But first off, I think we need to go a little bit into your disease journey just to get a level set as to where you are, what your diagnosis was, and what kind of surgery and complications that you had, especially as it relates to your motherhood journey.

**Brooke Abbott 2:04**

Well, I was diagnosed in 2008. But I always go back because I started feeling symptoms in 2001. It was my first week of college. I was super excited. And but it was kind of weird. My first week of school was the week of 9/11. And so it was like I started school and 9/11 happened. And then all of a sudden, I started not feeling good. I thought I had kind of caught the flu. And then the symptoms from that just continued to the point where I started really failing at school and I had to drop out. And then I started work. And then I wasn't doing so great at work either.

**Amber Tresca 2:48**

It's kind of odd that like that's like you dropped out of school to go to work because you weren't doing well.

**Brooke Abbott 2:54**

Yeah. Do you know what I mean? I thought I thought well, cuz you know what it is I dropped out thinking like oh God, I just can't handle school. Like, all of a sudden, I'm not a good student. Maybe college wasn't for me, because I'm falling asleep in class. And I'm, you know, unable to

get up in the morning. I just thought what was happening with me was maybe like bad diet, nervous stomach stress. And I wasn't a good college student. So then I went to work in Hollywood, because that's what you do when you're stressed. You go to work for 16 hours on your feet straight and have people yell at you for no really good reason whatsoever.

**Amber Tresca 3:33**

Well, what were you doing though, what was what was your job?

**Brooke Abbott 3:35**

I went from being a production assistant to being in an assistant director and a production manager. So I was diagnosed in 2008 with ulcerative colitis. And you know, I didn't really understand it too much. I really didn't. I went into remission, but I still I just didn't have a good handle on it. I became pregnant in 2009. And then in 2011, I became a single mom, and in 2012 I had my colon removed and I now live with a j-pouch. I have all these beautiful extra intestinal manifestations that I love so much they make me want to have a party every time they pop up. And you know it's great you know, it's funny now living with my j-pouch and and you know being on the treatment plan that I'm on my chronic pouchitis is pretty well controlled, but all the little extra things are not very well controlled and because literally everything that bothers me now has to do with all of the outside gut stuff.

**Amber Tresca 4:52**

I think that's something that I hear every so often from j-pouch patients is like the j-pouch is all fine and good. But then there's other things that crop up. And then of course, there's all the situations that you have that never leave you like the fatigue. You were working in Hollywood, and because you know, that wasn't stressful enough, you decided to start your motherhood journey. Take me back...

**Brooke Abbott 5:21**

Yeah.

**Amber Tresca 5:22**

...to how that all came about, because that's something that a lot of women with IBD are obviously concerned about in the first place is even just being able to get pregnant.

**Brooke Abbott 5:32**

Yeah. So initially, I was told that I had to be healthy enough, or that I should be healthy enough, before I started my family planning, so I actually went on birth control, because I felt like I had to control that situation. But then somehow, I became pregnant a couple times while on birth control between my diagnosis and between the birth of my child, I had some losses.

**Brooke Abbott 6:02**

And right before I found out that I was pregnant with my child, I was told that with the shape that my body was in with, you know, the losses that I had experienced that I wouldn't be able, I

probably wouldn't be able to have children. And then about three weeks later, I found that I was pregnant.

**Brooke Abbott 6:23**

It was so like, I wanted to be so excited. But I was so scared. I spent most of my pregnancy, completely scared that I feel like, you know, I wrote I tried to like, enjoy it. I tried to write things down. I tried to go to the classes and do all the fun stuff. But I was on a modified petrest for most of it. I had an OB GYN who was trying to understand it, understand my IBD but but she really didn't. And I had a GI who I had to go to because I had no insurance. I got kicked off with my insurance before I became pregnant. And so then I had to go on California, as Medicaid is called MediCal. And so I had to go on. I had to go on that insurance.

**Brooke Abbott 7:19**

And so they sent me to a GI who was not a specialist in IBD. And he told me that I simply had him right. And that people like me, didn't have Crohn's disease. And I said, Well, I don't have Crohn's disease. I have ulcerative colitis. And he goes, No, no, no, no, what you're describing is Crohn's disease and people like you don't have Crohn's disease. You don't have Crohn's disease. You have hemorrhoids.

**Amber Tresca 7:42**

What did he mean people like you, what is that code for?

**Brooke Abbott 7:45**

Uh, you know, that is a mystery. But I'm pretty sure that I can guess what he meant. You know, I've actually had green eyes. And doctors asked me if I'm part Jewish, because they they know that Jewish people get inflammatory bowel disease. And perhaps I have IBS, which I do have IBS also, but it is confirmed. I have IBD. And it is confirmed I'm not Jewish. So you know. And so my care was just not great. I was taken off of my meds because of the pregnancy because of the pregnancy. And because apparently, you know, I didn't have IBD I had hemorrhoids. And because my gynecologist was uncomfortable, because she just didn't really understand the effects of the medication on the baby.

**Amber Tresca 8:45**

Can you share what medication it was or what class of medication it was?

**Brooke Abbott 8:49**

Yeah, I was on a on an 5-ASA and a steroid.

**Amber Tresca 8:56**

Okay, which had been in use for many years by that time. Yeah. So there was data. It wasn't a mystery.

**Brooke Abbott 9:02**

Yeah, no, it wasn't a mystery. But I think that we were also up against the idea that perhaps I really didn't have all sort of colitis. unconscious bias that follows patients of color is so deep. People don't even realize that they're being bias or that they're being racist or people and giving them poor treatment, based on you know, their ideas of what black women feel what black women know, what black women can get.

**Brooke Abbott 9:39**

There are these two things that really follow black women and it's very hard. The first one is that we are not maternal, and that we are prone to, you know, not caring for our children or we don't want to have children or we don't want to be pregnant or that we're We're just not maternal. And that really is something that continues. And the second is that we don't, we're like super strong, and we don't, we have a super high tolerance for pain, or we don't feel pain, physical or emotional, that we are not emotional creatures and that we, you know, don't have feelings.

**[MUSIC: About IBD Piano]**

**Amber Tresca 10:34**

Tell me about what some of the challenges are about -- I know that there's like a like a list as long as your arm probably yours and my arm put together. But what is some of the things maybe as they relate to IBD, and I think about it all the time, every time I have to deal with an IBD situation and how I would handle it, if I didn't have a live in partner that could step right in. So tell me what that has been like for you.

**Brooke Abbott 11:00**

Yeah, I didn't start off as a single mom. So having to balance motherhood in a chronic condition is an art form in itself. But when you have a partner who's at home, who can pick up the slack, but more so I have found out the biggest support is the fact that they can go and create financial stability for your household while you are sick.

**Brooke Abbott 11:32**

My parenting partner lives in another state. So in the beginning, he was coming once a month. And then there were a couple years where he could come twice a month. And it still felt like a lot because I was still you know, even though he contributes financially, a portion, it's different than having a shared bank account. So there's just all these little different things.

**Brooke Abbott 11:56**

And I think that's what really bothers me. I mean, I'm kind of put this out there, it really bothers me, when I see married moms, who are financially stable, who have spouses, leaving for work going on a work trip, and they say, Oh, I'm a single mom, this weekend, you're not a single mom, this weekend, you're maybe a solo Mom, you know, you may have to pick up the slack in certain ways. But you don't have to worry about not making it to work on time and not making a deadline. And missing that paycheck that could literally change the whole, you know, your whole situation at home. The pressure is so great.

**Brooke Abbott 12:50**

The amount of pressure, I'm not just raising a child, I am leading an entire household. What's hard, the hardest part is having to be everything all the time, and never feeling like I can be off.

**Amber Tresca 13:11**

There are also benefits to being an IBD Mom.

**Brooke Abbott 13:14**

Yeah.

**Amber Tresca 13:15**

What do you think some of those are for you?

**Brooke Abbott 13:18**

Well, I think, I think having the condition itself? Well, first of all, the very first thing is it allowed me to be a stay at home mom for, you know, the first two years of his life. Because I'm not working in Hollywood, because of my condition, I work from home a lot more. And I do have these, you know, interesting jobs that I travel for, and that I'm home for. And so it allows me to do more things that I think I would not have been able to do more things that, you know, my mom wasn't able to do. And she always reminds me of that when she sees that I'm getting like, on myself and feeling guilty. You know, she's like, you got to do this, you get to do that. And, you know, he's experienced just a different side of humanity, because of my condition.

**Brooke Abbott 14:14**

And because of the advocacy work that I've been doing. And, and then you know, also there are, there are a couple pluses to being a single mom, but just being able to kind of like, get up and go and have your own plan, kind of being able to navigate our own path is kind of nice, not having to really check in with someone all the time about the choices that I make. You know, there's just there is a little bit of independence there.

**Brooke Abbott 14:46**

But I think also, it's kind of made him a little more self sufficient. So I feel like that, that works out for us. It's an interesting dynamic, you know, My child and I are also super close.

**Brooke Abbott 15:03**

I don't want it to come off. Like, I don't want people to feel sorry for me, I think that I want people to understand that it is a different type of motherhood, it is a different journey. It's not, it's not harder, it's not easier. It's just different. I think I would, I just want people to really respect the path that single moms have to go through. Because it really is more than just, you know, picking up the slack, you're literally molding and raising and helping another human being all by yourself.

**Brooke Abbott 15:42**

In all the ways I am the good guy and the bad guy. And when I'm the bad guy, there is no good guy for him to kind of turn to so then I got to flip it and be the good guy in like five minutes when I really don't want to because tweens are annoying.

**Amber Tresca 15:58**

I already do that because you know, perimenopause, I could be the good guy and the bad guy in rapid succession. So, obviously, you need different kinds of support than for instance, that kind of support that I need having a live in partner to parent my children. So where do you find support? And how much of your time are you actively spending cultivating relationships in regards to your motherhood journey?

**Brooke Abbott 16:27**

Pre pandemic? You know...[LAUGHTER]

**Amber Tresca 16:32**

A lot of things have fallen off.

**Brooke Abbott 16:34**

Yeah, it's it. I was sitting down talking to someone just you know, about how difficult this year has been, and how all of our personalities have changed. I was the only one for a long time with a baby. And, you know, that was just a different dynamic, you know, for people who see couples or singles who didn't have children, you know, so I was constantly looking for moms and and so that kind of led me into being in the the mom influencer sphere.

**Brooke Abbott 17:07**

And when I was doing a lot of advocacy work for people living with autism, I found a lot of moms there. And then when I came into the IBD space, I found a lot of moms. And I think that's what, you know, pushed me to work with you on IBD Moms because I realized, like we really needed, there's just a different, we have different needs. We have different questions, we have, you know, different concerns. And it's beyond pregnancy. That's beyond loss, you know, how are we navigating our day to day in different ways with children of different ages and different needs themselves?

**Brooke Abbott 17:50**

Right now...my, you know, my biggest support are that the small circle of friends and and when you get into that circle, it's not just me that you're supporting, you're also supporting Jax. I don't think many people could really understand the nuance and I have my my own personal journey. But I think that people who are considerate, and don't feel the need to, I don't want to say don't feel the need to help me, but maybe, like, try to navigate the course, who have learned my love language. Let's look that's that's what I think moms need...

**Amber Tresca 18:27**

Oh, love languages...[LAUGHTER]

**Brooke Abbott 18:33**

Yes...

**Amber Tresca 18:34**

I think about this so much this specifically because I still don't understand what my love languages are. And I don't think people fall into buckets, like I really don't. But at the same time, like I recognize what my children need, I know what they need. Am I always able to give it? Maybe not...but I know what they need...

**Brooke Abbott 18:54**

You know, and you work hard at that. And I feel like those are the friendships that I value. And that helped me that best support me are the friends who see and understand what I need in terms of support.

**Brooke Abbott 19:12**

Someone asked me the other day, like how can I best support you and I'm like, just be my friend. You know, talk to me about all the things. I've had friends who are married who don't talk about their husbands to me because they think it makes me sad. And that's not what I want your I want to enjoy your life. I want to participate in your life. I want to have you participate in mine. And that is the best way to support me and also having people around me that my child knows he can go through my phone, grab their numbers and text.

**Amber Tresca 19:50**

My motherhood journey has been vastly improved after I met you because there were no other mothers like me.

**Brooke Abbott 20:01**

Yeah.

**Amber Tresca 20:02**

I don't think I know what your love language is, though.

**Brooke Abbott 20:05**

You do though.

**Amber Tresca 20:07**

I think your love language is different from the five that have been laid out in the famous book because I think your love language is 90s music

**Brooke Abbott 20:16**

And yours is not. And it breaks my heart. But I love you through that, even though it's a hard path for me to walk.

**Amber Tresca 20:27**



Yeah, I mean, can we talk about that for a second? Because I think part of loving someone is not that you have to love their faults, but you definitely have to see them for what they are. And I'm speaking specifically of 90s music as a fault.

**Brooke Abbott 20:49**

I guess I know...

**Amber Tresca 20:51**

I know. It's, you know, understand, but it's it's not saying to yourself that, oh, they're not like this, or Oh, they don't have this thing that annoys me. But it is. It's also not saying I'm going to find a way to love this thing about this person that annoys me. Like, I don't think that's necessary, either. But I do think you have to find a way to coexist with it. Again, it's not about net losses and gains. It's just...you just can't think of it in that way.

**Brooke Abbott 21:22**

Yeah, I think you appreciate the things that work for you and that relationship with that person. And you understand that not everything is going to work for you with that person or that you're not going to see eye to eye on everything. Yeah, I don't know, I would have no one to try and convince that Fleetwood Mac is the greatest band of all time, with if you love Fleetwood Mac. And that would be very boring, because we would just be listening to Stevie Nicks all day long, although...

**Amber Tresca 22:02**

I don't dislike it's just not what I would choose for myself. Fleetwood Mac is just not what I would choose for myself.

**Brooke Abbott 22:09**

I would choose Fleetwood Mac for everyone in the world if I could, but I understand that that's just not a possibility. So I'm gonna have to live with that.

**Amber Tresca 22:18**

But I feel the same like people...I've never had anyone tell me that they don't like Prince. I've never heard that.

**Brooke Abbott 22:25**

I've heard that. And that almost made me pass out.

**Amber Tresca 22:28**

Who would say that? Who said that? Was it Tipper Gore?

**Brooke Abbott 22:31**

It wasn't Tipper Gore. [LAUGHTER]

**[MUSIC: About Transition]**

**Amber Tresca 22:39**

I think one thing about children of parents who have IBD is that they grow up to be more empathetic than other people do.

**Brooke Abbott 22:49**

Oh, yeah. I absolutely think that's true. I think that when you grow up, watching a parent, not necessarily struggle, but survive certain basic situations, you open your heart a little bit more to people, you appreciate other people's experiences, because your experience was not normal. I mean, I have empathy for people because my mom was a single mom, and I watched her, tried to do all the things I have empathy for people, because my mom is a small business owner. And you know, I'm watching her struggle through this pandemic. And I think that when it comes to chronic illness, you know, being around people who are differently abled, it changes your perception of life for the better.

**Amber Tresca 23:41**

How do you think that that applies to a person as they grow up, and they enter into their career and they enter into relationships with other people?

**Brooke Abbott 23:50**

I think it helps with your listening with your communication. I think that it gets you out of a silo. You know, for example, my child is really into politics. And he really wants to become president. And a long time ago. He said that he would start having movie nights on Fridays at the White House and invite all the families of people who didn't have a lot of money, because he knew that they may not ever be able to tour the White House. And so he would have Paul McCartney come and play guitar. And he would cook these people dinner, and they would have dinner and he would put up a movie on the lawn and they would be able to watch movies and hang out.

**Brooke Abbott 24:40**

And I said every Friday, like isn't that gonna be a lot you can be President of the United States and you got you know, presidents do a lot of work and he's like, Mom, they're like 75 people on the West Wing. That's what they're there for. They're there to work on different things. I'm there to help people know that America is a good place to live.

**Brooke Abbott 25:00**

And I feel like he understood the importance of family of togetherness, but also that some people don't have opportunities to do other things. Because he lives with a mom with a chronic condition, he lives with a mom who is a single parent, he goes to a church where the incomes are very mixed, where he's had to volunteer to feed people that you know, are on the street and where he's donated backpacks full of school supplies to people that to kids in his Sunday school.

**Brooke Abbott 25:37**

And those experiences have started to shape him at a young age, and that will stay with him for the rest of his life. And so if there's one thing I'm, you know, I'm grateful for IBD. And for my advocacy work, it's that it has taught my child that life doesn't begin and end at our front door. There's a whole other world out there with people with different situations, and different abilities. And they all deserve everything that he has, and more...

**Amber Tresca 26:10**

Does have a backup for Paul McCartney, because I think he's got a few years before he's going to be president.

**Brooke Abbott 26:19**

He volunteered my stepdad.

**Amber Tresca 26:22**

Does he have a backup for his backup? May they live forever...

**Brooke Abbott 26:29**

But guess what, here's the killer. He told my grandmother that when he runs, he would make sure that she moves her from Holy Cross cemetery, to the White House cemetery, so that she can be with him while he's at the White House. Paul McCartney and my grandma the same age. So number one, and number two, um, there is no White House cemetery.

**Amber Tresca 26:55**

I thought you were telling me something that I didn't know just now I was like, alright...

**Brooke Abbott 26:58**

No, no, they're is no White House cemetery. In fact, when we went to go tour, the White House, he pointed to where he would bury my grandma. And it was near Michelle Obama's garden. And I was like, I don't know how Michelle Obama's gonna feel about grandma being so close to her tomatoes, but okay, cool.

**Brooke Abbott 27:22**

Meanwhile, I can't live in the White House, by the way. Grandma can be there.

**Amber Tresca 27:31**

Well, may they both live forever. And may, Jax's grand, and very specific, plans come to pass.

**Brooke Abbott 27:42**

One can only hope. You know, one of the great things about being a parent is watching the world through, you know, our kids eyes, and like how pure their hearts are, you know, and how easy it is to just love and understand people and give to people. And so I hope, you know, we tend to lose that as we get older, right?

**Brooke Abbott 28:10**

But when you come from a background where you are forced to see a little more reality than your friends, I think it sticks with you a little bit longer. And I'm just saying that from you know, my own. My own experience. I didn't have a mom with a chronic disease. But I did have a single mother and I do have a family full of very strong, very opinionated women. And that helped me that helped give me the strength to really not just survive through my disease or survive through single motherhood but to thrive through my disease to thrive through single motherhood, to thrive through the pandemic and to cultivate a village of amazing people, amazing humans that I know my kid can count on.

**Brooke Abbott 29:05**

And that that's like, that's the greatest gift I have. Is that knowledge and the support of my village and yeah, man, I got a good life. You know?

**[MUSIC: IBD Dance Party]**

**Amber Tresca 29:19**

Brook, we're out of time...

**Brooke Abbott 29:22**

Amber, thank you for the platform. Thank you for being my friend. Thank you for sending my kid postcards during the pandemic that like made him laugh and smile. Yo, if you're listening to this, get a friend like Amber, get a village of ambers seriously get, you know, create that for your for yourself and for your kid.

**Brooke Abbott 29:45**

You don't have to be friends with people who are not contributing to your life. And I think that when you are raising children, the best thing that you can do is to have people who are contributing to your life into your children's life because it makes a difference. Thanks, girlfriend.

**Amber Tresca 30:05**

Thank you. All right. I'll talk to you soon. Probably in like five minutes.

**Brooke Abbott 30:09**

Yeah, yeah. Okay. All right. Bye.

**Amber Tresca 30:11**

Bye.

**Amber Tresca 30:17**

Hey super listener! Thanks to Brooke Abbott for being willing to discuss her motherhood journey in a frank and transparent way.

You can follow her on Instagram as @crazycreolemama, on Facebook as @crazycreolemommy, and on Twitter as @CrzyCreoleMommy. Her blog is crazycreolemommy.com. I will put links to all her social media and to more information about the topics we discussed in the show notes.

Talking about IBD is already uncomfortable. The intersection of motherhood and IBD adds even more challenges in finding support. However, the days of us all coping with these difficulties alone are over. That's why Brooke and I founded IBDMoms. IBDMoms is a space for moms and moms-to-be who live with an IBD and moms of kids with IBD to find help and support. Our closed group on Facebook is a great space to ask questions and get answers from other moms whose lives are touched by IBD. You can connect with us across all social media as @IBDMoms.

I will put all of these links in the show notes and on my Episode 94 page on [AboutIBD.com](http://AboutIBD.com).

Thanks for listening, and remember, until next time, I want you to know more About IBD.

About IBD is a production of Mal and Tal Enterprises.

It is written, produced, and directed by me, Amber Tresca.

Mix and sound design is by [Mac Cooney](#). Theme music is from [Cooney Studio](#).