Discipline In Development: Nurturing Emotional And Behavioral Growth In Toddlers And Youth Transcript

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Introduction and Summit Welcome

Welcome back to ADHD, Autism and Chronic Disease Parenting Summit. I'm here with the absolutely fantastic Tammy Shamoon from the Institute of Child Psychology and one of the coauthors for the Parenting Handbook.

Thank you so much for being here. I'm really excited to chat today. Yeah. Me too. It's only we we've been following each other's accounts for a while, so it's nice to finally connect.

Like this way. So super happy with the work you're doing too. It's really good. Really good stuff. Thank you. That's really kind of. You have one of the the best parenting accounts.

You going to get so much great information. So I really I'm very honored to chat with you today. Wonderful. Well, let's jump right in. We're going to talk about discipline, neurological development.

And so I guess we can start with just the neurological development of the child and how the maturing brain and structure really relates to the common behavioral challenges that we see in childhood.

Yeah. I think, you know, when parents think of discipline, most of the time, what they're really talking about is emotion dysregulation. And so like, big behaviors come from really big feelings.

And you know, I'm a parent of three kids, and I've been doing clinical work with kids for about 15 years now. And I can tell you, like, kids want to do well when they can.

So usually what's happening is we have a child brain meeting an adult brain, and there are mismatches that are kind of going on there. And then, you know, we have some dysregulation happening with us, which then feeds further into what is going on in kind of their brain.

Brain Development and Emotional Dysregulation

So I think or whether we're talking about brain development or emotion dysregulation or discipline, it all kind of like goes together when you understand the way information flows in the brain.

If you know where to intervene as a parent and as a professional, like anybody who works with kids, has to understand how information flows in the brain, and then you know what to do about it.

And, you know, like what gets in the way. Yes. Can you tell us a little bit more about that in terms of the information flow on what parents to start thinking about?

Because I know, you know, a lot of parents come to me. I'm sure they come to you when their kids are dysregulated. They're having tantrums that they feel like are outside of the norm, or they're just very frustrated with with their kid.

So where do you usually start with this? In terms of and this? So everyone who is like a parent who's really well read will understand where the influence came in for here is from like work of like Doctor Dan Siegel, Doctor Tina Price and Doctor Bruce Perry.

Doctor Bessel van der Kolk, Stephen Poor. Just like there's so many people who influenced this, I just want to be clear, this is not like all original research here, but if we really break it down to information flows from the base of the brain upwards, and if we think of the base of the brain is being the brain stem.

So think of it as three floors of the brain. And this is an oversimplified we know this, this is oversimplified, but that's just the easiest way to teach it.

If the bottom floor think of like the basement or the foundation of the house is the brain stem, it controls the body. And that and in the book we say that there's three floors and they at each floor asks a question.

And that's the important thing is if we want kids with really good behavior who are emotionally regulated, who participate in the world, who don't avoid hard things, who are gritty kids, they're getting three yeses.

To all of these three questions. We run into issues we'll meet and we'll talk about the. Each floor is when you get to know at each one of these kind of points in the brain.

So the first floor of the brain, the foundation of the house, is your brain stem, which controls your central nervous system. And this is all about safety.

So this part of the brain speaks in safety am I safe? And most parents would be like, well, of course I'm safe to my kid. Well okay. The safety is, you would assume.

But the thing is with safety and kids is they're super vulnerable compared to adults. Like kids just are inherently vulnerable. And if we think about it from like an evolutionary perspective, and we are living in Mother Nature, not in this house, not in civilized society, but like where there are avalanches and forest fires and things that can eat us.

If a child's immune system is compromised, if they're like if they're feeling kind of yucky in their body because their diets just horrible, if they have a limp in their leg, if they are so they're not as alert because they're so sleep deprived.

Safety, Body Needs, and the Brain Stem

All of these things make them weaker physiologically, so they are more likely to be picked off by a predator because that's a predators. They pick off the most vulnerable.

The youngest, the weakest. So the second a child doesn't feel good in their body, they're overstimulated, they're sleep deprived, they feel sick. You're automatically getting a no a hell no in the brain stem.

So you're already done the second we get a no. And am I safe? And that would also mean maybe that parent is scary to that child. The parent is acting in a threatening way by cowering over top of them.

They have their arms crossed. They're elevating their voice, their, you know, they're avoiding the eye contact and they're yelling, you know, that's also a no.

So it's physiological. And it's also like the attachment relationship. Like, does that parent feel threatening or are they yelling, hitting, criticizing, shaming the child?

They're also getting to know there too, because that child emotionally doesn't feel safe or physically doesn't feel safe. So that's the first thing we have to ask is parents is just like, pause and say like, is my kid all sleep deprived?

Did they like my son? Yesterday was Easter here, Easter Monday, and he was chock full of caffeine from all of the chocolate he ingested in 48 hours. And we had three meltdowns yesterday.

I haven't seen my son have three meltdowns in probably six months, and yesterday was the stimulation and the and the his gut was out of whack because he's eating all the sugar he normally doesn't eat.

There's caffeine in his system. He can't maintain eye contact. He's spinning like literally like spinning, doing breakdancing on the floor and even the slightest thing.

He's just like, in tears and you're thinking like, but he had such a good day. Well, his nervous system is flooded from all the stimulation, the stimulant and the chocolate and so many transitions and so many people.

So his body doesn't feel normal, his body does not feel good, and he sleep deprived because he was so excited to get up because the Easter Bunny was coming.

So I already got to know. Not the time for discipline. We are just going to be settling in for. This is the first thing we do with kids. When you get to know what the first part of the brain is, we are just setting limits and kind of just hanging out there while they completely lose their mind.

That's why we get a little you cannot do much else in the brain like their body. So all we are is at that point is being like, we are going to be safe, like we are going to move them to a quiet place.

I went on the couch and held him in the middle of dinner, picked him up, moved into the couch. He had a good cry until he could regulate with me. He felt safe again.

Off we went to eat dinner. There's no I not doing consequences. We're not doing any of that stuff because at this point, he doesn't even feel good in his body.

So that's kind of like the first floor of the brain. So we have to ask, like, does my child feel safe. And can I see them before we move on a. Second?

Oh yeah. Sorry. No, I just wanted to jump in there and, you know, thank you for for saying all that you just said because you really don't hear it that often from the therapy world or the, you know, the brain world bringing back to everything else in the like in lifestyle.

Right? You talked about sleep and diet, all the things that that I talk about all the time in integrative medicine as like these are like kind of the the base foundation for, for a lot of these things and, and, you know, a lot of books just kind of jump into the therapy side of things, which is important because that's, you know, what, what therapies do I get that?

But that's one of the impetuses for why I wanted to write my book was because it's all connected. I mean, I'm not a therapist. I don't know all the stuff that, you know, and but at the same time, it's like these things are connected and we have to work together because what you're doing, if you're working with a child who's dysregulated, well, if you don't get their their health in order, if you don't get their eating in order, if you don't get their sleep in order, then you know, it's very hard, if not impossible, to help that family regulate the child, because these are the baseline foundations and they all go together.

And a big part of what we're seeing with chronic disease and all of the, you know, longer term issues, mental health issues stem from a lot of this basic stuff, which, you know, sometimes comes in before the therapist, but they don't really address it a lot of the times, they just kind of get to the the therapy side of things.

But you have to do both. It has to be we have to work together. Yeah. And it wasn't, you know, when when I was doing therapy full time, I, you know, for a long time I didn't think of these things like it was until I started doing my we start.

Well, the we started the institute and we started interviewing people who are much smarter than us on this subject. And we started looking at holistic practices and talking to doctors and psychiatrists and naturopaths and dietitians like we started learning.

So because there's just so many amazing professions out there that all have something very valuable to contribute to child development, but it's so often we get stuck in being like, I mean, look at is it just a therapist or just as a doctor?

I'm like, no, you have to look at the whole child. And that includes diet. It includes the therapeutic skills like I will talk

about, which is the next floor of the brain.

But also like, you know, I'm sure you talk about this like on your on your own social platforms, like what goes into your gut influences the neurotransmitters in your brain which regulate your feelings.

So if our guts are chronically inflamed and unhealthy, our kiddos don't have the neurotransmitters to regulate their feelings. So like it all? It's connected.

You can't like, separate it. You got to put your gas in the car, the oil in the car, the windshield wiper fluid. You can't just take care of one area.

You have to take care of all the areas, right? It's just as simple as you said. Like on a day you're eating, not that well and you have too much sugar or whatever, and your kids are completely dysregulated and you can't blame them for that.

That's just that's the reality of the world.

Connection and the Limbic System

If they're going to eat that way. Yeah. And then that's what we don't. When I was like, there's this is not a time for discipline. Like he needs just to go to bed and detox from everything he is ingested.

But we created that as parents. We decided to do that and we took, you know, we know. And you just kind of expect it. You're like, well, like, we don't do this often, but it happens.

But we don't expect good behavior after that. Like, of course not like because Jake. Exactly. Well, I'll let you move on I sorry. Yeah. It's like such a important point that you made.

Yeah. And so, like, if you get a yes, like, your child is eating well and like, do get enough sleep and they're not feeling sick, like, you're, like, good.

And the parents terrorizing the child. We move on the next floor of the brain, which is your limbic system, which is your feelings brain. And that's what we so we call it like the body brain.

And then the feelings brain. And that part of the brain speaks in attachment and love. It asks, am I loved like am I connected? And what this comes down to?

And Dan Watts, Doctor Dan Siegel would say, you know, you connect before you redirect children who are dysregulated. That's where most misbehavior comes from.

It's dysregulation in their nervous system. Those kids, when we get dysregulated as human beings, this includes adults. Our go to strategy is to move towards our tribe because we're safety in numbers, right?

We're supposed to move towards our attachment figures, our spouse, our siblings, like people in our village, because that is a good survival strategy, because if there is an inclement weather, there's a there's a predator.

You're going to survive in numbers, not by yourself. So it is very normal for children when they when they, you know, are just dysregulated, they're supposed to look towards the parent.

And that's why kids are the worst with their parents. Like that's where they feel safe to unload all these things. And they're really looking for that parent to say, like, I got you.

Your feelings are normal. Like maybe the behavior is not okay, but the feelings are okay. I accept who you are in this moment and you know nothing you could do could separate me from my love for you.

Like I'm going to be here till, like, this wave passes and it will pass. And this, as a parent, can be really hard if you're dysregulated. Like we have to sometimes, like, go away and come back and breathe or tag in another parents for a while or, you know, lock ourselves in the bed, you know, in a bathroom and just drink some water and deep breaths till we're a little calm.

But understand that that child's nervous system is unlikely to calm on its own, because the the brain is so underdeveloped in the next floor that they really need you to be with them during hard moments.

Because when your nervous system is calm, you are regulating their nervous system through the their right hemispheres, connecting with your right hemisphere, which is all about feelings and emotions.

And we see this synchronicity in the brain between the parent and child. And then you're we're sending these signals to the child being like, you're safe, you're okay.

There's nothing wrong with you. I will be with you until this storm passes. We really anchor them in the relationship in that moment. And that's that limbic system that's always kind of.

There's this part in it called the amygdala, which you already know, that is always looking. It kind of sends a signal actually to the downstairs brain to say, like there is a threat.

So we have to send those that amygdala, we have to tell it, you know, it's there isn't danger like you're okay or the danger has passed. And now, like Mom or dad's here, I've got you.

And while the behavior might be not, it's not okay to hate your sister. It's not okay to spit. It's not okay to break the TV. Whatever they're doing, you know you're still there for them until the storm, till they've calmed down.

And then we can deal with, like, consequences or whatever you're doing after the storm. We don't do it in the middle of the storm because they can't hear you.

And that's what really is like the essence of discipline is about safety and really connection first. Then we can use all these strategies. But parents often use the strategies in the wrong order.

They jump right to consequences, right to criticism, right to limit setting. When that child's brain is not in a receptive state, to hear that parent, all they're worried about is like, I feel safer, I feel bad, I feel bad, I have this feeling because they've been taught feelings are bad or, you know, I just don't know what to do.

Like, my heart's racing and I'm looking for the nearest exit. Like they're just in this state of fight flight. Freeze. Their nervous system needs calming.

And then do you feel like. So after things are calm, then that would be the best time to kind of, you know, may have a better than the age, obviously, but the discussion or the discipline quote unquote at best.

Because if we think the last four so far I've mentioned, like the brain stem is in charge of the body, the limbic system is in charge of feelings and attachment and also like monitoring, also like safety, it works together with the brain stem.

Then you have the third floor and the third floor which is is the while it's the cortical brain part of it's called the prefrontal cortex is, you know, it's not the whole thing, but it's a part of it.

Parents only have to think, but it's the thinking brain is simply it's the part that's in charge of emotion regulation and impulse control and thinking and empathy and hindsight about that child being like, yeah, that wasn't a good choice to do that or I'll do better next time.

Next time when my brother breaks my Lego tower, I'm going to use my words or I'm going to practice saying it this way or I'll get mom next time. Like that.

Is one a very underdeveloped part of the brain in children that prefrontal cortex we see like of course like the shell is there, but we don't see a lot of those neurons kind of filling in and wiring and connecting up till it starts at about four and five and some kids sooner, some later.

And it's not until we're close to 30. So I mean, it's so like it's a precarious with these kids because, I mean, the hardware is not really very well established like the Wi-Fi goes down really easily to this part of the brain.

So when your kiddo is in there having these big feelings, often they lose connectivity to this part of the brain. But once they feel safe and loved, it comes back online.

If they're super tiny like toddlers and preschoolers, we still don't have much to deal with there. So we're basically just not poking at the downstairs brain.

That's our job is to and to soothe, just work with the lower parts of the brain. But the really cool thing is when you parent this way from the bottom up, when you deal with the safety needs and the love needs and the connection needs, that upper floor that's in charge of emotion regulation and comprehension and problem solving and critical thinking develops faster.

So you get access through that stairway to that upstairs brain.

Thinking Brain, Boundaries, and Discipline

And so once your child's calm, we can start to work with and they feel safe, we can work with that cortical brain. And that is when we have consequences.

We can talk about these things. We can practice skills with that child. Like next time when your brother does this or instead when you're angry. We can do this like, but they won't be receptive to even teaching or accepting a consequence until those other two needs are met in the lower two floors of the brain.

And this upstairs brain, this thinking, this prefrontal cortex area of the cortical brain, whatever we want to call it, because it's quite complex. As a doctor, you know, asks, am I competent and what can I learn from this?

So it's kind of a two part question am I competent and what do I learn? So once we're calm, we can ask those questions in our brain. But if the lower two floors are compromised, like, forget it.

It just it's futile. And of course the rest are like, why won't they consider their actions? Why don't they want to apologize? Like, because they're feeling unsafe and unloved or like, shamed or like there's all this stuff coming up in their bodies and emotions really hang out in the body.

So I think that's just when parents understand a framework for how information flows, it's like, oh, we respond in this order. We don't jump to consequences, we don't jump to lecturing, we don't jump.

Not that that works well with kids anyway, or nagging or like, it just they won't they won't do it. The brain won't allow it. And I think it's such an interesting, very important discussion to have because so many of us and so many of our parents grew up with very, you know, authoritarian type, models where, where it was like, you know, the yelling that's coming home, you know, that kind of stuff like discipline, timeouts, spanking and any of that stuff that that, you know, was more common maybe 50 years ago.

And now we're we're kind of learning a lot more. We understand things, I think a lot better in terms of what works and what doesn't work. But the the impulse, I think, for a lot of parents, is very hard in that moment to, to realize that that's not going to teach them the best versus the, you know, this kind of model, which you can kind of step back, make sure they feel loved and then, you know, a little bit after once things are calmed down, like you mentioned, then that would be the best time to do any sort of teaching, obviously, depending on their age.

Yeah. I think what happened and for a lot of us who grew up and I did grow up with a really like authoritarian parent

is sometimes what happens is we get reactive and we the pendulum swings the like swings the opposite way.

And so sometimes we're like, I don't want to be like my father. So then we go way over here and we get super permissive in our parenting because we're so scared to, like, damage our kids like we were damaged.

And one of the things we want to caution about with this approach is it doesn't mean you aren't firm. It doesn't mean that you don't set limits like if my kid, even yesterday, he's, you know, spinning and I can see he's just it didn't mean that I didn't set a limit with him and say, like, you can't do that at the dinner table.

And I removed him from the dinner table. I knew he was spinning because of the caffeine. I knew that this is why he was emotional, but it didn't mean that I allowed him to keep going.

Like, I was like, no, this isn't okay to be like sticking your hands in the food and making them, if you're seven like this is not okay. So it did involve me removing him, which in itself is a consequence.

It's like this behavior is not okay for the dinner table, but knowing when I removed him, he just needed to like, let out all that cortisol in his body by having a good cry.

And then his nervous system went back to like, homeostasis, like back to normal. And we had to do this dance a few times with big tears. And we know that reduces stress hormones when kids cry.

So the crying isn't the problem. It's often actually the solution. But we often get really uncomfortable with the tears. So I just want parents to know, like the kind of parenting you want is authoritative parenting, which means you have high expectations for behavior, but high levels of warmth at the same time, so you can still be strict with your kids, but it just means you allow for the feelings to happen.

And maybe, like we pause before we jump to applying a consequence because we have to say like, is the brain compromised right now? Like, would I be even effective in this moment?

Yeah. This is still my question because I was going to ask about next. But the, the permissive parenting because you see a lot of that especially here in LA.

Like there's a lot of this pendulum swing to the way, the other way where like you just see kids running around doing whatever the parents don't say anything and nothing in, in you know, positive parenting which, which kind of I think swung the pendulum based on this, the title of it.

But that's not really the meaning of it. And certainly anybody who's talking about it now, you hear like, you guys and it's like, you know, you know, pain other other amazing professionals, they're reminding parents to kind of swing back to the middle because.

In the middle. They need boundaries. I mean, that's super important. That helps kids grow and that helps them to kind of know their limits. And one other thing that you didn't mention, which I think is important, I've heard you say before, is, you know, in the moment, if something is dangerous, then safety, you know, safety first, obviously, that's the super important.

Like if you, you know, if you need to get them out of a situation, if they're hurting, you know, the little baby or whatever, obviously. Yes. That that's not a consequence.

That's like immediate thing because it's super important. But they need boundaries in general. So I think it's yeah, you know, that. I think Doctor Brené Brown, I was Doctor Brené Brown said like, let parenting without boundaries is like letting a child run across a suspension bridge without handrails.

Like, kids need to know you're in charge. They need to know you. They have a leader. This is important with all mammals, like all mammals, have hierarchical relationships within the system that keeps them safe.

So if kids feel like the parent is not in charge, they take the leadership role and they're not equipped to take that leadership role. And that actually makes them really anxious.

So like either way we can be like, we can have that authoritarian parent where we're a dictator with little warmth that scares the crap out of kids because we're scary to them.

Or we can be super permissive in our parenting, which means the child's in control, not us. And that is also debilitating in terms of anxiety for them because they are not meant to be the boss.

So you're right, it really comes down to this balance, which is the most exhausting route to take is being like, I have to be a strong leader, but I also have to be, kind in my leadership, like I have to be compassionate, that this little human being is ill equipped to deal with their feelings because the brain is underdeveloped, they can't make good choices.

And really, what it comes down to is the parent is acting as a surrogate thinking brain for the child, a surrogate prefrontal cortex for that child. Because that child's thinking brain is underdeveloped.

So in that moment they, they come in and saying like here borrow mine because yours is, it's just not quite there yet. But that does require that parent to have leadership to have calm, to have regulation.

And often like the biggest thing that get sabotaged with parents going this route or trying to go this route is they can't regulate their own feelings.

So it really does start with like us being like, feelings are okay, I am the I am the boss here. I am the leader. And sometimes it requires a little bit of faking it til you make it here.

But ultimately, like until I learned to call my nervous system like my child can't call them theirs. So it does. Really. It starts with us. I think there's a lot of self-discovery we have to do to get really good at this.

I couldn't agree more. And you know, you get hit. Another point that's just so important is we have a mental health crisis in adults too. So it's it's hard enough to be a parent in the best of situation in the best of circumstances.

Parent Self-Regulation and Childhood Triggers

But if we're not able to regulate our own emotions and we we haven't been model the best emotions, are we? We don't have a framework from which to to go by.

It's very difficult to have the, you know, disciplined child who's well behaved, that has the the emotional regulation that we're looking for. If we don't, if we don't do it ourselves and we don't model it.

So I think that's again, like another important point is we have to take care of ourselves too, right? We have to take action. We've got to we have some some things that we need to deal with.

We going to deal with those too. And then having amazing practitioners like you, you know, to listen to you because nothing, nothing with parenting is easy, right?

It's not easy. It's there's a lot of different situations and, you know, things come up. And so there's, there's we're going to maneuver through this as we go.

And you learn as you go. And every child is different. Every parent is different. So it's fantastic to have practitioners that we can listen to and learn from, such as yourself, that can help people navigate.

Because it's not it's not easy. Yeah. No it's not I mean, parenting. Well, you should be exhausted. I guess I tell parents, if you're if you're tired all the time, you're probably doing it well because it's it requires not only, like sleep.

And we take care of ourselves like our, our basic needs, but it also you're very conscientious in what you're doing, an intentional about your choices.

And that's really hard when we're, you know, we're so busy. And in our book, we talk a lot about, like, self-care for parents and like, navigating their wilderness and their childhood because there's definitely this crap we carry from our childhoods into our parenting.

And like one of your biggest superpowers as a parent is awareness of being like, okay, in this moment, it's not about my child's tantrum. It's a fact that I'm really uncomfortable crying because my parents used to spank me when I cried like, there is that.

And once you you can make those connections, you're like, oh, this isn't about this. Like, okay, all right, now I got to work through this, like, and and then our kids stop triggering us so much.

But I know that's a hard one for parents, and that's often the root of where we fall short is we're just not conscious of our own narrative when it comes to our childhoods, and how that kind of leaches into our parenting practices, like in this moment.

Yeah. And I always like to, to finish with some, some positivity, some action actionable steps for this week. So I'm curious, you know, for parents who are listening to this, what what is something that that you would want them to take away from this or do this week?

And maybe it's just the self-reflection like you just mentioned or thinking about, the basics of, of, of health and eating, you know, but what what would be your, your big takeaway for what people could do this week to kind of move things in a more positive, more resilient direction for their kids.

In a really hard moment with your child, whether that's like they're having a tantrum, they're not wanting to eat what you put out in the dinner table in the moment.

I want you to take a breath and try to you remember your child at their best moment, like the reason why you love them so much. Like, what are these really positive qualities about them?

And in that moment, before you respond to your child, reflect, if you can for 10s on a positive memory of an interaction you had with your child or the best moment where you saw them being like such a great athlete, or they helped their sister cross the street, or they took care of your new baby in that moment, remember, that's who they are.

Not the tantrum. They are not the defiance. They are not their inability to sleep through the night.

Takeaways and Where to Find Tammy Shamoon

Your child is wants to be loved. They are good. They are whole. Like, just remember this is focus on that. And the other stuff won't feel so big. You know beautifully, beautifully said I can I don't want to add to that.

I think it's perfectly said. Can you before we go, just tell people a little bit more about where to find you, your socials, a little more about your book, in case they want to, you know, get more information.

And I couldn't suggest more for people to to grab your book or to follow you on online. Yeah. We're I mean, the Institute of Child Psychology. So Institute of Child Psych on Instagram and we have Facebook's just the Institute of Psychology. We're on YouTube.

All the fun social platforms pretty easy to find. And then we have our book, The Parenting Handbook. And it just came out about three weeks ago. And you can find that on Amazon.

And, it really encompasses what we talked about today, but it also brings in lots of holistic health with play

resiliency. There's three chapters on discipline because parents have a really hard time with that.

There is a whole chapter on brain health talking about parent wounds and how they kind of get in the way of our own parenting. What are some things we can do to start repairing that?

Parental self care is a huge one we have in there. So, you know, we created the guide. It's basically the foundations of the Institute and like how we target our parenting, our kids and all of like the things we tell the parents.

We, you know, the kiddos we treat clinically. These are all the things we teach them. So we put it in a book, so that you can get on, on Amazon if you're interested.

If not, like, we're we always we have a podcast. We have the child psych podcast. A lot of weight, a lot of ways of money, a lot of great information.

One of the best resources out there in terms of child psychology and all the topics we talked about today and many more. So again, thank you so much for for being a part of this.

I really appreciate it. And thank you everyone for for listening. And we'll we'll see you in the next session.