Sibling Conflict: Moving from Referee to Coach | Lalaine Frankel Transcript

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Introduction and behavior as communication

Hi, welcome. I am Dr. Rachel McConnell and I'm your host and the creator of our Masterclass series here today called Why is my child acting this way? So I' m a board certified pediatrician with over 20 years of experience and so there's a lot of information out there, a lots of parenting tips and tricks out here, but my approach is a little bit different.

Because I think that the behavior your child is showing you is a signal. It's not necessarily the problem It is just that there's something going on and this is how it's coming out and This is they're displaying that.

There's an underlying problem. So it is time to stop guessing and start understanding I'll see you soon. Thanks Thank you so much for joining us today for our discussion about why is my child acting this way?

Tell us a little bit about yourself and the work you do with children and families. Yes, hi, so happy to be here. I am an educator, a parent educator and a coach who specializes in sibling relationships and I help parents manage sibling conflict, sibling rivalry and help them really build strong sibling relationship from the very beginning.

really helpful. You know, whether parents are preparing for their first child or preparing their child for a new baby or navigating just every day something complex, I really try to help give them practical tools to raise children who feel secure and connected and capable.

A lot of my clients will come to me with, you know, my kids fight all day and my older child is jealous of the baby. I'm exhausted from just playing referee all-day.

One child was always picking on the other child. So it's just this feeling of stress and feeling out of control. And some of them are coming to me again because they are expecting their second child and they want to make sure that they're doing all the right things or they worry that maybe their love is going to be spread thin between the two children and just really trying to figure out what's the best way to start all of this.

Start to bring a new sibling into the family, a baby into family.

Sibling conflict and underlying needs

Perfect. That is such important work since a lot of families have more than one or are thinking about having another. So coincidentally, our summit is called, Why is my child acting this way?

And I'm sure you have a lots of parents who come to you with that exact question. What do you tell them? What's the first thing that you want them to understand?

The first thing I would want them to understand is that behavior is communication, right, and children behave in a way pretty much to get whatever their needs are met.

So, most of what we consider or look at as bad behavior, is really a symptom of sort of a deeper issue. And then we tend to kind of focus on the negative behaviors and trying to extinguish those behaviors.

And what we intend to see is those behavior start to resurface because we haven't really taken care of the underlying need. I wanted to share this one slide with you if you wouldn't mind.

Oh, perfect. We love slides. I love slides. Let me just get this on here really quick. Show you this slide right here. All right. Can you see that okay?

Nice. Yes, I see it. Okay. Tell me about it? So what we have here is this iceberg. And when I talk about the behaviors that are concerning to us as parents, we'll see aggression, will see hitting, some bullying and imitating and teasing right competing and those are the things that we feel like we have to focus our energy on trying to stop but those things will just keep reoccurring if we don't focus on the underlying reasons for it and usually there are these feelings and these are some possible reasons why they're occurring you know your child might feel a sense of jealousy or shame or they feel misunderstood or they're not getting the attention that they want or they are feeling inferior to their other sibling, unfavored, unloved, unseen.

If you can address those sort of underlying feelings, then you will start to see the change in the behavior. But it's almost like, you know, I'm going to stop sharing this really quick here, but it is almost you have a leaky roof, okay?

And all you do is take duct tape and continually patch up all of the holes as they come in. Those holes are going to keep on coming. I mean, the water is gonna keep coming and the holds are gonna be, unless you figure out where that water, is actually coming from.

So that's what we need to address. Perfect. I love that you also believe that behavior is a signal, a way to communicate kind of what's going on and that your looking to see what is underneath that.

Right. Um, I think we have to be curious, you know, as parents, we can't just stop it, try and stop the behavior. We have be to curious and try to understand what going in there.

Is this child feeling displaced? Is a child needing more attention? Um is the child, feeling unloved because mom's attention has shifted? Yeah, all so true.

Do you notice any common misconceptions that as you're trying to explain this to parents that they have about kind of viewing it through this new lens?

Yeah. I think that the biggest misconception that parents have is that conflict between siblings are these bad things, right? If they need to be avoided at all costs.

Using the iceberg model to understand behavior

Conflict between siblings is actually an opportunity for them to practice and learn some really valuable social skills that will benefit each of the children in all of their future relationships.

The conflicts with the right amount of guidance is giving them practice in self-advocacy, in listening to another person's perspective, in empathy and negotiation and compromise right and also in repair and these are all skills that will help them with their roommates their friends their future you know partner their co-worker their boss so I think that we have to shift that mindset and so that it's not we're not feeling like they're driving us crazy you it's their learning and their practicing.

They're practicing so that they can learn some emerging really important lifelong skills. Perfect. I wonder if they did a study of negotiators, if most of them would have siblings they practiced on when they were young.

The more you practice something, the more skilled you get at it, absolutely. Yeah, it's such an interesting way to frame it and to think about what we always think of, ooh, sibling conflict, you got to stop that right away and have to be best friends.

Right, exactly. And they're not going to be because like conflict is sort of everyday occurrence, right? And it happens in the best of relationships, but how you handle the conflict and how You repair and come away with the things that you come Away with and learn from that is very important.

Perfect. So when parents are in the thick of it and feel like they're holding both kids back, what is some advice that you give parents in that moment instead of like, okay, just what's some advise you'd give them to kind of bring themselves down so they are able to help the children?

Yeah. I think that in a heat of the moment, there's no learning that can take place. Right? I that when emotions are high, The most critical thing to do is to get everybody in a calm state so that they are open to learning whatever the lesson is meaning being taught.

And I think as a parent, when you come into a situation where you have two children fighting, it's very important that you're not taking sides. It's not important really who started it.

What's important is how they're going to solve this problem. And I think we spend too much time saying, OK, well, who did it? Who started first? What happened?

And instead of what happened, I thing the important thing to ask is, what are you both feeling right now? what is it that you need? But do each of you needs?

Staying calm and guiding children through conflict

Once they are calm, it's trying to understand what the need is that they were trying express and trying sort of repeating and clarifying what it is for each other.

Oh, as a parent walking into the room, oh, I see two children that are pulling at the same toy. And don't offer so many explanations, but just kind of come into it curious and objective.

so that each can feel like they are seen and heard and valued for what they're feeling at that moment. Once you address that, then they'll be more open to learning and figuring out how they will solve the solution.

They both want the same toy, what are we going to do? And from that conversation, you might find that one child is like, well, it's my turn and I'm not done with my term.

And then she's taking too long with the turn. From that, and you can ask them, what are we going to do about this? How are you going solve this problem?

Then we're giving them some really important time to think critically about what it is that they want and what is it that, you know, they can do together to make it work.

And their ideas are going to be way off base sometimes. I want her to go away. But it's important for them to just voice it and for you as a parent to understand it, to try and say, oh, well, you have some really big feelings about this.

You really wanted your turn. It's very hard to wait. And sort of empathize with that. and then as they are generating their different solutions, they may agree on something that's way off base, but you want them to go through the process and follow through with it.

And then when it doesn't work out, it's also a great opportunity for them, to learn that things don't always work, out but there are more options out there that we can try.

No, that is terrific. And I think that advice goes for parents who only have one child to because even with one childhood house is not always super harmonious.

So, So yeah, it has to do a lot. I'm sorry with just as parents, we step in because we always feel like we want to make everything right. We want make everybody happy.

And there's another mind shift there. It's like, they're not going to be happy 100% of the time. it's more important that we are helping our children to build their resilience muscle and disappointment is okay, right?

And we can fail. We can do something not quite, things can work out not as we had planned, but we rise above that. we find a way out of that Yeah, I think that's perfect because a lot of times in our society it's like it has to be

perfect every time and we don't have time to fail to have that resilience and then to try again.

So I that is a very important concept for everyone. Yeah. Yeah, I do. Especially in this society that we're living in right now, you know, everything has to be perfect and it's this life isn't perfect.

And I think that, failure is really sort of the starting point of learning because you're going to, try and figure it out. Yeah, very true. Yeah. That's like a whole nother talk I think about failure and resilience, going to sign you up again for that one in a little while.

So, sometimes as a parent, I have I had two children they're older now teenagers once turning 18 I feel so old. But you know, sometimes I'll come into it maybe not in the best mindset, or I come in to it not as calm as I should be, and that can probably escalate things.

What advice do you have for parents who come to into also elevated like the kids already are? Yeah, that's when you just need to take your breath too, right?

You need take a break. Because if you join in in chaos, it just escalates. the noise level escalates, everything escalate. But if you can be the calm presence in that situation, you will bring the intensity level down.

And that means that not everything has to be addressed right then and there. I mean, as long as they're safe and they are not physically, hurting each other, as long as they're safe.

Take your deep breaths, figure out what is, maybe it's a mantra that you have, you know, this too, we shall pass and just kind of like say it to yourself with you.

You know it going to be okay, everything's going be to okay. And whatever you do, be quiet in it. I find that if you come into a situation where your children are fighting and all of a sudden you're just softer.

Shifting from referee to coach

everyone's gonna have to quiet down so they can understand what it is that you are trying to say. So just this, that, well, and then practice the breathing with them.

I think we need to all take big breaths with little children. We're gonna take a deep breath like we're smelling a flower and let's blow out a candle.

And the more that they, you model those types of calming things for them, that will definitely be something that they start to adopt in when they're recognizing that, they are feeling a little stressed or overwhelmed.

But for the most part, when things are in total dysregulation, no one can learn. And so it really, I invite parents to try and become calm so that children can borrow their calm.

And that's what they need when they are totally dysregulated and having big, big emotions. They need some help in getting calm. Your role as a parent is to be a teacher in that moment.

And I always encourage parents to think about the kind of teacher that they want for their child. Lovely. I doubt that they want a teacher that is yelling and impatient and has lost complete control.

And that. Is not the teacher. That you want for your child. So become the. Teacher that you. Want because your goal, your job is to teach appropriate behavior.

In order to do that, you have to be able to model that Right? And your child is a student and that student can't learn when they're feeling threatened or they are feeling misunderstood or just too busy trying to defend themselves that they can even get into a place of like, okay, I'm ready to understand the lesson and learn the lessons.

So again, everyone needs to be calm. in order to learn. And you, the parent, as you're the teacher, be the teach that you would want for your child. This child needs to be ready to receive that information, and they can't when they are totally dysregulated, when their emotions are too big.

They can even access the part of their brain that will help them to think through what is happening. Perfect. I think that is so great because I thing a lot of parents don't always think of themselves as the teacher.

They're like, oh the teachers someone out there and I'm just the parent. But you're totally right. Like what you do at home has the most impact on how your child behaves.

Absolutely. Yeah. That is terrific. You had mentioned while you were talking about that, that sometimes just maybe take a step back and don't address every single issue at once.

Do you ever get any pushback saying like, oh, then I'm too permissive or they're going to feel like they can get away with things and how do you deal with that?

I think it's more important that the quality and that you're effective. permissiveness, no, you can still be kind and still, be firm about what the boundary is that you have set.

And parents, I mean, excuse me, children need that sort of sturdy influence in their life. They can't, they don't really want anybody. they didn't wanna be in charge.

Even though we think that they do and they act like they, do they still need the adult guidance. So it's not that they're getting away with anything. We're just doing it in a kind, respectful way.

Excellent.

Parenting with grace, resilience, and resources

So what advice do you have parents who feel like they are busy refereeing all of these spats between their children, like day in and day out, and they just kind of getting exhausted and at the end of their rope?

Yeah, I am going to tell you to just change your role. change it from referee to coach. If you act as a referee, they're always gonna need you to solve their problems.

But if you become their coach, you're training them to be able to, solve, their, problems on their own. To be problem solvers, to relationship builders.

So coach your children on how to. solve. their. own problems and teach them, those problem solving skills, how, listen to each other, communicate, find solutions to their agreements.

Just shift your role. I think that is such a great insight. Do you have like a favorite phrase or anything that you tell parents to use when they're working on on making that shift?

Because I know like all things you're like, I'm doing great. Oh, i really fell back or oh, we're making some progress. You mean what to do when the children, I mean the question, the phrase or question for me when I'm going into a situation where children are fighting, it's how are the two of you going to solve this problem together?

Is that what you mean? Oh, love that because then it really sort of shifts the problem solving to the Children. And in that one sentence, you realize yourself like, okay, on the coach now and I am not the one solving your problem.

So I do really like I really like that sentence to use as well. Perfect. All right. So imagine a parent who's just tuning in, they're exhausted, and they finally got their kids to bed.

They have like 10 minutes to watch. What is one takeaway message that you would like to leave them with from

our whole conversation today? Wow. Let's see.

I guess what's important to know is that you can read all the books, you know, watch all of the information that's out there. And we're going to try to hit the mark.

You know, and, but we're not always going to do it 100% of the time, we are not going do in ways that we, are proud of all the times. We're going slip and that's okay.

Parenting is you're always evolving your children are growing they're changing your parenting style is evolving. You have, you use all the information that you have as sort of a measuring stick to help guide you.

But, and, I really would encourage everyone to still look inside and rely on instinct and love when they are parenting. it's still a learning experience.

It's a time for you to teach how to make amends, how do repair a relationship. And I think that that is also very valuable. So don't be too hard on yourself.

We're all learning. Parenting is tough. Nobody really trains us on how to do it. Oftentimes we fall back to how we ourselves are parented. And, you know, sometimes, that was wonderful and great, and we have things that we want to repeat.

But then other times there are some things that didn't go so well and you can be the one to break the patterns, the generational patterns and change, make the change that needs to be made so that you compare it in a way that is healthy for your child and for you.

All right. Thank you so much. That brings us to the end of our interview, but thank you for all of your insights. I know I got a lot out of it, so I'm sure all our parents who are watching did also.

For any parent who wants to learn more about you and what you do, where can they find you? They can find me at Parenting with Elaine. And that's the name of the website and that name is my business.

And in there, there is a resource area under products and there's some free resources there that your parents can look into whether it's how to bring a new baby into the family, to how manage sibling conflict.

I actually also have a family conflict plan that you can just go check it out and take what you need. And I'm here if you want a consultation, I am happy to meet with you.

I've got a 30-minute free consultation for all of you, so just feel free to book that on my website as well. So it is parentingwithlalane.com. Well, perfect.

Thank you so much for joining us today.