Spoil Your Baby Ep 48 - Raising Anti-Doomers feat. Ariella Cook Shonkoff Transcript

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Opening on hope, fear, and climate concerns

As a writer, I, you know, feel moved to write about what moves me. So that space between hope and fear is very rich. And I wrote this book because, um, my own very real mother bear concerns about raising kids in a region impacted by wildfires, which have intensified in Northern California over the last 10 years.

You know, because of that. But I also wrote this book as a therapist, listening each week to young people and parents, you know very real concerns about the state of the world.

And as therapist I want to create space for folks to process their emotions, but I wanna be able to resource them too. Hello, everybody. Welcome to Spoil Your Baby podcast.

I am very excited to be here today with Ariella Kokshankoff. She is a therapist who works with adults and children, and she is also affiliated with the Climate Psychology Alliance of North America.

And she's the author of this wonderful book, Raising Anti-Doomers. This title just caught my attention right away, and I'm so happy for you to be here.

Welcome. Thank you so much for having me, Greer. Yeah, so excited to connect with you today.

Introducing Raising Anti-Doomers

So today we're exploring how to raise hopeful and emotionally grounded children in a world that can feel really heavy. and how our own nervous systems as mothers are part of that story.

And I really identified with that feeling and I feel like I have done a lot to move past the heaviness in the world, especially in my parenting. So, I'm so excited to be even more resourced by your work.

For people who haven't read your book yet, tell us, what does raising anti-doomers mean and what was your inspiration for this? Well, as a writer, I, you know, feel moved to write about what moves me, so that space between hope and fear is very rich.

And I wrote this book because, um, my own very real mother bear concerns about raising kids in a region impacted by wildfires, which have intensified in Northern California over the last 10 years.

You know because of that and but I also I. Also wrote this book as a therapist listening each week to young people and parents you know very real concerns about the state of the world.

And as a therapist, I want to create space for folks to process their emotions, but I also want be able to resource them too. So coming up with tools for the book has been both like a professional and and a personal endeavor really.

And yeah, so as far as the title goes, I think with the news being as heavy as it is and climate change and it can make you want to stick your head in the sand and like just, you know, and, it was in, the course of writing the book that I came up with this concept or idea of anti-doomer.

And I think it was just to counter that, this narrative of a doomer, like to animate the opposite of, you know, a Doomer. Like to say, there is scary stuff happening, yes, but it's not our destiny.

We can raise hopeful kids and we can lead fulfilling lives. And we can do much to protect and connect with, you know, what's called the more than human world, the natural world.

And so the title, The Raising Antidermists title is very much grounded in hope. Yeah. I love that. My son said to me this morning, there are only 600 Siberian tigers left, mama.

So we had a whole discussion about it. And yeah, our kids know what's going on, right, in the world, and so do we.

Helping kids face climate anxiety with hope

And there really is a really strong doomer kind of presence around, that's how people get clicks on news stories and social media, clicks and all these kinds of things.

But we can, I love the message that we also, like those two things can be true, That can also be raising our little ones to be more hopeful. and engaged.

That's an important message. Yeah, absolutely. I'm curious, what would you What would you say to my son, Siberian, telling your comment? Oh, my goodness.

I mean, we just validate, like, yeah, it's sad that these are the numbers, right? And that we haven't done more to take care of, you know, our animal friends on this earth.

And I know that there's a lot of people working on that as well. Like, there are a lots of good people that are working with, and there is like a network.

you know, there's scientists and there are activists and people who, this is what they do for their job and they really care. And there is so many people that care, actually.

I mean, I'm trying to think of the stat, but the vast majority of people in the world want their governments to address climate change and take care of all of, you now, the natural world and do more to protect resources and to take those actions.

I think that's like the kind of, you know, the messaging that can also be given even as you validate your sons, right? Like, rational like concerns that he's growing up and he is learning about what's happening in the world.

And we can't deny that, but we also give some hope. Yeah, I did answer along those lines and I said that there's a lot of people helping and there are so many populations that we've protected of animals and have gotten their numbers back up to a beautiful place.

Like we can be successful at these things. I like that, because there a a of success stories. And yeah, think I mentioned a couple of them in the book.

But yeah to say that like this has happened before and yeah out here we had like, you know, different bird species recover. And I mean, it's incredible what can happen.

So that's good. Good job. I mean, he's obsessed with animals and, um, yeah, in nature he goes to outdoor school. They told you. And so, Yeah, they're really attuned to it, which is lovely.

So it's important to support. Yeah. so many of our moms listening are, They don't have seven year olds like me.

Finding the sweet spot between awareness and overwhelm

Um, have babies. Maybe they have older kids too, but certainly have a baby, you know, In those really young years where we're, our brains are so attune to like, be so protective and assessing threat to our baby.

And, you know, we're really in those modes. So I feel like probably even more sensitive to climate news and You know, all, you know just news in general, right?

That negative slant on news. So how can, what's some advice for moms, striking some kind of balance there between kind being aware and also, yeah, not sort of putting that anxiety on their baby or, sort fostering this hopeful engaged stance that you talk about.

Yeah, um, I think, yeah, it's tough, because it is such a vulnerable period for for moms and you know, for the little ones. And, and I'm just thinking of like this image of holding a tiny human to your heart, like while thinking about these like larger existential concerns and like that, that's an intense image.

And like having it right on your phone in your face. Yeah, so close, right in in you're hand and yeah, at your in the fingertips. But I think it asks, that it's asking us to be sensitive to what's happening in the world, but also boundary.

But we can't be too porous, right? We take too much in. And so one thing I'd recommend to new parents is to play with what I call the sweet spot of engagement.

It's this idea of you having one foot rooted into, let's call it the muck of reality, and then the other foot in this place of grounding. and kind of playing with that edge, excuse me.

Wonderful. Yeah, that alone takes practice because you don't want to jump into that muck completely to the point of panic, but you also don t want avoid or deny the hardships either.

So yeah, because avoiding will not help seed a social movement or like equip your kids with skills of you know, just kind of distress tolerance skills, right?

That they'll need in life anyway. Mm-hmm. Yeah, yeah, absolutely. What are some of the ways to be grounded? Yeah. Tell us more. Um, I cover like a lot of this in my book, but I, um, have this existential body map that I created.

So that's kind of a fun image to look at. Um. But like the, yeah, the grounding comes in like, maybe I'll just highlight, let's see. Definitely staying socially connected, like staying connected to people, friends, you know, being able to lean on your supports, which can be different.

It's an important part of early motherhood too, because you can feel really isolated.

Grounding practices: connection, creativity, and nature

But so finding good supports like that, that's one good way. And then I, yeah, I think creativity can be really helpful. I know for me and my early motherhood time, it was very helpful to have space to write.

But tapping into kind of a creative energy and like making space for that can counter some of these like heavier, yeah, heavier things coming your way.

So I'm kind of, I just like glossing over a little bit the body map. And then maybe we'll get into this a bit later, but the natural world is key too and spending time right outside and connecting to nature and feeling into that connection because You know, when you're outside, there's so much that, you know to look at, There's So much to receive with your your senses that your problems grow smaller in comparison.

So that can be a helpful reset. I love all of those suggestions. The connection, the social connection is so important. I always try to help moms have at least one other mom friend right there along with them and can be supportive.

But also to, yeah, to try and just select… you know, all the people who are gonna be loving and giving during that time. Oh, yeah, absolutely. It's really, um, I think it's essential.

You know… I call it the… the parent club in the book too, like, just connecting with other parents. I mean, it doesn't have to be your support, but it can be really rich and validating to have, you now, those connections with their parents, so there's like mama's groups, I mean, places that you can really be real and about what's on your mind, right?

And I have one today, even with my older kids, like a women's group I had. Yeah, we're all moms and it's really, really supportive for myself. I love it.

Part of my professional certification, We've trained people now all over the world to hold mom groups. of babies, because I feel the same way. Like, it's so necessary.

I have a women's group in my real life as well. It's revolutionary for us to be doing these things, right? Coming from this, you know, very isolated kind of society, we can hear that calling to Be Together.

It's wild that it's, like, become revolutionary. Like, it should, It makes so much sense, right? Intuitively, this makes sense. It almost like we're going back, you know?

Yeah, they're remembering. We always say that, because women were banned from gathering a few hundred years ago. And we sort of feel healing that wound.

I like that, yeah. Yeah, so important. And then spending time in nature, again, has so many benefits. I talk about that all the time for moms and babies to get out.

Any practices you recommend in the nature? Because I feel like you touched on the awe, kind of experiencing that awe factor and like your place in Nature.

That can be a really healing practice.

Nature practices for babies and young children

Mm, yeah. I think, I mean, with kids, like without, there's, talk about nature-based practice, having something you do regularly. And yeah, it could be on your own or with your baby, right, or your family.

But whether that's going for a walk, you know, once a week, just sitting and writing in a quiet spot outside, you know, that's really important. But I do think that I love in terms of like, you nature practices with kids.

I like the, you might know this from the forest cove, but like, the five senses, just really, and I've done this with my own kids, it's really welcoming and, through going outside and seeing what the colors around you or the smells, right?

I mean, sometimes even getting down on the ground or getting up on a rock and getting new perspective from those vantage points, tastes. I mean, just really having your kids immerse and really notice and doing that for yourself.

Because it's all well and good when it up here in theory, but totally different when you go down into your body and actually experience that. And I think that there's this, so much, you know, there's gardening, There's just kind of care taking.

If you see, I don't know an injured butterfly, like with a wing, or like a hurt wing or a caterpillar in the middle of the sidewalk or, gently moving them aside or just kinda like even those things can be really nice.

But yeah, the ah, opening up to ah is a big one. And like I was saying, just this sense of what's called interbeing with where we're part of something greater, right?

Like we are all connected. That's like a term that Thich Nhat Hanh, the Buddhist monk Thach Nha Han gave to this,

yeah, sense connectedness between all, you know, all of life.

And it's really beautiful to to feel into that and kind of melt into, that yeah, it can be really relieving. And there's benefits too, mental health benefits, too from, you know, spending time out in nature as we know.

I can go into but I don't have to. Yeah, I love it. It's so important like to us to like know we belong to nature. We're not visiting nature, we are part, We are nature and we spend time there.

we experience that. And I love this, you know, experiencing it with your senses. I definitely do that with my little guy. How do we tell us about how to do with a baby?

Because I think, it's not too different than a child, but maybe people listening would be curious. Yeah. Sure. Yeah, it's not too different. I think that in a way there's just like a raw, there is like, a real connection.

Like babies don't have all of this maybe active, you know, cognitive, like you talk, speak going on. You know they don t have this like this chatter to the same, so they're really present and they re really seeing through those, those eyes, right?

Those wide, curious, open, And they're really taking in through their senses.

Building eco-consciousness through care and stewardship

And so it's just, it you know, you can go around and you kind of get up close to things, maybe like a branch of a tree or plant and get a smell or You can kind of model what you're doing too, right?

You could say aloud like, ah, like do you smell that? Oh, this like you know, the spine or you want to touch this pine cone or yeah, smell this, you the needles, pine needles.

Oh, look at this beautiful, you know, sunset. Oh what's this bee doing in this flower? Let's look, let's looks. You know just modeling that curiosity I think is huge too.

Yeah, it really goes a long way. I was just laughing along as you were talking because I'm just thinking of all those memories with my little guy. He loved the bees in our backyard in LA.

and like asked to go up to them every day. And it really, the modeling really works. Now he's, like I said, he is seven and he'll be like, mama, this is the most beautiful sunrise I've ever seen in my life.

Oh, that's sweet. Yeah, it's really it works, really really the modelling, which is so important. We, during the pandemic, you know, and trying to figure out what to do with your kids, uh, I took my kids to the park every morning, like during the week, and we found that roly-polies, they were obsessed with those little roley-pollies.

And they would create, bring them back and create these, you know, what they call them, these little, like, not a terrarium, but like that, you know, this little ecosystem for them.

It would set up these, and it was just really sweet. Like this was, so just also there's a natural curiosity that we can just support and be curious with them and Yeah, that sort of thing.

I love it. So those are so many great places for people to start to resource themselves and ground themselves between, like you said, the muck and the grounding.

And I loved that idea so much. When we talk about raising emotionally resilient children, and in relation to climate, the realities of climate change and everything, what are some other ways to begin to nurture that, kind of eco-consciousness or that balanced thinking for them, even when they're really little?

So how to, how do nurture the eco consciousness within kids when their younger? Well, I think, those are the ways

I would say, You know, this kind of, they do this often in kindergarten, but like caring for a seed and like watching it grow and, you know watering it, tending to it.

Checking the soil, like, I mean gardening. A little ones would like love that. Yeah, it's great. Absolutely. I think also, you know, volunteering and going out to the community and being part of, you now, cleanups, environmental clean ups, or even you don't have to do the organized ones.

But like, when I go to hiking trails with my kids, I pick up trash. It's not a big deal. deal, but they see me doing it. I think I embarrassed my older kids sometimes when I do it, But it's all part of the modeling, like leaving the place, you know, maybe in a better, yeah, better than you found it or like packing out and leave no trace kind of philosophies.

You know, I think also just this idea of giving back, like we take a lot, right, from the earth. But there's a reciprocal relation. And can we steward and take care of, you know places, if we're at a campground?

Certainly, we restore it to how it was when we got there, but maybe even like go further. I don't know. Like I had a friend who helped, there was like a roading at her camp ground and she was setting up stones to kind of try to contain the soil and, I mean, she's a real sweetheart.

She like made, just like sweeping the, you know. She's kind of sweeping the campground as well. She made a broom out of like plant matter and was like sweeping it and doing that.

Why outdoor time matters for resilient kids

But it's really beautiful what we can teach our kids, what can do ourselves and feel that connection into the natural world that we're part of. I love all these ideas because so much of what we're trying to do within my work is raise babies who are resilient and able to nurture the world for the next generation, to take care of all humans, plants, animals, and it sounds like what you're suggesting is really along those lines too, right?

Really creating some of that natural, like, wonder, curiosity, and joy in the natural world as a way of them kind of carrying it forward. As, yeah, caretakers.

Just like the trajectory of childhood right now and how it's… move towards a screen-based childhood, you know, what Jonathan Haig calls the screen based childhood as a social psychologist and just how spending time outside is so you know, is so healthy for little ones, for all of us.

I mean, and there are many benefits of doing that. And so, like, just improved cognitive function, improved mood and focus, lowering stress levels, but also this building confidence and creativity and independence and responsibility.

And yeah, teaching kids about stewardship and care. And there's just, you know, there is so much to be gained from, from that. It's a really rich. I mean, I think we all can think of a story, right?

Like many stories, probably, where we went outside, and we felt much better. Like, as soon as we got to, The campground or the river the beach or whatever it is a park, you know, because in urban areas, even just the park.

Right and or having an encounter with an animal or even noticing one that you wouldn't normally notice like. I saw a squirrel just before when I was coming into my office this morning.

And you know, I don't necessarily look twice at a scroll because I see them all the time. But like I had like a little moment with one. So yeah, like just in a minute, our attitudes, you our moods, or perspectives can shift and we tapped into that.

Yeah, that feeling of awe that we talked about earlier. Yeah, I love that. Helping the kids, like, really understand, how much gratitude to have for those moments in that world and clean water, clean air.

Yeah. I feel I loved that as the activism that we can do as parents to protect the world. And maybe that can ease some of that scary, no scary kind of ideas too, right?

To know that, we are doing something. Absolutely. Yeah. It's a form of activism that starts with the family unit. And then it's going to ripple out from there into the communities and then beyond.

Then it seeds these values in our youngest generations. They're the ones that are going inherit the world in whatever state we leave it. Absolutely. Oh my gosh.

Well, thank you so much for coming and sharing your perspective. I know that I feel influenced and inspired by it, and I'm sure everyone listening does as well.

Um, I want to show your book one more time for everyone interested. Here it is. And tell us, um, where people can find your Well, it's at, I can certainly find it on anti-doomer.com, my website.

And I have some social media like attached there, but you can buy the book there as well. Beautiful. We'll put those links on the show as Well. So thank you again.

I'm so happy we got to connect and I learned a lot today. Thank you so much. You're welcome.