Talk to Them Early and Often About Healing - Here's How with Cara Tyrrell, M.Ed Transcript

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Introduction to eczema, food sensitivities, and toddler communication

Hey team, welcome back. If you are in the trenches right now with a toddler or any child with eczema and food sensitivities, which of course you're here, then this episode is for you.

I mean, really for, you because this isn't just the normal kid feeding stuff. This isn' just normal toddler stuff, these kids are itchy and uncomfortable and their bodies hurt.

And on top of that, your trying to guide them through some pretty big changes. holistically. New foods, new routines, knew everything, and they don't have the words in a lot of cases to tell you how hard it is.

And for these kids, change is especially hard because the gut and the brain are constantly talking to each other. If you're experiencing eczema, there's a dysbiosis happening, right?

There's lots of things happening that aren't working in our favor in the right now. And these things aren't just showing up in your child's skin, they're showing in their moods and their meltdowns, and in ability to regulate.

So that means the communication strategies that we're talking about today and the gut work, aren' t separate things. They go hand in hand. So I brought back one of my favorites, Kara Tyrell.

She has her master's in education, she specializes in early childhood, and she just came out with a new book called Talk to Them Early and Often. And honestly, what she shares in this conversation helped me so much.

If she talks about what to actually say when your kid is melting down and why fewer words always work better and how to connect with them even when you can't fix things in the moment.

And before you jump in, if you're sitting there wondering why your child's eczema hasn't gotten better despite trying everything, or you have tried everything and you are just not getting the results that you were looking for, or you've gone down so many rabbit holes that you don't even know where to start anymore, I invite you to book a free alignment call with me.

It is a one-on-one conversation where we get to dig into what's actually going on for your child, for you family, in your home, and get clarity on what is driving it so you can finally stop spinning your wheels and start getting real answers.

So the link to put that call is below and you could also find it at xmakids.com. All right friends, let's get into it. Is your child struggling with itchy nights and endless flare-ups?

I'm Andrea McHugh, mom of four and host of Eczema Kids. Here, you'll find natural solutions that actually work so you can heal your children's eczemat without steroids, without the overwhelm, and finally see calm, healthy skin again.

Let's get into it. Well, Kara, welcome back to the show. I am so glad that you're here. Me too. It's been a good long while. I can't wait to catch up with you and hear all the new stuff.

Me, too! And I was just extra excited to bring you back on because just everything that you talk about and practice is so relevant to everyone listening today because everyone who's listening a lot of them are raising toddlers.

And they're not only strong willed, they are not just dealing with the normal toddler stuff. They're also physically

uncomfortable all the time.

Validating a childu2019s discomfort with short, simple language

Their skin itches and their bodies hurt, and they deal with food sensitivities, their parents are trying to guide them through some pretty big lifestyle changes to support they're healing right because what they've been doing up till now it hasn't been working.

So a lot of these families as a part of those big shifts are shifting away from processed snacks and toward real food and building daily skincare routines to protect the skin barrier and helping these little humans understand what's happening in their bodies when they just don't have the words for it yet.

Again, that's just why I'm just so extra excited to have you on, because I know your words of wisdom will help in so many levels, even if you don't have toddlers at home.

These truths ring true for just child rearing in general. So when you're there, Kara, just to start us off, and that is where you are, staring at this itchy, miserable kid, rightfully so, not feeling well, their attitude reflects that.

What do our kids need from us in that moment? You know, the first thing that they need, Andra, is just to feel known that their having those feelings.

So I had a two and a half year old in my backseat the other day and itchy was not the feeling she was having, but hot was. She was overdressed and she in the car seat and it was brutal when we got in and halfway to where we were going, she lost it.

She was uncomfortable and she was crying, take my coat off. She Was crying all the things like take My shoes off, she Was just so upset. And the first thing she needed me to do was agree with her.

You are so uncomfortable. And just validate that that's how her body was feeling in that moment. Because I had a physical barrier, right? I'm driving a car.

I literally cannot solve her problem in the moment, however, parents, I want you to hear this. Before you even consider the solving of the problem, even if you're able to, the first thing you have to do is make sure that they understand that you understand how they feel.

That's fair. And if… you haven't experienced… eczema and I haven't and i had two kids that struggled with severe severe exima you know and, I can imagine from feeling the literal heat that comes off of their bodies and you, know from the quieting like their screams in the middle of the night.

I, can tell how itchy and burny and just I mean, uncomfortable isn't the right word. It has to feel outright excruciating. And I guess even if you're in that place, the words that are best to use are just words maybe you would use to describe it if they don't have the I mean, these are littles that we're talking about here.

So one of the things that I always recommend is to keep your sentences really short. You are uncomfortable. That's three words, right? Now we are going to stack our sentences.

We're going continue to feed what they need from us. that must feel so is a great sentence starter. And then you fill in the blank with what, like you said, Andra, what you think it might feel like.

That must be so painful. like you want to, right? Jump out of your skin. Or when you start the phrase, which that must feel so, you're not assuming anything.

They still can, because around two and a half. If you have a typically developing toddler from the language, expressive language perspective, they're going to start to have pretty deep vocabulary to pull from and some decent sense and structures to respond to from their own.

And so they get permission to correct you, if you're wrong, is that that must feel so itchy. They might just look at you and say, no, that hurts. Now the gateway to the conversation has opened.

So you're saying use short sentences you give them space because I know a lot of times when emotions run high and you maybe don't know exactly what to do like you were driving the car and couldn't do anything right now but like these parents feel the same way it's like I'm doing everything I can.

Like, I am literally trying as hard as I, but this isn't something that's going to be remedied right now. I guess the natural tendency, certainly for me, and I would assume many, is you start to explain and negotiate and reason and maybe use more words.

But you're saying it's much more effective to use fewer. Yeah, for a number of reasons. In any situation with toddlers where you are pouring into them, that is true.

Yeah.

The Talking Triangle: energy, body language, facial cues, and tone

in a heightened emotional situation where the biology of the body is physically altered, right? The physiology is the problem here. The skin doesn't feel good.

They are already in an emotionally heightened and a nervous system state that is not able to process well when you are talking at them. So the fewer the words we use, the less they have to and the better opportunity that we have for an outcome where they actually hear the meaning behind what we are trying to say.

And if what they say is about them, I can see that this is upsetting. I could tell how you're feeling. If we're pouring into their state of being, they're much more willing to join us there.

If we just start over explaining or the doctor said this would happen or, wow, this isn't getting any better or worse yet, you're okay, right? If come from that, there are just going to completely shut down and their brain is going tune into what it feels like it needs to do in survival mode, which is, how do I help my body feel better?

So is there anything else we can do to help those words land a little bit better? Like, does it help to be, I don't know, kneel down, be close to them?

Or, you know sometimes it feels like they need the space. Like what should you do physically to helped those word land? I'm so glad you asked that question because in my new book, Talk to Them Early and Often, introduce a framework for engaging with children and it's called the Talking Triangle.

And we have talked for the last 10 minutes or so about the words that are coming out of our mouth. But did you know that words only comprise 7% of the meaning-based communication between any two humans when they're having a conversation?

I did not know that. Seven percent, which means the other 93 percent of this meaning-based conversation between the two of us is all the non-verbal components of communication and language.

And so in the talking triangle, it's hard to see, but it will copy right here. We stack up how engaging with small kids affects their ability to be in a moment with you, and then eventually hear and process those words.

So the first thing that answers the conversation before anything else is your energy. It's called your affect with an A. And the energy that you bring, to that interaction is either going to set the stage for this is about to be really hard or my parent is already creating a calm bubble for me.

It's one or the other. And so we start the conversation with intentionally choosing the energy that our body is holding. If that means that you need to do a quick little gut check, Where are my shoulders right now?

Are they at my ears? They need to come down before I start and engage. Where my hands right? Now are they balled up because I'm feeling so frustrated for my child?

I need you to release them. If you just have to do a quick sensory check of your own before you engage, please do. The second layer of the talking triangle is our body language.

Body language is either open, and inviting, or it's closed off and immediately sends a message, whether we intend it or not, that everything we're about to do next actually doesn't need to be heard.

Kids either feel invited in or they feel like they need protect out one or the other. So align your energy, open the body posture. Part of body language is positioning, sure.

And so the kneeling down, the sitting next to, The squatting near, getting on their level, whatever that might be. I'm assuming they're on the floor. If not, well, get yourself where you need to be so that you are on that even playing field in the physical plane.

That matters. Now, most of the time I recommend that people get close to but don't touch unless they have intimate knowledge that this particular child's vestibular system is seeking touch, right?

In this case, I'm 100% going to say, don't touch. You've got a skin flare going on. The thing we want the most is to wrap them up and make them feel loved.

But unless you have evidence that that has worked in the past, remember this is about them, and you are engaging at a place that's near them making them feels safe, but you're not going to physically touch unless they engage with you.

The next step of the talking triangle are our non-verbal cues, and that's just a fancy way of saying facial expressions. Facial expressions speak volumes.

Yep. So if you've done all this work, And you calmed your actual body and your energy. And, you got in and you're next to them. You didn't touch, but you are creating this calm bubble.

But, your facial expression is all furrowed. Your cheeks are tight because you know you've had this conversation about 40 times in the last three days.

And here we go again. It's over. Yeah. They're going to read you immediately, whether it's conscious. Most of this actually receptively happens subconsciously.

Sure. And the stories will immediately pop up in their head. My mom is angry. My Mom is frustrated. They'll immediately start the stories even if they're not true.

Sure. And we're blocked. Then the next little piece of the talking triangle as we come up is tone. Because words and intonation are two very different things.

We can say the same exact words, but if we layer on a tone, it changes the implication and it change the meaning. So those are the four language links that precede every word that comes out of your mouth.

Wow. Yeah. It's not extraordinary. Really is. As adults, we are so hyper-focused on the words because that is how we perceive language. We believe language are words.

But believe it or not, your toddlers, they're like superpower communicators. They might not have a lot of words yet, but they are experts in these other four.

Look at your babies, look at you infants, looks at their facial expressions, watch their body language, lean into their position when they seeking for comfort or looking for space.

Like they tell you everything you need to know if you just know how to observe and listen. Oh, that's great. I love that triangle. That's fantastic. Thank you for taking us through that.

When it's 2 a.m. and, right, you're so tired and your kid is crying and you are putting cream on them, I mean, just the best that you can do is take a deep breath, roll your shoulders, and then go in.

Yes, and also you get to feel your feelings too, right? Like, here's an example with a little, little little. Yeah, an infant in my life right at the moment who we thought that she had scabies, which I actually didn't even know what that was, right?

It's one of those skin conditions that is not widely known, it's not wildly talked about, and it kind of in the nuisance category, like lice. And so once I was like, okay, now I know infant, all right, we're talking like two months old, who has no ability to communicate whatsoever beyond crying because something doesn't feel right.

And so all those strategies that I just told you, they're out the window. She doesn' care what my body posture is. Well, she cares what m energy level is, She definitely cares about that.

Using empathy and narration during skin care routines

But I still used all the same words. First for myself, this is really hard. The fact that you're hurting hurts me. Listening to you cry makes my heart hurt.

Yes, I'm saying this to a two-month-old as putting on cream. You are allowed to use those short feeling sentences to reflect how you are doing in that moment as well.

And I know that it seems like, what's the point? But these kids, over time, you're just modeling how to process feelings that are so big in moments that you actually don't have a ton of control over.

And the power in that is huge. That's really, really helpful. And so you've been doing it for long enough, you just start to narrate everything. You really do.

And I got to tell you, this kid ended up just having really, really dry skin. Oh, yeah. It was a misdiagnosis. But we learned a lot, right? We learned that really really dried skin can look and feel like a skin condition.

Sure. It's also very uncomfortable. Yeah, it's very comfortable. Absolutely. And then, you know, we just kept talking. You don't like it when we put this on your skin.

it doesn't feel good to rub it in. Just validating, validates all the way through. Okay, so that's another high energy moment. It's like, you know, this skin care is a part of the symptom management piece for eczema is it's a big deal, right?

As we're calming the inside, we are doing everything we can to help the skin barrier rebuild from the outside. And so when sometimes these kids don't like the texture of the oil or they don't like bathing every day or wet wrapping.

Even if it's in their best interest and it helps them, it makes them feel better. And you certainly have to put something on their skin because you can't just let it sit there dry and burning all night long because he won't get any sleep.

So when you're in that moment, right? After bath and you are doing your things and maybe it's a new thing for them and they don't really like it and your trying something new.

I mean, just in the circumstance. If you feeling resistance there, you kind of say those validating words as you doing that or you say it before? Well, the interesting part about those situations is you need to stack up.

So the validating words come first. In that situation, it's also really fair to acknowledge anxiety around it,

acknowledge what happened yesterday, but the validation needs to come.

But then the reality is it has to happen. So this is a little bit of a shift. So one of the strategies, I have 25 intentional language strategies that I teach in the book, and they are broken down by how they connect the adult and the child and what they do for turning on the kid's brain to take action.

And so those validating statements and those emotion identification statements, they are words that connect. And we have to have connection if we're going to do the hard thing.

What we need here is a strategy or a language tool that invites collaboration. Because the truth is, and I remember this, this was not skin related, but I remembered this with my little girls.

when they were young, I had one who had no problem with the teeth brushing. I got a turn, she got her turn. Ta-da, we're good. And the other one, who was like, oh, these teeth aren't being touched.

Yeah. We're not doing this. In my youth, thinking that there was an outcome that had to happen, the connection part, and I skipped the collaboration part and went straight to, fine, just hold you down and brush your dang teeth.

Right? Yeah? That's not what we're looking for here, because that is going to become a daily anxiety point and eventually a trauma-based sensory memory.

So what do we need to do is create the boundaries. And this is why I call my technique collaborative discipline, is that the love and the emotion and connection is there, but so is the boundary.

This would be a first-then situation. First, cream, then, and I don't know how to fill that blank for you. Then, maybe they're like bookworms and then three books.

First cream then cookie, first cream and fill in the blank. But you've got that end goal needs to align with something that they can buy into and look forward to.

so that they can tolerate the distress of the moment that gets them there. And there's a win-win win here, Andra, because one of things that this generation is suffering a lack of is called distress tolerance.

The ability to sit inside something hard and believe they get through it. So I mean, I know it sounds crazy, but when you have kids that have chronic struggle, you actually when, when approach it properly, You actually raise kids with an incredibly strong moral fiber and characteristics that can tackle anything.

Yeah, agreed. my baby that struggled with severe, severe eczema, she is tough as nails. I mean, it's quite incredible to watch.

Collaborative discipline and first-then language at mealtimes

She really can power through anything. And she was just an infant. But just to get me through it, I did those same things that you said. Not all of them, certainly.

There were times that I would promise her, as I was lotioning her and oiling and doing everything that i could possibly think of. It's like, i promise you, we are going to go through this.

Like, this feels horrible and it does hurt my heart. And that is why I cry, but we are going to figure this out, I promise. And I don't know, it helped her as much as me.

Then my two-year-old, the same thing, just helped us all get through it and eventually come out the other side. So that's amazing. Can you share some more language patterns, maybe ones that would be extra helpful in the kitchen and around meal time because some of these kids are transitioning from pouches and fruit snacks and waffles and peanut butter and jelly and to vegetables and, you know, proteins and just like a different presentation

of foods.

So could you help us when you're seeing some resistance there, and it's the same thing. It's for their own good. But yeah, they're not feeling it at the moment.

Yeah. So these are what I call in the book words of cognition. One of the things that we really want our kids to do is think about things in many ways and create worlds of possibility.

instead of these finite realities and outcomes. One of the biggest, the little phrases that you want to put in your back pocket is you wish. You wish you could have the macaroni and cheese.

Yeah. We've always enjoyed eating that. It is such a bummer that we can't have that anymore. The validation is in there, but also, it's a Disney phrase for a reason.

It is a word of many possibilities. So have that in your back pocket. And I also really would love people to say yes as much as they can. If you can start to find places throughout their day to Even if it's not to, like, a request per se, but they come up and they hold up their toy and say, blue, right?

And it happens to be blue. Yes, that is blue! Like, get the yeses feeding their positive system so that when you in the kitchen have no choice but to say you wish you could have the mac and cheese, the answer to that I always tell why.

Now, we said keep it short, but that doesn't mean withhold information because attach and it will make you feel to the end of that sentence. Not because the doctor said so, not because this is the new thing we're trying, because we have to do this for two weeks, right?

A lot of people send them home and say, do it for a period of time. Because it will make you feel itchy, painful, you won't be able to sleep. tag back to the thing that is so challenging, I have to do this for myself these days.

I am gluten free by choice because if I eat it, have an adverse reaction that I love. And nobody's telling me I can't have it except my body. So I had to say to myself in those moments where someone offers me something extraordinarily looking and smelling, if i choose to eat this, that I'm choosing to feel like that later.

It's hard stuff. And you are helping to navigate that for your kids. Yeah, that's very helpful. Just tie it to, you're saying tie to the negative reaction that they are experiencing and that helps with that collaborative experience and ultimately buy in.

Love that. Do you find it as helpful to tie so like, okay, mac and cheese is a no right now because it'll make your tummy hurt and you won't be able to sleep tonight versus broccoli is great to try because It will help you grow and be big and get rid of your spots.

Do you think they can be interchangeably, or do you it's better to relate to the negative, I guess? I think it depends on how they're presenting. So if the meltdown in the kitchen is because they want the mac and cheese, then speak to that.

Yeah. Right? If the Meltdown In The Kitchen is, because you're offering a new or different food, speak Perfect. Thank you. So, I mean, these kids are just, they're extra sensitive, extra reactive, you know, more than toddlers already are.

And everybody already knows that this is, like, a trying time. It's already becomes challenging at times, and then these kid present this extra challenge.

Can you share a few more of those 25 intentional language strategies? Because things come up all day, every day. Just a view more that you found to be really helpful in these high stress situations.

All right. Let me stick with the really short sentence starters because they really are the most powerful. high stress situation, let's go back to the application moment of creams or oils.

And what we haven't talked about is the fact that they might physically be using their body to protest. In those situations, Because we honor and respect how they feel and because we want them to feel connected with us and motivated over time to collaborate to solve these together, we just are going to take a beat, reset all our nonverbal body postures and say, I'm here and I'll wait.

That's a good strategy. And then let the silence be. I am here when you're ready. is when their system gets almost too far gone, not just the physical reaction that they're having, but you can tell they are approaching that DEFCON 5 meltdown mode where you're going to lose them.

You're gonna lose at least 10 minutes, if not longer. Mine was a good 40-minute meltdowner, right? And then when it was over, she was like, and ready for the world again.

I'm like what? I am not over what just happened. How are you? But you don't want to lose them. So if what you've got to do is back up, calm back down and just know that you are confident to speak because all you have to say are four words.

What if you've already blown it? Yes. How do we remedy that? How, how do go back and start again? Can you use that same language pattern or do you suggest something else?

You mean like they're gone? They're done or you came in in a way that you didn't want to. You weren't showing up as your best self because you're tired or it's been a long day or whatever it is.

And yeah, you made a mistake in the way you related to them and now you need to recalibrate and repair. So if they're not fully gone, if their reacting to what you've done or said, but they are still with you.

Yeah. Retract your words as quickly as possible with a really fun, upbeat facial expression, tone-induced, oops. That's not what I meant to say. I mean to and then just fix it.

Repairing missteps and using countdowns for behavior redirection

See if they can kind of meet you right there. And if don't, if can't well then it's a different story, right? Then you say, well, it looks like we'll have to wait.

This is different than I'm waiting, I am here and I'll wait is you clearly need a minute in your own body before you're ready for me to put this on you.

If they're so far gone, it looks like we'll have to wait, means you're not going to push the issue right now. You're going do something else and come back to it.

Okay. So say you drew a boundary, like they want whatever it is, they won a popsicle. And dinner is going be in 30 minutes. Or they've already had the allotted sugar for the day.

The answer is no. And they're starting to react to that and whatever that looks like for that child, like mine tend to get big and loud, as big loud as they possibly can.

And you need to either remove them or you can see that you're about to lose them. And discipline is in order. I guess what is the least traumatizing way that you can discipline these kids?

Because then I remember just a lot of times feeling, like even if they were acting naughty about something that, you typically be like, okay, we need to remove ourselves and just have a little time to just calm down.

You would feel bad, right? because they're already dealing with all this other stuff, and so you just you feel extra

guilty about enforcing discipline, I guess in this case.

My specific language answers depend on so many things, right? Like if the popsicle could happen after dinner, then we'd go one way with that language.

If it's just never gonna happen for the rest of the day, it is a different story. But I'm gonna answer your discipline question because I have a behavior redirection method and it in the book.

It's called the five to one and done countdown. And so what's true for kids and what you just described is exactly what we as adults continually do, right?

We see there's a problem and we go, how do we quickly get to the resolution of that problem? And for us, the solution is to move their body or time away or give them what they want.

Right? Like we're looking for the sensory resolution, but we are skipping the middle section, which is kids need opportunities to practice making choices that either get them to the point where they need us to solve it for them or doesn't.

And so this five to one and done countdown does that. It gives them eight choice opportunities to change their behavior before the adult actually has to come in and help them do it.

And you're building their problem solving brain. it's just so fascinating how every time you give them the choice, it builds that neural pathway. They have to run that pathway again and say, well, Last time I landed here, I didn't love that outcome.

Why don't I try this way this time? That didn''t work out so well either. How about I tried this? I kind of like that out come. So you're priming them so that the next time you are in the kitchen, the time getting out of the bath, that same environmental experience happens.

There's a higher likelihood that they're ready to automatically and intrinsically make a different choice without you having to lead them there. For everyone that's listening today, what would be one thing that you'd want them to take from this conversation?

The one think that I just want you to takes from the conversation is you don't have to memorize all these intentional language strategies and feel like you always have pull the right one.

The cool part about your little people, is that there's so much more to them like you know where they are currently developmentally you, know, where, they, are with their emotional capabilities you.

Know where. They are, with, their, emotional sensitivities so play with the 25 i give you but just keep three or four that are working right now knowing that the next language leap they hit or the learning leap that they have, it will be time to shake it up.

But you don't have to do everything at once. Meet them where they are and use the same language repeatedly. It might be boring to you, It's not boring them, its grounding and it's teaching them how to be their best self in that particular age and space.

Key takeaways and where to find Kara Tyrell

So wonderful. Tell everyone where you can find and follow you and get a hold of your book. Absolutely. So the best thing to do is just go to my website, it's carterral.com, and you can see everything there.

I have a couple of freebies that you could download and start to this on your own. Those language patterns in one of the freebie's, can you put it on the grid somewhere?

Yeah, so I have a free offer. You can go download the five I sentences and those are going to help you build that connection throughout the entire day.

So you're building the trust and respect with your child. When you enter the struggle, they're going be able to hear you. And of course, I've a podcast as well.

If you want to learn more about me, if you wanna hear more, about this I do teaching episodes where you can come over and soak it all in. My podcast is called Transforming the Toddler Years.

You can look that up anywhere you source your shows. And then the book is call Talk to Them Early and Often, and that is on my website. Amazing. All of that will be linked in the show notes.

Thank you so much for your time today, Kara. I really, really appreciate it. and I know you helped everyone listening so, so so thank you. Oh, you're so welcome.

Enjoyed it! How great is she? She gave us so much to work with. Short sentences, validate first, solve second, and you do not have to memorize every strategy.

Just find three or four that work right now and then use those consistently. They don't get bored of them. So now you got a whole communication toolkit for your toddler and this works through early childhood.

And if you want the same kind of clarity around your child's eczema, I would love to help. Book a free alignment call with me. The link is in the show notes and at eximakids.com.

Let's figure out exactly what your child needs in the here and now to start changing the trajectory of your days and your nights and weeks and months and years.

Let us start laying the groundwork for a healthy, happy, thriving, pharmaceutical-free child. And one last thing before you go, if this podcast helped you at all, I would love it if you took the 30 seconds to leave me a review on Apple Podcasts.

It honestly means the world to me and it helps other eXima families find this show. And as a thank you, you can take a screenshot and send it to support at examakids.com and I will send you a 30% off coupon to use inside the exima shop at examakids.

com. Thanks, friends. I'll talk to you next week. Thank you for helping with my eczema. Love you. Thank you for listening today, friend. I know healing your child's skin isn't easy, but you're doing it one smart step at a time.

If this episode gave you a little hope or a better night's sleep, leave a quick review so more exhausted parents can find eczema kids and finally rest easy too.

Follow, share, and let's help more kids heal. Take care.