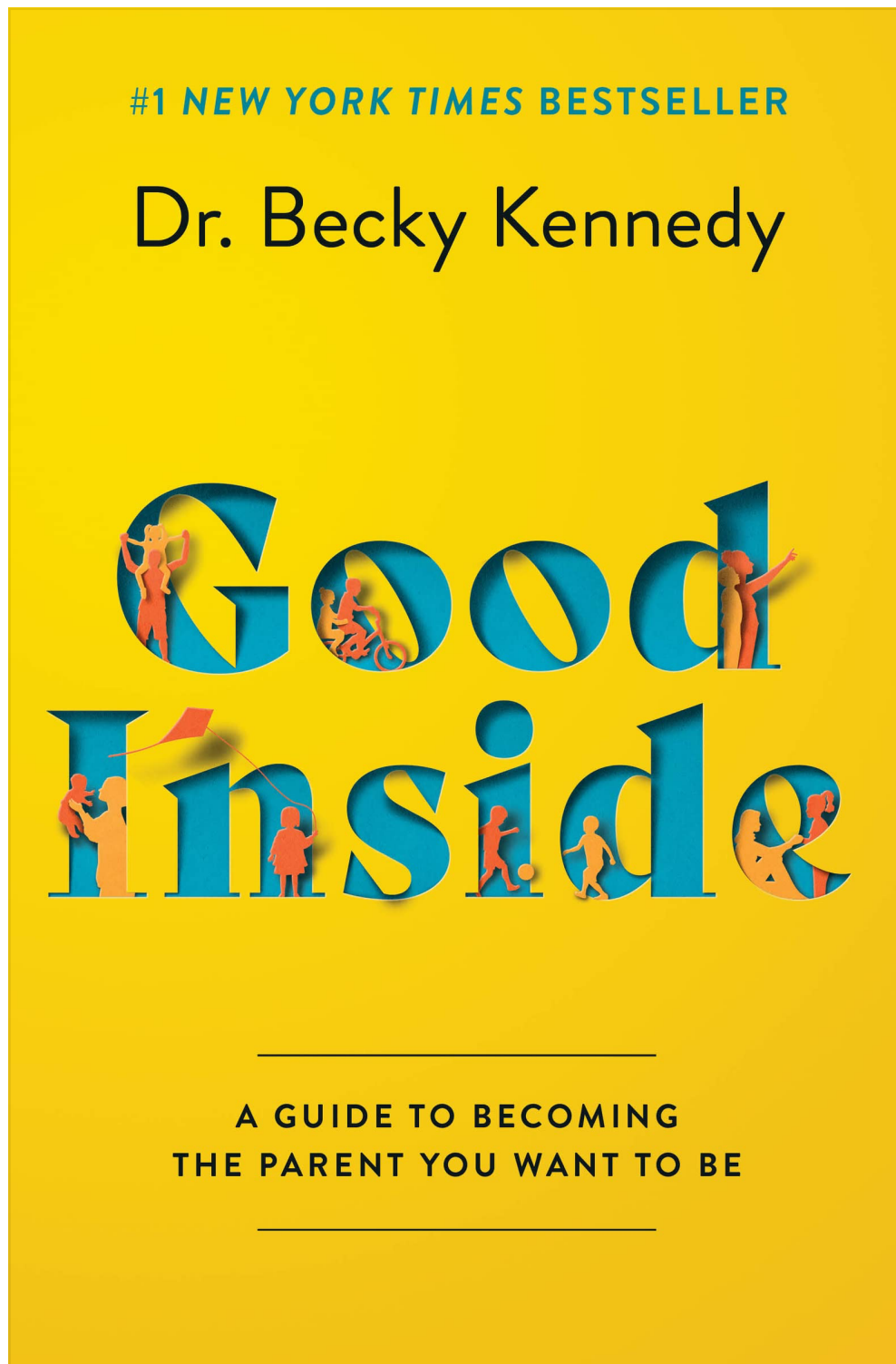


Good Inside: A Practical Guide to Becoming the Parent You Want to Be (2022) - Dr. Becky Kennedy



About Dr. Becky Kennedy

An American clinical psychologist and author known for her work in parenting, especially as the founder of the online parenting service [Good Inside](#). She holds degrees from Duke University and Columbia University and is the author of the #1 *New York Times* bestselling book, "Good Inside: A Guide to Becoming the Parent You Want to Be". Her work focuses on providing actionable tools to help

parents feel more confident and to raise resilient children, and she has been dubbed "The Millennial Parenting Whisperer" by *TIME* magazine.

[What follows are quotes from the book above. These quotes stood out to psychotherapist Emil Barna in his reading of the book. They are not meant to be exhaustive nor representative of the entire book. All quotes are to be read in this context and must not replace medical and/or other professional advice. Note: Any typographical errors occurred through the transcription process and do not reflect what may be found in the book.]

Introduction

"Behavior is a clue to what a child—and, often, an entire family system—is struggling with."

"evidence-based" approaches were built on principles of behaviorism, a theory of learning that focuses on observable actions rather than non-observable mental states like feelings and thoughts and urges. Behaviorism privileges shaping behavior above understanding behavior. [...] they confused the signal (what was really going on for a child) with the noise (behavior)."

Chapter 1 - Good Inside

"Underneath 'bad behavior' is always a good child. And yet, when parents chronically shut down a behavior harshly without recognizing the good kid underneath, a child internalizes that they are bad. And badness has to be shut down at all costs, so a child develops methods, including harsh self-talk, to chastise himself, as a way of killing off the 'bad kid' parts and instead finding the 'good kid' ones—meaning the parts that get approval and connection."

"Finding the good inside can often come from asking ourselves one simple question: 'What is my most generous interpretation of what just happened?'"

"Finding the MGI teaches parents to attend to what is going on inside of their child (big feelings, big worries, big urges, big sensations) rather than what is going on outside of their child (big words, or sometimes big actions). [...] Self-regulation skills rely on the ability to recognize internal experience, so by focusing on what's inside rather than what's outside, we are building in our children the foundation of healthy coping."

"[Example] 'I know that you have just as much sharing capacity and generosity as anyone else in this family. I'm going to leave the room; you and your sister can work this out.'"

Chapter 2 - Two Things Are True

"people who listen in order to understand versus listen in order to respond have

higher across-the-board relationship satisfaction."

"Two things are true" is a foundational parenting principle because it reminds us to see our child's experience, or a coparent's experience, as real and valid and worthy of naming and connecting to. And it also allows us to hold on to our own experience as real and valid and worthy of naming and connecting to. It reminds us that logic doesn't overpower emotion: I may have a valid reason for doing something ... and also someone else has a valid emotional reaction. Both are true."

"Two things are true, sweetie. First, I have decided that you cannot watch that movie. Second, you're upset and mad at me. Like, really mad. I hear that. I even understand it. You're allowed to be mad." You don't have to choose between firm decisions and loving validation. There's no trade-off between doing what feels right to you and acknowledging the very real experience of your child. Both can be true."

"When children feel seen and sense their parent is a teammate and not an adversary, and when they're asked to collaborate in problem-solving ... good things happen."

PARENT: "Hmm... what can we do? As your parent, it's my job to keep you safe, and right now safety means wearing a jacket. And also, you like to make your own decisions and it feels bad to have a parent tell you what to do."

CHILD: "I'm not wearing that jacket!"

PARENT: "I hear you. Two things are true: you have to wear a jacket if you're going outside.. and also, you're allowed to be mad at me about it. You don't have to like wearing it."

"we have to separate behaviors (what we do) from identity (who we are). This does not mean letting yourself off the hook or making excuses for yourself. It means recognizing that you are good, and that you can do the hard work to improve. So commit this principle to memory and tell yourself, over and over and over again: "Two things are true: I am having a hard time and I am a good parent. I am a good parent having a hard time.""

Chapter 3 - Know Your Job

"Parents have the job of establishing safety through boundaries, validation, and empathy. Children have the job of exploring and learning, through experiencing and expressing their emotions. And when it comes to jobs, we all have to stay in our lanes. Our kids should not dictate our boundaries and we should not dictate their feelings."

"Safety comes before happiness and before our kids' being pleased with us. First and foremost, our job is to keep our children safe, physically and psychologically. There's nothing as scary to a child as noticing when their

parent fails at this job (especially when that failure stems from a parent's fear of their kid's reaction). The child receives the subconscious message: when you are out of control, there's no one capable of stepping in and helping you."

"we cannot control someone else—we can only control ourselves. And when we ask our child to do our job for us, they are more likely to get further dysregulated, because we are essentially saying, "I see that you're out of control. I don't know what to do here, so I'm going to put you in charge and ask you to get yourself back in control." This is terrifying for a child, because when she is out of control, she needs an adult who can provide a safe, sturdy, firm boundary; this boundary is a form of love. It's a way of saying, "I know you're good inside and you're just having a hard, out-of-control time. I will be the container you need, I will stop you from continuing to act in this way, I will protect you from your own dysregulation taking over.""

"Empathy comes from our ability to be curious: it allows us to explore our child's emotional experience from a place of learning, not judgment. When a child receives empathy—in fact, when any of us receives empathy—it makes them feel like someone is on their team, almost as if that person is taking on some of their emotional burden; after all, feelings come out in behavior only when those feelings are unmanageable inside, when they are too big to regulate and contain."

""This feeling might seem as if it will take over and destroy the world, it might seem too much, and yet I am sensing in my parent's boundary that there is a way to contain it. This feeling feels scary and overwhelming to me, but I can see it's not scary or overwhelming to my parent." Over time, children absorb this containment and can access it on their own."

Chapter 5 - It's Not Too Late

"Research has established that, oftentimes, when kids are struggling, it is not therapy for the child himself but coaching or therapy for the parent that leads to the most significant changes in the child. This is powerful research, because it suggests that a child's behavior—which is an expression of a child's emotion regulation patterns—develops in relation to a parent's emotional maturity."

"Kids use self-doubt to protect themselves from the overwhelming feelings that would arise if they accepted the reality of what really just happened. They do this because being alone in their feelings seems like "too much," and self-doubt offers a way to escape and self-preserve. And yet, a child is wiring herself to believe, "I don't perceive things accurately. I overreact. I cannot trust how things feel to me. Other people have a better idea of my reality than I do." This is a scary circuit to build"

"Repair can happen ten minutes after a blowup, ten days later, or ten years later. Never ever doubt the power of repair—every time you go back to your

child, you allow him to rewire, to rewrite the ending of the story so it concludes in connection and understanding, rather than aloneness and fear."

Chapter 6 - Resilience > Happiness

"Building resilience is about developing the capacity to tolerate distress, to stay in and with a tough, challenging moment, to find our footing and our goodness even when we don't have confirmation of achievement or pending success. Resilience building happens in the space before a "win" arrives, which is why it can feel so hard to access."

"the qualities children most need from their parents in order to develop resilience include: empathy, listening, accepting them for who they are, providing a safe and consistent presence, identifying their strengths, allowing for mistakes, helping them develop responsibility, and building problem-solving skills."

"the more we emphasize our children's happiness and "feeling better," the more we set up them up for an adulthood of anxiety. Setting happiness as the goal compels us to solve our kids' problems rather than equip them to solve their own."

"I don't know one adult who has ever said, "Wow, my parents really got all those uncomfortable feelings out of me! The disappointment and frustration and envy... they convinced me out of all of them! They successfully distracted me so much that now, as an adult, I never feel these things! I am happy all the time!" And yet... I do know adults—so many adults—whose internal alarm bells go off whenever they feel disappointment, frustration, or jealousy that they cannot "make go away" relatively quickly. Adults whose childhoods were focused mainly on happiness are not only unprepared for tough moments, they experience *more* discomfort in those tough moments because, deep down, they think they're doing something wrong if they can't "find the happy" and get themselves to a "better place.""

Chapter 7 - Behaviour Is A Window

"while reinforcing our kid's people-pleasing tendencies can be "convenient" in childhood, it can lead to major problems—a reluctance to say no, an inability to assert or even locate one's own needs, a prioritization of other people's wellness to the detriment of one's own—later on. And for non-people-pleasing kids? Well, these methods often intensify challenging behavior, not help it. Because when se are not heard or seen on the inside, we escalate our *expressions* on the outside, in hopes of being taken se-pously and getting our needs met."

"When we sacrifice relationship building in favor of control tactics, our children may age, but in many ways, they *developmentally* remain toddlers, because

they miss out on years of building the emotion regulation, coping skills, intrinsic motivation, and inhibition of desires that are necessary for life success. "

"the evidence around behavior change can make us lose sight of what *actually matters* in favor of what is *immediately observable*. And there's something a little absurd about it too. One of my favorite supervisors once said to me: "I could run a study that shows a one hundred percent reduction in difficult behavior if I wanted! If, every time a young child did something 'undesirable,' a parent hit the child or made him sleep on the street for a night ... I am pretty sure my study would show that a child would appear more compliant after a few weeks.""

"Evidence-based parenting guidance often measures success by whether or not a behavior changed—it follows a behavior-first framework. But, if you ask me, that alone isn't enough to make something a success."

Chapter 8 - Reduce Shame, Increase Connection

"Being alone as a child is synonymous with being in danger, so shame works, within the attachment system, as a signal to a child to *hide the part of them that does not successfully gain attachment*. [...] Shame says: you must change course so you can feel safe and secure."

Chapter 10 - Self-Care

"Tell yourself, "Someone else is allowed to be upset when I assert myself; this doesn't make them a bad person and it doesn't make me unable to uphold my decision.""

"Visualize yourself on one side of a tennis court and someone else on the other side. Remind yourself, "I am over here ... I have my need and my decision on my side. He is over THERE, on his own side. His feelings about my decisions ... those are on HIS side of the court, not mine. I can see them, I can even empathize with them ... but I didn't cause them and I don't need to make them go away.""

Chapter 11 - Building Connection Capital

"what kids (and also adults) want when they're on a bench, especially the dark uncomfortable ones, is someone to sit with them."

"Silliness and playfulness are amazing connection capital builders. Laughter reduces stress hormones like cortisol and adrenaline and increases antibodies and immune cells—which means laughter is actually pretty serious business, since our bodies become healthier every time we giggle or let loose."

"if playfulness is hard for you, it's likely that it was never *modeled* for you."

Oftentimes, parents who struggle to be playful with their kids grew up in households that, early on, shut down a child's silliness with shame ("You are embarrassing me, stop that right now!"), ignoring (a parent who disengaged when a child wanted to play a game or act goofy), or even punishment ("There's no place for potty language here. Go to your room!")."

"Do not end your story by directly relating it to your child. There's no need to spell out, "Isn't that just like when you ... ?" Allow the story and moment to stand on their own, trusting that it will reach the part of your child that needed connection."

""I keep thinking about earlier today [*reflection*], when I came into the playroom after you knocked over your sister's tower. I'm sure you were upset about something to have knocked it down [*acknowledgment*]. I'm sorry I yelled. I wish I had asked more about what was going on for you instead [*what to do differently*]. Can I have a redo? Can you tell me what was happening before you knocked it down? It's important. I'd love to listen and understand [*curiosity*].""

Chapter 12 - Not Listening

We say "My kid won't listen," but what we *mean* is "My kid won't cooperate when I want him to do something he doesn't want to do."

"The more connected we feel to someone, the more we want to comply with their requests. Listening is essentially a barometer for the strength of a relationship in any given moment. So when our kids aren't listening to us, it's critical to frame the struggle not as a child problem but as a relationship problem. If your child ignores you or rarely cooperates with your requests, he's trying to tell you that your relationship needs some TLC."

"If you've ever been so frustrated with your child's lack of cooperation that you yell, "ARE YOU EVEN LISTENING TO WHAT I AM SAYING?"—well, the answer is no, kids are not "listening" in these moments. And that's not a sign of disrespect or disobedience but rather the body entering into an animal defensive freeze state. But we don't want our kids to be scared of us, and we don't want them to freeze in the very moments we are trying to get them to work with us (reminder: you're still a good parent if you do yell, and after yelling, you can repair). When we infuse connection, respect, playfulness, and trust into our asks, exchanges that once felt antagonistic start to be met with cooperation."

""I am going to close my eyes" then place your hands over your eyes—"and all I'm saying is that if there is a child with his shoes on when I open my eyes... oh my goodness, if there is a child all Veleroed up... I just don't know what I am going to do! I am going to be so confused! I may even—oh no oh no—have to do a silly jumpy dance and wiggle all around and I may even fall on the floor!" Then pause. Wait."

"If you're convinced this will fall flat with your older child, then try using the foundational ideas from this strategy and adapt it for your tween or teen. Try saying, "I see you didn't clean your room yet... hmm, all right, I'm going to get dinner started and I trust you to keep your promise to put your clothes away before you come downstairs." [...] add: "All I'm saying is that if that room ends up getting clean, I just may break out in song!""

"the "I have to listen to you now" game. Introduce this by saying, "I know being a kid is tough. There are so many things that parents ask of you! So let's play a game. For the next five minutes, you're the adult and I'm the kid. I have to do what you say, assuming it's safe." Explain to your child that the game does not involve food or gifts (your child cannot tell you to go buy them a hundred new Pokémon packs or give them thirty bags of Skittles)—it's really about the routine of your day. But the details here aren't important. What's important is to reverse roles, allow your child to experiment with the position of powerful adult, and express empathy for the difficulties of being a child. While you play the game, exaggerate how hard it is to listen to your "parent"; voice things like, "Ughhhhhh, really? I have to clean up the Magna-Tiles? I don't waaaaaant to," and "Ughhhhhh, I wish I didn't have to take a shower *right now!*"

Chapter 13 - Emotional Tantrums

"Is our goal to stop a tantrum in its tracks or stop them from happening entirely? No, it's not. Here's why: **We want our kids to want for themselves.** As parents, we want our kids to be able to recognize and assert their desires, to be able to hold on to the idea "I know what I want, even when people around me tell me no." **But we cannot encourage subservience and compliance in our kids when they're young and expect confidence and assertiveness when they're older.** It just doesn't work that way."

"below the surface of any tantrum is a child who has been *building up feelings* of distress—some combination of frustration, disappointment, jealousy, sadness, and anger. I sometimes visualize tantrums as feelings exploding out of the body, as if my child's "distressing feelings jar" was completely full and whatever event immediately preceded the tantrum led the entire jar to overflow."

"the next time your child starts "losing it," before you do anything else, tell yourself: "Nothing is wrong with me. Nothing is wrong with my child. I can cope with this.""

"One of my favorite tantrum strategies is to name the wish underneath a child's meltdown—literally say out loud what your child is wishing for that they aren't getting. There's always an unmet wish to be found, whether it's something tangible, like ice cream for breakfast, or something more internal, like wanting more independence or to feel heard."

"in moments of big tantrums, I find that validating the magnitude of the feeling is much more effective. When we validate the intensity of their feelings, we help to reframe a confusing mass of emotion into something concrete and easier to understand. [...] "You're not 'usual' upset about this ... you're as upset as this whole car! No, bigger—your upset is as big as this whole street!" Hopefully your child will run with it, saying, "No, I'm as upset as the whole WORLD!" This is a good thing—it means a child feels seen in how big the feeling feels and they are able to express the seriousness of how the moment feels. [...] add, "I'm so glad I know how big it is. It's so important. I'm here with you.""

Chapter 14 - Aggressive Tantrums

"Since kids interpret changes as threats until caregivers show them otherwise, emotionally explosive outbursts are a child's way of saying, "I'm scared of the feelings in my body. I don't understand what's happening to me. I'm being attacked by these awful sensations and yet I cannot get away from them because they are inside me. Help me, help me, help me!""

"These four words—"I won't let you"—are critical for every parent's toolbox. "I won't let you" communicates that a parent is in charge, that a parent will stop a child from continuing to act in a way that is dysregulated and ultimately feels awful. Because we often forget, kids don't feel good when they are out of control. They don't enjoy experiencing their body as unable to make good and safe decisions, just as adults don't enjoy watching ourselves behave in awful ways. And yet, in these tantrum moments, kids are developmentally incapable of stopping themselves. If they could stop throwing they would; if they could stop hitting they would; if they could stop biting they would. A dysregulated child needs an adult to step in and provide the containment that *they cannot provide for themselves.*"

"I won't let you" isn't a go-to strategy for day-to-day occurrences [...] "I won't let you" is for moments when your child can no longer make good decisions—when he is being unsafe or behaving in a way that begs for sturdy leadership. In these situations, if you use "please stop" or "you can't" language, a child becomes terrified that he is in the driver's seat. This will only make him further dysregulated, because he will *feel* you avoiding authority and essentially think, "Why is my parent putting me in charge? My parent clearly sees me struggling and won't step in to help! The feelings that have overwhelmed and taken over my body have now overwhelmed and taken over my parent.. and that is scarier than anything else."

"Loud, chaotic tantrums need calm, steady voices. Tell your child *some* of the following, more slowly and quietly than feels natural, while looking off to the side or to the ground, because when a child (or adult) is in fight-or-flight mode, direct eye contact can be interpreted as a threat. *"You're a good kid having a hard time. I'm here. I love you. Do your thing. You're allowed to feel this way."*

Or try to sing a simple song over and over, very slowly. Something like, "*Blake, Blake, it's okay... Blake, Blake, it's okay... Blake, Blake, it's okay... let's take a deep breath,*" and then take an audible slow diaphragmatic breath."

"In the heat of the moment, kids can say some nasty things: "I hate you!" or "Leave me alone!" or "I hope you die!" Let's pause and reframe how we look at these words. Your child isn't talking to you. Yes, your child is saying these words aloud and seems to be throwing them in your direction, but consider this: your child is actually talking to the overwhelming, terrifying, threatening feelings *inside his body*. It's as if your child is saying to his dysregulation: "I hate you!" and "Leave me alone!" and "I hope you die!" as a way of protecting himself"

Chapter 15 - Sibling Rivalry

"There is no strategy as important for healthy sibling relationships as PNP Time, or dedicated alone time for each child to spend with a parent. The more secure a child feels with their parents, the more they can view a sibling as a playmate and not a rival."

""It's so hard to see your brother get new shoes. Can you get new ones? Not right now, sweetie. In this family, every kid gets what they need—and your shoes are still in great shape. You're allowed to be upset. I get it.""

"venting: I have a zero-tolerance policy for siblings insulting each other or calling each other names. In my mind, this is bullying, and it's something I encourage families to take a hard line about. Name-calling is not innocent teasing; it's one way a kid can chip away at another kid's confidence, especially when parents don't step in to stop it. And this is why I encourage parents to establish with each child that it's okay to talk to *them*, alone, about their angry or jealous sibling feelings—this way, there's a dedicated space to air those feelings. You can even spell this out with your child when you're alone: "I know having a sibling is tricky. And I know you have a ton to say about your sister. You can talk to me about this when we are together, just the two of us, and I won't try to convince you otherwise or tell you not to feel this way. I'll try to understand and help you out. And ... here's the other important thing: I absolutely will not allow you to speak with harsh words or insults or teasing toward your sister. My number one job is to keep everyone in this family safe, and safety includes the words we use with each other.""

"use these words: "I need both of you to go to your rooms, right now. You're not in trouble. My number one job is to keep everyone safe, and right now safety means two kids apart so we can calm our bodies. I'll check on both of you soon. I love you.""

Chapter 16 - Rudeness and Defiance

"think about yourself—why are you rude to people sometimes? Why would you talk back to or disobey your boss? I come up with the same reason, every time: I feel misunderstood. I am looking to feel seen and don't. I feel frustrated that someone else isn't really *hearing* me, and my relationship with that person isn't as strong as it could be"

"we must unlearn the idea that if we don't punish the original behavior, it will be more likely to happen again. We do not reinforce bad behavior by skipping punishment. The idea that if we "let a child get away with this," they will learn it is "okay to talk to their parents like that" ... well, this assumes a very negative view of human behavior, one that I don't buy into."

Step 1: Put a *boundary* around your child's behavior ("I won't allow..." or "I won't let you ...").

Step 2: Provide a generous *interpretation*, acknowledging the deeper feelings, worries, and desire to be seen. Sometimes, presence without words is enough (remember, children interpret your presence as a sign of their goodness, because you're showing your child they don't scare you).

"Reflect and act later. What impulse control does your child struggle with? When things are calmer between you, can you help your child practice having that urge and then pausing and breathing and choosing a better option? Do you need more buy-in from your child to have her listen to certain rules?"

Chapter 17 - Whining

I often use the formula *whining* = *strong desire* + *powerlessness*.

"The next time your child says, "I need you to get me my pajamaaaaaas!" take a deep breath, remind your body you are safe, and then try something like, "Oh no oh no oh no... the whines again! How the heck did they" — walk over to the window, look around outside — "get in here again?" Continue with your monologue, and watch your child loosen up. "Okay, I don't know how they got in, but let's get some of those out. Throw them onto some other kids!" Walk over to your child and pretend to "take" the whines out of their body, then throw those whines out the window or door or something else. Then return to your child and say something like, "Okay, sorry, what? Oh, you want your pajamas?" You can get them for your child at this point. You aren't "reinforcing" the whine, you are just adding playfulness and connection."

"Empathize with the general plight of childhood: "Sometimes it feels really hard to be a kid. I know." Maybe continue, if relevant, "You wish you could make all your own decisions. I get that.""

Chapter 18 - Lying

"Kids also lie if they believe that telling the truth will threaten their attachment with their parents. Attachment is a system of proximity. It's literally about staying close to your caregivers and feeling that your caregivers want to stay close to you. Kids are constantly monitoring their relationships with their parents with this in mind."

"Approach your child in a calm moment, and share something like: "Hey, I want to give you more independence. I know it feels awful, when you're a kid, to be in charge of so little. Where can we start? Where's an area you'd like to have more control?""

"When it comes to parenting kids who have a tendency to lie, my approach is designed to increase truth-telling *in the future* rather than increase "confessions" now."

"When your child says, "I didn't knock down my sister's tower, it just fell!" you might respond, "You wish that tower was still up ...," or "Sometimes I do things and then wish I hadn't done them... it's so hard when that happens." Seeing the lie as a wish allows us to feel on the same team as our child instead of seeing them as the enemy. This perspective shift makes change possible and might make our child more inclined to tell the truth the next time."

"If lying is an issue in your home, connect with your child *outside* of the moment to have a larger discussion about what he needs to be honest. This is especially effective with older kids who are more equipped to verbalize these thoughts. You might start like this: "Hey... I want to talk for a few minutes. You're not in trouble. I'm just thinking about how sometimes it's hard to tell me the truth. And I'm not blaming you, because I realize there must be things *you* need from *me* in order to tell me the truth. There must be things I'm doing that make truth-telling scary for you, or maybe you think you might get in some type of trouble. Anyway, I'm wondering what you need from me, or if there's something I could do differently. Because I want this to be a house where you can tell me the truth about things even if you think they're not so great.""

Chapter 19 - Fears and Anxiety

"The "Here's why you don't need to be scared" approach focuses on providing your child a new and different experience; the "Huh, there must be something to this, tell me more" approach focuses on learning more about your child's experience."

"Learning the details around a fear gives you more information to help your child."

"we don't want to talk our kids out of their fears because we want them to trust

their feelings of threat and discomfort. Down the line, we want our children to trust their feelings when they're in truly threatening situations. We want them to follow their instincts when they think, "Hmm... something is off here. My body is telling me this isn't right. I need to leave this situation."

"avoidance always increases anxiety. If we aren't willing to name and discuss a situation that our *child* feels anxious about, it tells our child that we must be anxious about it as well, and this only adds to his anxiety."

"A dry run for separation might start like this: "On Monday, you'll have your first day of school. Let's think about how we want to say goodbye and then practice it a few times so our bodies are ready for the moment when it comes!""

"Ask more, and tell less—no convincing or explaining, just information gathering. Then restate what you've learned to see if you "have it right." You might say, "Okay, let me see if I have this right. When you walk somewhere alone in the house, and it's dark, it just feels scary in your body. You're not sure why but you know it feels that way. Is that right?""

"Say something like: "The dark can feel scary because we can't see. And it can feel scary when we don't know for sure what's around us. It makes sense that walking around the house alone when it's dark feels tricky to you!""

"Tell your child how glad you are that you talked about this fear. Use the word "important." This communicates that the fear feelings within them are worthy of being spoken about, which encourages them to cope with these feelings rather than push them away (which would only make them bigger!). Try, "I'm so glad we're talking about this. This is really important stuff."

"Resist the urge to explain the fear away or solve the problem on your own. Phrases like "I wonder" and "I'm thinking about" help engage your child in problem-solving. It might sound like this: "Hmm ... I'm wondering if we can go to the basement and start going down the stairs one at a time ... let me know when the scary feeling starts and when it feels like it's getting bigger."

"Create a mantra. For kids who struggle with anxiety, mantras can be very helpful in the moment. Whether spoken out loud or recited internally, a mantra focuses their attention on the calming words rather than the source of distress. Examples of mantras include, "It's okay to be nervous. I can get through this," "I can feel scared and brave at the same time," and "I'm safe, my parents are near." Work with your child to develop a mantra that feels good to them and encourage them to repeat it during scary moments."

Chapter 20 - Hesitation and Shyness

Confidence isn't *being* ready—confidence is *knowing* when you're ready.

"If you notice that your child's shyness or hesitation or clinginess bothers you, remind yourself that a child's willingness to not join the crowd is probably a trait you'll value in her later on. Try to do a 180 on your interpretation of shyness, and experiment with telling yourself: "My child knows who he is and what is and isn't comfortable, even in the face of others' acting differently. How bold, how awe-some, how confident!""

"Here's a powerful phrase to use with your kids: "You'll know when you're ready to ____" This communicates that you trust your child, which will teach them to trust themselves, and self-trust is the essence of confidence."

"When we label kids, saying things like "Oh, she's shy" or "He never likes to talk to grown-ups, he's really reserved," we lock them into roles with a type of rigidity that makes growth difficult. Instead of labeling, provide a generous interpretation of your child's behavior, especially if someone else smacks on a label. If a family member says, "Aisha, why are you being so shy?," take a breath, jump in, and share, "Aisha isn't shy. Aisha is figuring out what feels comfortable to her, and that's great. She'll share more about her school year when she's ready.""

Chapter 21 - Frustration Intolerance

"Here's a deep paradox about learning: the more we embrace not-knowing and mistakes and struggles, the more we set the stage for growth, success, and achievement. This is true for adults and kids alike, and it's a critical reminder about the importance of normalizing difficulties, embracing mistakes as an opportunity to learn, and building frustration tolerance."

"the more I'm okay with her struggling with a challenge—meaning I let her work it out rather than offering a solution—the more she will be okay with it."

"frustration tolerance requires us to ground ourselves in what is happening in the moment, to feel okay even when we don't know how to do something, and to focus on effort instead of outcome."

"This is a lot easier to do when we navigate the world with a "growth mindset"—the belief that abilities can be cultivated through effort, study, and persistence and that failures and struggles are not enemies of learning but rather key elements on the pathway to learning."

"the less obsessed we are with "success," the more we'll be willing to try new things and develop and grow, which of course are key elements in all types of success."

"Deep breaths calm our nervous system, and this sets the stage for accessing all our other coping mechanisms. When you notice your child getting frustrated,

instead of telling them, "Take a deep breath," model it yourself."

It can be really helpful, as a family, to establish a set of *growth mindset family values* that you can refer to in moments of struggle or challenge (both your kids' moments and your own). Here are four of these values I love, which I often write down in work areas or the kitchen, for my entire family to see:

1. In our family, we love to be challenged.
2. In our family, how hard we work is more important than coming up with the right answer.
3. In our family, we know that not-knowing sits next to learning something new. We love learning new things, so we embrace "I don't know" moments.
4. In our family, we try to remember that sticking with something hard makes our brains grow. And we're big into brain growth.

"It's incredibly hard to build tolerance for frustration when you're learning in an environment where no one else seems to have had a hard time."

Chapter 22 - Food and Eating Habits

"As a child pushes a boundary around food or rejects it entirely, a parent feels like a "bad parent," causing her to refocus on controlling her kid in an attempt to feel "good" again. Yet the more a child feels controlled, the more she will cling to rejection or boundary-pushing in order to assert her independence, which leads to increased parental desperation, intensified power struggles, and frustration for everyone."

Parent's job: decide what food is offered, where it is offered, when it is offered
Child's job: decide whether and how much to eat of what's offered

"Parents can say to themselves: "My job is the what-when-where. Did I do my job well? Okay, I served chicken, pasta, and broccoli. I decided dinner is at five thirty p.m. and that it takes place only at our dinner table. Wow, yes, I did all of that—job well done!" Sure, a parent's mind will naturally wander to questions like "My son only ate the pasta ... I wonder why he's not eating any veggies? What am I doing wrong?" But hopefully this is when an internal alarm might go off. "Oh wait, that's my child's job! Those decisions are his to make. Let me come back to myself and my role. I will keep doing my job and will trust him to do his ... I am doing my job well.""

""Hey, I learned something interesting today and wanted to share it with you. When it comes to food, you have a job and I have a job—and our jobs are totally different. It's my job to decide what we eat, when we eat, and where we eat. And just so you know, I'll always offer at least one thing that you like so that eating never feels stressful. Your job is to decide whether you eat what I serve and how much. That's kind of interesting, right? It means you get to choose

what goes into your body, but it also means you don't get to tell me to make something new if you want something I didn't choose that day. I get to choose what we eat that day, but I don't get to make you take more bites of things or tell you what you have to finish. What do you think of that?"

"Here's a quick script: 'I'm going to make a change to snacks in our house. We have too many snacks, which means we don't eat enough dinner, which is the food that helps your body grow. When you get home from school, the only snacks I will offer are ____ and _____. I know that's a big change and I know it'll take some time to get used to.'"

- Remind yourself you don't need agreement: "I don't need my child to agree with me."
- Give permission for your child to be upset: "You're allowed to be upset."
- Name the wish: "You wish we could have—for dinner instead..." or "You wish you were in charge of every food choice."

Chapter 23 - Consent

"It's not my job to make other people happy. Their discomfort is a feeling in *their body*, and it's not my fault or my responsibility to make this feeling go away."

"feeling like you have the right to make decisions about your body comes from experience in your early years regarding.. whether you felt you had the right to make decisions about your body. It boils down to one question, the answer to which kids learn not by our words but by how we handle tricky situations: "Am I allowed to say no to others even if they get upset?"

"every single one of our children will know the word "no" or the phrase "I don't want to" by the time they enter adolescence, but the confidence to actually hold the boundaries around these words comes from our child's early *experiences with us*."

"Okay, let's pause. Parent-shame check! Note any "Oh no ... I've messed this all up" or "I'm the worst parent in the world" thoughts that are coming up for you. I've had those thoughts too, I promise, and I know how painful they are. Place a hand on your heart, making sure your feet are on the ground, and take a few deep breaths. Tell yourself: "It's not too late... for me or my child. My reaction is a sign that I *care*, not a sign that I'm *bad*. My willingness to reflect and try something new tells me that I am a brave cycle-breaker."

"The next time you have an "opening" with your child—a nice quiet moment when you're getting along—explore the topics of decision-making, asserting one's wants and needs, and tolerating other people's distress. I'd start with, "Ooooooh, I have an interesting question...", and then share some (but not all!)

of the following: "What's more important, doing something that feels right to you or making other people happy? What if you can't do both? When does making someone else happy, instead of doing something that feels right, feel okay to you? When would it be extra-important to choose doing what feels right, even if someone else is super *unhappy*? What if you do something that you want and someone else gets mad at you.. does this mean you're a bad person? Why or why not?"

Chapter 24 - Tears

"Tears operate in our attachment system as a signal that we need emotional support and connection from others. They are a sign of how we feel, and of the sheer strength of that feeling. I sometimes imagine my tears talking to me, saying: "Something so big is happening inside that I am literally a *liquid* coming out of your eyes in an attempt to get you to pause and notice."

""Bodies never lie. Tears are the body's way of sending a message about how someone is feeling. I don't have to like my or my kid's tears... but I have to respect them.""

""Our tears tell us that something important is happening in our body. In this family, we like to know important things, so let those tears come out. I'm here with you. I'm right here.""

Chapter 25 - Building Confidence

"When we define confidence as "feeling good about ourselves," we end up trying to convince our kids out of their distress, out of their disappointment, or out of their perception that they are not very good at certain things; this is unfortunate, because I believe this pathway of reassurance and propping up actually destroys confidence."

"When we try to convince a child to feel any other way than how they're currently feeling, a child learns: "I guess I'm not a good feeler of my feelings... I thought I was upset, but here's my most trusted adult telling me it's not such a big deal. I can't trust my feelings inside; after all, I've learned that other people have a better idea of how I feel than I do." Eesh. That's scary. When we think about the adults we hope our kids will become, I'm pretty sure most of us want our kids to have a strong internal compass, a "gut feel-ing" they can locate inside their bodies. This is what allows adults to make decisions amid uncertainty—to turn down social plans. because they feel exhausted and need a good night's sleep, or to speak up to a colleague who left them out of an important meeting."

"confidence cannot be built from external validation or praise. Sure, these comments feel good, but they never stick; rather, they disappear almost as quickly as they land, leaving us desperate for the next bit of praise so that we

can feel good about ourselves again. This isn't confidence... this is emptiness. Now, a quick praise caveat: commenting on what's happening *inside a child*, or a child's *process and not product*, orients a child to gaze back in instead of out. Comments like, "You're working so hard on that project," or "I notice you're using different colors in this drawing, tell me about this," or "How'd you think to make that?"—these support the development of confidence, because instead of teaching your child to crave positive words from others, we teach them to notice what they're doing and learn more about themselves."

Chapter 26 - Perfectionism

underneath perfectionism is always an emotion regulation struggle.

"And, because perfectionism is a sign of an emotion regulation struggle, logic won't help"

"We want to help a perfectionist child feel good enough rather than cling to the need to be perfect. Part of this inability to live in the gray comes from the fact that perfectionistic kids often can't tolerate—or simply can't understand—nuance."

"'Oh, hi, Perfect Girl. You again! I know, you always say, "Perfect, perfect, must be perfect, if it's not perfect I have to stop." I hear you! And also, I'm going to ask you to step back. I am going to take a deep breath and find my "I can do hard things" voice because I know that's in there too." Then I can hear a quieter voice telling me it's okay that things are hard and I can do hard things.'"

"the Perfect Voice approach is directly inspired by internal family systems and the idea that we have a multiplicity to our minds [...] Identifying the different "parts" of us speaks to how our mind is organized, and kids often take to this framework because it resonates with what actually goes on inside their bodies."

Chapter 27 - Separation Anxiety

"children create a mental representation of the parent-child relationship so that they can access the feelings of the relationship even when a parent is absent. Transitional objects help children with this process; a blanket or stuffed animal or object from home becomes a physical representation of the parent-child bond, reminding a child that parents still exist and are "there" for you even when they are not right in front of you. I always recommend transitional objects to parents whose kids struggle with separation anxiety—they are. a way to help make tricky transitions feel more manageable."

Chapter 28 - Sleep

"'You know what I've been thinking about? Sometimes I have a hard time falling asleep and I think of you and miss you! I'd love to have a picture of you right

next to my bed. Then I can see you and remind myself that you're here and I'm safe, and that I'll see you in the morning! I think it would be good for both of us to have pictures of each other. Maybe we can make picture frames and then put them by our beds.""

"Another way to infuse your presence is to tell your child you'll write them a note or create a drawing with their name on it after they fall asleep and put it next to their bed; this way, kids who wake up in the middle of the night will see proof of your presence and your child's body will feel safer knowing there's a time you'll "be there" next to them. I was in a stage with my daughter where each night, she wanted me to drop off a note that had her name and somewhere between fifty and one hundred hearts (she'd tell me the number each night—a way to feel in control); it always took me a while, but this was the thing that helped her feel safe and sleep without much protest ... it was totally worth it!"

"I love mantras. They take a situation that can feel big and overwhelming and give a child something small and within their control to focus on. I have used this mantra for years with my own kids: "Mommy is near, [*child's name*] is safe, my bed is cozy.""

Chapter 29 - Kids Who Don't Like Talking About Feelings (Deeply Feeling Kids)

"For children with these more intense emotions, I use the label "Deeply Feeling Kids" (DFKs) - it reflects the way they experience the world and it also explains why these children often feel overwhelmed and enter more easily into a "threat" or "fight or flight" state."

"These kids often struggle to accept help, yell, "Stop it!" when you talk about feelings, and escalate from zero to sixty over matters that are seemingly very small. So here's another important truth: You're not "doing it wrong"; you're not saying the words incorrectly or missing the tone. DFKs just can't take in the direct support you're offering because they feel so consumed by their overwhelming sensations."

"Understanding DFKs requires going all the way back to evolution. For these children, vulnerability sits right next to shame; remember, shame puts humans into a primal defense state, one in which we are taken over by the need to protect ourselves. And we do that by shutting down, attacking others, or closing people out. When a child is in this threat state, the world feels dangerous; even a parent's attempts to help can feel like an assault, which is why DFKs push us away at the precise moments they need our help."

Remember: logic is never our friend when it comes to understanding emotions, and this is never truer than with DFKs.

"When DFKs are met with parental screaming or harsh words or rejection, the patterns of dysregulation only intensify."

"Parents of DFKs have to practice "holding space" — meaning literally staying present around the child and taking up space, so that the child sees her overwhelming feelings aren't taking over the world around her and leaving her all alone. Parents of DFKs have to commit to limiting the damage instead of solving the problem. They need to focus on the larger arc of a child's struggle rather than fixating on what's happening on the surface."

"DFKs have massive meltdowns. They often escalate quickly and are full of flails, kicks, thrown objects, and total dysregulation. When kids are in this state, they need containment first. This requires that a parent take a deep breath and remember that their number one job is to keep their child safe. In times like these, that means removing the child from the current situation, bringing him to a smaller room, sitting with him, and being present for the emotional storm."

"You must carry through because your child needs to see that you are not overpowered by their dysregulation. They must understand that they have a sturdy leader who can take care of them in times of stress. Your child may be, on the surface, asking not to be carried to his room, but on the inside, imagine they're saying to you: "Please be the sturdy leader I need. I am clearly not in a place to be making good decisions. Please please please show me that my overwhelming feelings aren't contagious.""

"Perhaps more than anything else, DFKs pick up on your *perception* of them in their difficult moments; DFKs feel so overwhelmed by themselves and terrified of their own badness that they are hypervigilant for any sign from a parent that confirms their deepest fears."

"if you're sitting with your son in his room while he's having a massive meltdown, a "parent time-out" might begin with you saying to your child, "I love you. I need to give my body space for some deep breaths. I'm stepping right outside your door and then I'll be back." This couldn't be more different from yelling, "I can't be with you when you're like this!" Key elements of taking a break: explaining your need to calm your body, eliminating blame, stating clearly that you'll come back."

"DFKs tend to hate talking about feelings. It feels like too much, too intense, too intrusive. For DFKs, feelings sit too close to their vulnerability. As we know, their vulnerability sits so close to shame that it leads them to shut down."

"The next time you're trying to talk with your child about something feelings related, say, "I want to do something different. Lie down and don't even look at me! No eye contact at all. I'm going to say some things... if you agree, give me a thumbs-up. If it's a no, give me a thumbs-down. If something about what I say

is kind of right, kind of not, give me a thumbs-to-the-side." If your child wants to hide under a bed while you do this, by all means, allow it! Your child is limiting being seen, which can allow your child to ... be a bit more seen. Next, say something ridiculous, something you know you'll get a thumbs-down for; it might be: "Today I got pretty upset with my sister because she came home with five hundred scoops of ice cream and I got only one." You'll likely get a smirk or small laugh, which is great to ease tension and make the space that much safer. Now you have an opening, perhaps for something like this: "Today I got pretty upset with my sister ... it's so hard to have a younger sister, sometimes I wish it was just me in this family." Pause. Allow some time. If you do get a response, or a thumbs-up, move on—don't verbally process. This is likely a huge change for you, so maybe only say, "I hear that," or "I understand." You are slowly building your child's tolerance for feelings, vulnerability, connection."

Conclusion

"Place your feet on the ground, place your hand on your heart, and say this aloud with me: "Yes, I've done lots of things I wish I hadn't. I've behaved in ways I'm not proud of. Those are all things I *did*. That's not who I *am*. This difference doesn't let me off the hook; this difference leaves me *on the hook*, because it is the only way I can hold myself accountable to make changes. I am a good person who has done not-so-good things. I am still a good person. I am good inside, I have always been good inside, I will remain good inside."

These notes were collected by psychotherapist and author Emil Barna in his efforts to assist with professional development and further education for himself and those who read them. You can find out more about Emil by visiting www.barnacc.com