

Your Village: Parenting Beyond Discipline

#95: Creating a Parenting Framework for Positive Discipline Transcript

Erin: Hello and welcome to the Your Village podcast, Parenting Beyond Discipline, the place to learn about ALL things parenting and get your questions answered. I'm your host, Erin Royer.

This week I'm answering one question from a listener named Lola because Lola has a BIIIIG question, which basically begins to tackle what a big job parenting is.

Lola says, "Hi, Thank you for the education you have provided in your episodes. I am a single mom. My daughter is 9 and my son is seven. Both of them seem to be very shy and lacking self confidence and social skills. My seven year old boy is very aggressive and I get bad report about him from school almost every other day about hitting other kids and not respecting other' Space and many more issues. I think I lack a good structure for raising my kids. I wanted to ask if there is any material you would recommend that will teach me how to build a strong foundation/structure in every area of raising kids in a family. Maybe a prototype."

First, I want to untangle this a bit by touching on the obvious and not so obvious areas of parenting and how they all play together. Then give some tips for Lola to get started in the right direction along with recommended resources for continued progress and learning.

So Lola you touched on several areas for parenting including discipline supporting self-esteem social skills and when I'm going to add the place into all of this is the life skills and is are important And play into the rest of this because it's also a part of self-esteem.

Let's start with discipline. The word discipline comes from a latin word that means "teaching" or learning so discipline should be about teaching our children, helping our children learn. It's about supporting, coaching and teaching. I don't know where or when the term got changed from it's root meaning. But when we look in the dictionary today, we see that the modern definition is far from it's root. The modern definition states: control that is gained by requiring that rules or orders be obeyed; punishing bad behavior. As far as discipline with children (or really anyone), It should never be about punishment. So I think when a lot of us hear the word discipline we think punishment because the meaning has gotten so adulterated. So I wanted to start by clearing that up!

When I speak of discipline, I mean to help, teach and guide our children in making good choices, for building internal motivations for these behaviors through building empathy. Choices they make because they want to learn, grow, succeed, be kind, caring, and the type of person other people like to be around. It means allowing them room to make choices, which means room to make mistakes. But then help them learn from their mistakes to make better choices going forward. We help them self-reflect, self-assess and problem solve so they know what to do differently the next time. Social skills come into play here, when we're talking about being the type of person that other people want to be around. So teaching and coaching social skills is a part of discipline. We want to set boundaries around their choices so that they can make mistakes that don't make them crash and burn so hard that it's hard to recover. But rather, they metaphorically can fall down and scratch their knee rather than break every bone in their body! Another way I've heard it put is like a kite on a string. We let our kids string out a little at a time so they don't go up too fast, not have enough skill to handle it and then come crashing down. If they show us we gave them a little too much string, they're starting to dip and dive, we pull that string back in to give them the support and boundaries they need and then slowly let it back out as they show they are ready for more responsibility again. A lot of the trouble for parents comes in when they aren't sure what they should be expecting from their kids at certain ages. So I often seem parents either just fly by the seat of their pants, try this, oh that didn't work. Ok let's try that... (I don't recommend this method!) or they go off what they see other family's doing. Here's what I've noticed about that. In general, my kids peers don't have enough responsibility yet have too much freedom. This is more true for my older son's peers than my younger two. Keep in mind, my kids are the same ages as lola's. My twins are 7 and my older son is 9. In most areas, my older son has far more responsibility than his peers which means more freedom but by freedom, I mean freedom that requires responsibility. He has less freedom in other areas though. Here's what I mean. So my oldest is responsible for getting himself up and ready in the morning and getting his morning chores done. He gets himself up, dressed, teeth brushed, gets his own breakfast, and feeds the dogs. He's completely responsible for his own homework, meaning when and how it gets done and getting it into his backpack before he goes to bed. I don't ask or remind him even once. I see him doing it and once every few weeks he'll ask for some help. He has chores he has to get done throughout the week. If they aren't done by Sunday, I will remind but most of the time I don't have to. He gets to go over to friends houses, now even outside of our little neighborhood, to the next neighborhood over with his watch that I can call him on. He has to call me when he gets there and has to answer if I call. If I can't reach him, he's knows that means big trouble! He has the freedom to go if he can handle the responsibility of calling me when he arrives and answering when I call even though he

knows I might be asking him to come home! Where he doesn't have as much freedom is with screen time, access to electronics, and nutritional food choices. I've been getting the argument a lot lately how "all my friends have a phone and they make fun of me!" I'm sure they don't all have one and if any of them are really making fun of him then that's on them. So those are fun conversations!

So I'm going to get into some discipline tips and resources for Lola and anyone else who isn't sure where to start. First, some other podcast episodes that discuss this topic that are really good to start with include episode 22, What is your parenting style? I talk about the 4 parenting styles and the different outcomes along with why one style in particular is the most effective for raising happy and successful kids. This is, of course the style discuss and teach on the podcast as well as the classes on the website. When I say style it's really an attitude of approaching parenting. It's not a strict, cookie-cutter, here's how you approach each issue, step by step! Because every child and every situation is different so we definitely need options! In addition to this episode, my class Intro to discipline on the website covers that material more in depth plus additional information about the basics of discipline, why some things work and others don't, the role of discipline and helps to give a basic overall understanding of discipline so parents can be more effective. Another episode that is very helpful is episode #55, raising responsible and independent kids part 2. There is a part one, episode #54 as well which also covers some more about parenting style and how it affects kids abilities to be independent and responsible. But episode 55 gets into all the life skills kids should have by age so that by the time they leave home they are ready to be independent and take care of their own stuff! So it's a really good barometer to see if your kids on track for this. When it comes to setting up a household where kids are ready, willing and able to do these tasks, you want to use positive discipline, giving responsibility, using positive feedback, coaching, strong communication skills, setting the boundaries, following through and then appropriate consequences only when absolutely necessary and only as a last resort. Now this is a HUGE category and way too much to go into here. So that's why I put hours worth of discipline classes on the website, discipline tools for toddler, preschoolers, and elementary age kids, getting kids to listen, misbehaviors and their solutions, power struggles, etc. to give parents access to all this information on-demand. To watch sample classes and/or sign-up to watch those, go to the website at YourVillageOnline.com under the Discipline section. Also you can check out any of the books by Jane Nelson. My discipline classes are a combination of information from her teachings along with several others. But she's got some great books and hers go into more depth and background than my classes do. I give some background but then basically cut right to the chase of the topic for busy parents who aren't quite as interested in all the deeper psychological background of why and all the examples and test cases that she gives in her books.

So for parents struggling with discipline such as getting kids to do what is expected of them, listen to episode 55 to see if your kids are on track. Then if they aren't on track for their age, make a plan for what you want them to start with to get caught up, one to two things max for instance, mornings and homework. Get some discipline tools ready to go by reading Jane Nelson or watching the classes on the website like intro to discipline, power struggles and discipline tools for (whatever your child's age) toddlers, preschool or elementary age (that's kids ages 5-10) I will be adding a discipline tools for adolescents as well in the near future but it's not available yet. Then start tackling those problem areas using the tools you've learned.

Because the thing is that kids like to be independent. So once they get the idea that getting themselves up and ready in the morning or taking over the process for their homework gives them freedom and independence, the whole process is much, much easier.

Next I'm going to cover self-esteem because self-esteem and independence are very interrelated and where self esteem comes from and how to support building our kids' self esteem right after a word from our sponsor, story worth.

I'm going to get more into building kids self-esteem as soon as we return after a word from our sponsor Story Worth!

Now that we're back, let's get back to talking about raising kids with self-esteem.

Self-esteem comes from 2 places, feeling wanted and needed and having skills. So being helpful around the house adds to self esteem. Yes, telling your kids they are important to you and why is another way for them to understand they are loved and needed. but also contributing to the family makes us feel needed as well. Skills also plays into self esteem and these include life skills. Being able to take care of oneself is an important piece to self-esteem. It's not just "I can draw well" or "I'm a great goalie" It's "I can sweep the floor" "I can pick out my own clothes" "I can make my snack or breakfast" That's huge! I can take care of myself is huge! If your kids are toddlers you see this everyday. They are independent little stinkers or they try their hardest to be! Let them be independent in positive ways and they'll push back a lot less in the annoying ways! If your kids are older than toddlers, you remember this stage. They want to do everything and anything they can on their own, persistently so. So let them. Then it seems to die down in many families by the time they are in late elementary and middle school? Why? Because adults tend to squash it. Don't squash it! Build it! Kids

say, "Can I help with.." and we say "No, just let mommy do it this time." Soon they stop asking. Let kids help anyway you can.

An important thing to remember about self esteem is that it has to be built. It CANNOT be given. I've seen this meme, some of you have probably seen it, too and it's sweet and I can see the appeal but it says something like our job is to fill our kids bucket so full of self-esteem that no amount of holes will empty the bucket. There are two problems with this. Number one, if you leave the job of self-esteem up to another to fill it up then they rely on the other, that's external not internal. Number two holes are going to empty a bucket no matter how hard you try and who wants the job of constantly filling up someone's bucket? Three let's teach our kids not to poke holes in other people's buckets! The problem there is the hole poker! OK, I digress, but seriously, self-esteem has to be built through skills and abilities and feeling needed and wanted. We can help our kids feel needed and wanted through our words and actions and of course that is important too. But kids are going to grow up and they will feel needed and wanted by being of service to others, by making the world a nicer place, by working hard. By learning that they are going to mess up, they are going to fail even. Failure is a part of trying and it's inevitable. The important thing to remember to teach kids is that you have to get back up and try again. Failure teaches lessons and makes us stronger. It's not a sign to quit. So if we give our kids OPPORTUNITIES to see their abilities and their own potential, this is the best job we can do, not by setting up them up so they can't fail. That's a disaster. All these awards and congratulations just for showing up and I think it's on the decline thank goodness. They actually work against building true self-esteem. My husband likes to say, "I'm proud of you." He says it sometimes for things that are just expected. Don't be proud of your kids for brushing their teeth. That's expected. Don't be proud for them behaving in class that day. That's expected, especially in 3rd grade. He liked to say that a lot when our 3rd grader got recognized for good behavior. He pretty much gets that every day. Only once in a blue moon does he not get recognized for it. That's not something to be proud of, that's expected. If he sticks up for the kid who's being bullied, then I'm proud! If he takes time to clean up trash that isn't his after lunch, then I'm proud! But don't tell your kids you're proud of behavior that should be expected. Then they start looking for external validation for doing something they should be doing anyway. They should have to work for the "I'm proud of you's" Those are special and then they mean something. For more on self-esteem, listen to episode #2 and for even more on ways to work with kids self-esteem you can see the class on the website under the development and health section.

Lastly, I want to touch on the social skills piece of Lola's question. His social skills behavior is behind his peers. This type of behavior is common in 4 year olds sometimes

into early 5. (Not acceptable but common and where we work with them to make better choices). But by 5 we do expect kids to be able to mostly resolve differences by talking it out or going to get an adult if they can't work it out together. Since I don't have the answer to this, I'm just going to throw this out for Lola and any other parents who are wondering about this, is how does your son behave at home? Is it different? or does he seem to struggle with the same deficit in social skills at home? When he gets upset at home how does he react? Does he get aggressive with his sister or with you? Or does he react better? Whether he acts differently in the two different places or the same is telling. If he reacts differently at home it means he has the ability to handle himself more appropriately but he's not using those skills at school for some reason. If he's reacting the same in both places then there are things to troubleshoot. Is he simply lacking skills that he needs to be taught? Is he angry about something in the history of the family (I don't know if dad is in the picture or not. but could he be acting out about that?) or is there a possible diagnosis, such as ADHD?

So if he's acting differently at school than home, then you can work with him at home but it's like me going to the teacher and telling her he didn't eat his vegetables at dinner and asking her to talk with him about it. You can have a conversation, "what happened at school today? Why did you hit Jack?" and get some information. The thing with kids this young is that a consequence at home is rarely going to translate. He's not going to stop and think before he gets aggressive, "Oh wait, mom said I wouldn't get to go to the party tomorrow if I act out in school today." He's acting out. He's RE-acting. He's not thinking through his actions. So you would want to get to the bottom of what happened at least from his perspective. Then coach him on how to handle it better. You can discuss feelings and read some books at home, like "hands are not for hitting." or Personal Space Camp and/or It's Hard to be a Verb (which teaches about impulsivity) I have created a list of 22 books for kids on all different aspects of social skills. To get a copy of that list, you can go to YourVillageOnline.com/Podcast/SocialSkillsBooks. In addition to that, I would work with the school to figure out what's happening in the environment so that you and the school admin can work together to get your son the support he needs to make better choices.

If he's acting the same at home and school, then what I already gave about coaching at home about his behavior at home, as well as discussing and coaching the behavior from school, reading the books and working with the school will also be helpful. For tips on coaching about aggression, listen to episode #35 where I talk about helping kids with aggression & #73 where I share tips for a parent dealing with an aggressive 5 year old. If things improve within a month, and don't expect perfect but expect marked improvement. Then stay on that path. If they don't then there is something deeper

going on, emotional struggles due to life stress or potentially an assessment for behavior concerns may be in order.

If you have a parenting question you'd like answered, you can send an email to Podcast@YourVillageOnline.com.

Thanks for listening and see you next time!