

Parenting with Your Best Self

>> KATHERINE POWERS: Perfect. I see some chats coming in too. That's perfect. All right. Well, thank you, all, for coming. Hello and welcome. I'm so glad that you came and we can spend this time together and talk about parenting with your best self.

My name is Katherine Powers. I am an LSW or a licensed clinical social worker. I am a clinical trainer at Magellan. And on a personal note I am a mother of three little boys. I know we had that survey of how old your children are. And we have a good representation of kind of all the age groups. I myself, my boys are five years old, three years old, and one-year-old. In no way does that make me an expert or a pro. I'm still definitely learning this whole parenting thing every year, month, and moment at a time.

However, I have done some deep dives into research about the topic and some life experiences to back up some of the studies that I have read.

I also want to mention that we only have a short time to really talk today about such a vast topic. So I won't be able to get into the nitty-gritty of everyone's individual circumstances. Definitely always remember your EAP benefits for any kind of individualized sessions or anything that could definitely be helpful for that.

But I do hope that I can provide you a few things to really think about and consider when it comes to parenting.

At the end of our time together, hopefully you will be able to describe how to model positive relationships, learn how to set boundaries, and identify how to prioritize self-care.

Now, I do want to mention, when we discuss parents, I'm talking about if you are a caregiver to a younger person. We know parents might actually be grandparent or foster parent, siblings, aunts, uncles. The list goes on and on.

So if you are raising a child or children and taking on that parenting role, then that is what I'll be referring to whenever I'm saying parent. Now, as we know, life has challenges especially when it comes to parenting. We might be able better understand some of our feelings and our children's feelings after familiarizing ourselves with human developmental stages. So let's look at the tendencies that humans experience and our processing in psychosocial development.

There are a few different developmental stage theories out there. But today we're going to discuss psychologist Erik Erikson's stages of psychosocial development. Now Erickson's stages are as follows.

Stage one, infancy. In this stage we're working to develop that trust versus mistrust. Now, an example of this is an

infant learns that they have food whenever they need it. That they feel that love and security of their parent or caregiver.

Stage two is early childhood. In this stage we are working to develop that autonomy versus shame and doubt. An example is that parent or caregiver allowing opportunities for independence.

Stage three is the play age. In this stage we're developing that initiative versus guilt. This could look like something like a parent encouraging that child to discover their own interests.

Next is stage four, school age. Here is where we're developing that industry versus inferiority. An example, the parent is setting clear ground rules and really providing those positive affirmations for the child's achievements. These could be big achievements or small achievements.

Stage five is adolescence. In this stage we are developing that identity versus identity confusion. An example is the adolescent contemplating really who they are and really where they fit in. And that could be in the setting of home, in the setting of school, in their friend groups, in all these areas of their life.

Stage six, early adulthood. This is when we work to develop that intimacy versus isolation. An example here is that development of those lasting relationships that are really going to stick with them maybe for the rest of their life.

Stage seven, middle age. In this stage we are developing generativity versus stagnation. That means that we are looking at contributing to society or another generation. What can we contribute maybe to that younger generation?

And then the last stage, stage eight, is old age. Here is where we develop that grit versus despair. Thinking back on our achievements and our societal contributions, this is where we're going to, in that stage, kind of reflect.

Now, keep in mind, as we know, we have so many other experiences of course that are happening in life on top of all these things that developmentally we're trying to handle and work through. We are trying to figure out our own lives, right, like everything that we're going through. And then we also have our little ones looking to us for coaching. And it can be very stressful. But yet so rewarding when you see your child succeed or carry out something positive that you taught them.

Now, children are watching and absorbing so much even when it seems like they're not paying attention to us at all. This is true even as early as infants and toddlers. So we really want to be sure that we're aware of what we're modeling like those positive behaviors, interactions, and that we're modeling good habits.

The expression, actions speak louder than words, is especially true when it comes to children. Children are more likely to learn from our actions than our words.

Now, let's think about that for just a minute. Let's say we hear our child in the other room, maybe they're playing with a sibling. And we can hear them yelling. They're yelling at their sibling. Then maybe their sibling yells back. We can hear this going on. And we go in, enter the room, and we yell back, stop yelling, don't yell at each other. Now, we just sent a very confusing message. Our words are telling them not to yell, but our actions are saying yelling is okay. I'm going to just keep yelling at you to stop yelling.

So soon, our child will learn that our words actually hold little meaning. When our actions don't align with those words. And before you know it, they are only modeling the behaviors that they're seeing from us or experiencing from us instead of listening to what we are actually saying and doing that, those actions that we want them to do.

So this also brings up another point about our relationships. As we're talking about modeling, we want our children to see us interacting positively not only with them in that parenting role but also with others. And these could be our adult relationships or other relationships that we have.

Allowing our children to see good relationships will actually help them in their future relationships.

Now, children misbehaving is not just necessarily on them. We might actually trigger the misbehavior. Now, if we can figure out our own behaviors or their triggers, then we might be able to find a way to avoid the misbehavior.

There are a couple basic needs that we should keep in mind like, are they tired? Or are they hungry? Maybe pack a snack if you know you're going to be gone or running an errand right at snack time. That might help. But as we know, if a child is tired and hungry, that's just a sure sign that a meltdown is coming.

So today we're going to talk about another thing that helps after, of course, keeping those things in mind. The thing that we'll talk about today is boundaries. A boundary is a set limit so everyone has a clear expectation of the situation or the scenario.

It is our job as the parent to set the boundaries. Children like and need structure. It might not seem like it that moment that they're having that tantrum about the rule that you set and you agreed upon. It might not seem like they like that, but structure and routine are good for them. And they do like it. They will -- you'll start seeing better and better behaviors if you have those clear boundaries set.

It can be challenging to know what boundaries need to be set, though, when they're changing every day and moving through these developmental stages. Our kids are going through these things. One minute they're not quite old enough to do something. So we have a boundary set up maybe. And then pretty soon they are. So we might have to change that.

Now, as we -- as much as we can, we want to review the boundaries with our child ahead of time. This is really important. If someone is upset or having a tantrum, we often are going to shut down. And they're not able to hear a logical explanation in that moment or really think rationally even.

So we want to go over what the boundary is with the child and our family unit before the tantrum happens or when everyone's calm and thinking rationally.

When creating the boundary, try to phrase it in a positive way. So, for example, instead of saying something like, okay, the boundary is don't leave your clothes all over the floor. Try phrasing it in a little bit more positive way like, okay, the boundary will be put your clothes in your hamper. Allow your children or child to ask questions if they need to so that everyone understands and is on the same page. Not understanding why a boundary is set can seem confusing. So adding justification and reasoning can really help your child accept it.

Then when it comes time, make sure that you stick to the boundary. One thing to keep in mind when it comes to boundaries, it's our job to set the boundary. And it's their job to test the boundary. So practice with yourself or another person what your reaction plan will be when the boundaries are tested.

It can be challenging. Especially at first if it's a new boundary that's being set.

Another challenge is that we don't always know how our children will actually react. We might be able to anticipate how they could test us. But also might not really be able to prepare for every situation. Our emotions in that moment are going to be out of our control. But we can control our actions and really what we do about it.

Boundaries, like I said, might need to change and adapt along with our child's developmental stage.

Be sure that you're having a meeting with your child and family unit when the boundaries are changing. Again, so everyone remains on the same page. This can be especially important too, keeping in mind if there's siblings in the house. And then maybe older siblings are getting to do things that younger siblings are not able to do. Again, keeping the family unit in on all of these meetings about the boundaries is going to be really important.

As a parent, it can be very disheartening to feel like you truly don't know why your child is misbehaving. It can be easy to doubt your parenting. And you are not alone. And we will come back to this. But even you being here and showing up today is proof that you want to be the parent that is the best that you can be.

So today to do this it's important to try to recognize what your child might be saying with their behavior, whether they

realize it or not. A lot of times our children might be acting a certain way and they don't even necessarily know why. But let's look at why maybe it's happening. Again, after having basic needs met like that food, shelter, clothing, research shows that children also need belonging and significance. These are two pillars of positive parenting, which can really play out in attention and power.

Now, these are two things that we're going to focus on as they play a big part in the misbehavior that you may be seeing. Your child wants to feel like they are getting that attention they need. They need to feel that they are important to you and really worth your time and attention. If they feel that they aren't getting it with good behaviors, then they often will act out or misbehave.

Typically, if they aren't getting our positive attention, then they surely expect a reaction from us by misbehaving that will certainly gain our attention.

Your child also wants to feel that they have power to make meaningful contributions to you and the family unit but also that they have power over their own life. They want to show that they are capable while also independent.

If they're not given these opportunities to practice power, then they'll certainly come up with their own. For example, you might have seen them coming up with their own ways by having your child refuse to do something that you tell them to do. Eat your green beans. Child refuses, absolutely not. No, can't make me eat them. Or maybe they're going against our direction by doing the complete opposite of what you told them or purposefully pushing your buttons. They know you so well and they know what buttons they can push.

Now, again, it can be challenging for our little ones and really having us look for those opportunities for them to practice this power. Our little ones who don't have as much ability for power like really going to their drawer and just picking an outfit to wear for the day, getting dressed all on their own. We can still help them, though. We can still give them this opportunity for power in different or other ways like in choices.

So we can offer them choices like, do you want to wear this outfit or this outfit today? Offering choices early on can really help them develop their problem solving and decision making skills.

Okay. So now we can recognize these attention and power behaviors. But what can we do to give our children these things and hopefully avoid misbehaviors? Here's a proposal of what we could do to help fulfill our children's attention and power needs. Spend some one-on-one time with them. And if there's multiple parents in the home, ideally this would be one-on-one time with each individual parent. So one parent has one-on-one time. Then the next parent has one-on-one time.

At least ten minutes a day, try for at least ten minutes a day. This is not saying that you're sitting on the couch. You're on your phone finishing some emails. They're also sitting on the couch maybe next to you but they're on their tablet and playing a game or watching something. This is giving them your full attention, ten minutes, at least, if possible, giving them that power to choose maybe what your activity is to do together.

Ideally, it's something that they like to do. For example, for me a lot of times in our house this falls to bedtime. We're busy during the day and working and all these other things, sports and things we have. So at bedtime, though, I know I'm going to get some time with them. I'll read or have my child, my older child try and pick out his sight words, read with me a story. And I let them pick the story book.

Then they get to pick out a song that they want me to sing before lights out and we say good night. I do this with each one of my children before bed.

The goal is to do this at least once every day. Now, with life, though, comes many other factors. Like we discussed, different developmental influences or sometimes there might be a meeting or something that you have. You might have something else. And also we could just miss that window. They're just too tired. Maybe they missed their nap that day, or they just had an exhausting day, and we miss that window to really put them to bed smoothly.

So I'm not saying that this is going to solve all meltdowns or take away any and all misbehaviors. But it should help decrease them. Now, I did mention electronics. And I want to bring up a point of electronics again. There is kind of an exception for teens with electronics.

If this is a place that you can start with them by really just even starting that connection time, then you can do this adding the electronics, doing those electronics with them as long as it's together. And you're not doing different things on your electronic devices. So if there is a video game or something that they are really into and maybe they can teach you, and you can do it together or you can play with them together for at least that ten minutes' time, then that could be a good starting place or a good place to get that one-on-one time in with them.

Now, with that positive parenting -- I know we talked a lot about these pillars, these things that the children need. And really, instead of this reactive parenting that we might be used to where we experience the misbehavior. And then constantly find ourselves looking for consequences to really make an impact and change their behavior. Next time they're going to remember that I gave them this consequence. So then next time they won't do the misbehavior.

The goal with this positive parenting is to give the child

what they need, that attention and those power choices before the misbehavior even happens.

Another tool to consider is motivational interviewing. Motivational interviewing is a communication technique often used to motivate someone to change. It does not use persuasion but instead uses guidance from and in this situation, the parent to help the child work through what they need to do weighing pros and cons and hopefully realizing the change that needs to happen on their own.

When it comes to parenting, some of the motivational interviewing principles can be applied even if it's not necessarily a situation when we're trying to help the child move through the change process. In motivational interviewing active listening is a major element, especially in engaging with that person. Really establishing that rapport, that relationship.

Now, this means listening without distractions, without confrontation, without telling them what to do or directing. It's letting them work through their dilemma by asking open-ended questions and offering reflective statements.

When I say open-ended questions, these are questions you can't answer with a simple yes or no. A lot of times these questions might start with, what or how, describe, or tell me about.

A reflective statement is something that kind of acts like a mirror. It repeats what the person said using some of your own words to make sure then you're on the same page. In motivational interviewing we learn that a lot of times people we talk with will express defensiveness or become upset maybe. And this is often when they feel like they're not being heard or understood.

The same can be applied to our children. So taking the time to listen to what they are saying can build a stronger relationship with them.

Now, just jumping in to solve their problems is usually very challenging. Especially because we've been through life. We've been through maybe some of their experiences. Oh, yes, I have advice for you. I can just tell you what you need to do. But we really need to refrain from doing that and offering a validating statement maybe like, wow, that sounds like a tough decision. And then an open-ended question. How can I help? It can really open the door for your child to express what's in their heart and their mind.

Now, motivational interviewing communication cannot happen all the time, especially if you have littles. Your role will require more directing, more coaching. But you can still listen and enjoy your time with them.

When combining active listening and motivational interviewing tools with the previously discussed that time together, that at least ten minutes together, you'll hear your child say maybe some unexpected things. You may find that

they're goofier than you've realized or more sensitive than you thought.

You can enjoy that time so much more when you're not distracted by the pressures of solving their problems or correcting their posture, even if it is just that ten minutes a day.

Now, we've talked briefly about the huge topic of parenting. And I want to circle back to one thing I mentioned earlier. One thing to always keep in mind is you. You need to take care of yourself. Getting adequate sleep, eating well, spending time outside in nature, practicing self-care, meditating, taking even three minutes just to yourself. This is not only important for you, but it's also important for your child or children to see that you are taking care of yourself.

Remember how we talked about your actions speak louder than your words? If you are doing these things, your child is seeing you take care of yourself. That's a great way to teach them to develop that too for themselves.

Now, if you ever get down on yourself because, I just didn't handle that situation the best way with my child. I didn't get sleep last night. So my temper, my fuse was a little short. Darn, I didn't have the patience like I usually do. Remember, no one can be their best self all the time. Please cut yourself some slack. Parenting is not an easy job. So please be kind to yourself.

Now, as we wrap up today, I want you to take a minute and really think about what you're going to do for yourself today or this week. We will post a poll on the screen now so that you can share if you're comfortable with that with really what you plan to do for yourself this week.

Please think about it. Take some time. What's going to work for you? Write it down. I see these things coming in. This is awesome. All these things are such great ideas, and we want to make sure they actually happen. So please feel free to write it down. If you are anything like my husband, it doesn't happen unless it's on the calendar.

So put it on the calendar. Do whatever you have to do to make sure that it happens. When you're taking care of yourself, then you are setting the foundation for parenting with your best self. Thank you.

>> ALLONNA SCOTT: Wow. And thank you, Katherine for an excellent and informative presentation. We appreciate the information. Before we get to the questions, there are a few questions. Before we get to those, I do want to remind everyone that your program is here to help you and your family members. And if you want information on this topic or another health topic or wellness topic, please feel free to contact your program. Your program is here to help you and your family members.

Everyone, all of us have a lot to juggle. And there are

times when we run into struggles. So no matter where you are on your journey, a little help can go a long way. And we can help you be aware of how you're doing and improving your areas of life that you may want to change. We are a community of experts to support you in a confidential fashion as well as digital resources that you can use that may help you with your life juggle.

In the end we all want to help support you in living your best life. You can contact your program, day or night, 365 day as year. Or you can call the toll-free number or visit using the web.

And if you don't know your company's specific website, reach out to your human resources department for help. Let's go to our questions here.

All right. So there's one here that says, it's more of a question, not a comment. They just said that they love the photos. We thank you for that. We do try to make them as inclusive as possible.

And here's another one. It says, so can we do like a pre-meeting to set the boundaries? That's one of the questions.

>> KATHERINE POWERS: Yes. Great question. So absolutely. A family meeting, I think would be ideal, especially if there are siblings involved, then it's not -- then everybody can feel like they're all in on the same information. I'm not meeting with maybe the older sibling first and telling them their special rules, and then the other kids maybe can't hear them what they get to do.

So I think having that family meeting -- including the whole family unit is going to be so beneficial for everybody. And, again, allowing everybody to kind of talk and ask those questions. Well, yeah, Johnny's a little older. So he has a little bit more understanding of safety. So you're still going to need to -- just throwing out an example here -- hold my hand when we're crossing the street. Now Johnny doesn't have to because he understands that he can look both ways. So really explaining that could help. Not everybody's going to agree necessarily with the boundary all the time. But it will help them accept it. Great question.

>> ALLONNA SCOTT: Yes. Here's another question. How much time should we allocate for doing kid free activities per week for self-care? It's easy to spend free time with kids because we feel guilty.

>> KATHERINE POWERS: Absolutely. Oh, my goodness. And parent guilt is so much a thing. And you do have to take care of yourself. So the hard part is everybody is a little different. Everybody's tank gets refueled at different rates and different things. So for some people they're the sole parent, the sole caregiver, and they may not have the funds to get a baby sitter to really step out an hour every day for themselves. So it's really whatever -- maybe some people can

only do one night several hours a month for themselves. Sometimes it's not even going out or taking that time to yourself. Some people I saw in the chat, painting their nails or taking a bath. A lot of times for me it's -- once I do put them to bed, then I know, okay. I'm going to have some time. Just get through until bedtime. And then I'm going to know that I can have some time to myself to practice my breathing and everything.

So it really does depend on your situation. But definitely -- again, feeling that guilt, that is so normal. You are definitely not alone. And, again, just trying to educate your children. Because sometimes it does build from them. They're so upset to see you leave. And you do just try and explain to them. Mommy or daddy has to take that time for myself so that I can feel refreshed and I can be my best with you. We can still have fun. I'm going to have energy and to have that fun time with you, because I am taking care of myself as well. So really involving them and just trying to explain that you're doing it for them and you. Because it's going to make your time together with them so much better.

>> ALLONNA SCOTT: Here's one question. It says, how would you -- what would be your suggestion for how to have one-on-one time when you're doing it like with two spouses. One is doing it and the other is not. So it could get into a combative situation. How would you handle that?

>> KATHERINE POWERS: So as far as one spouse -- one parent and not the other, I'm not sure I understand. Are you talking about like if there are siblings?

>> ALLONNA SCOTT: Yes. What if it says you've been trying to have one-on-one time with the kids but the spouse is not engaging with the kids in their one-on-one time. So there's a fight over the one-on-one time. And they don't seem to enjoy it with the spouse.

>> KATHERINE POWERS: Yes. Great question. And you probably will see this if this is a new concept. Even you'll probably see this in the beginning. And it's okay to name it, to call it out and say this is my special time with so and so. Your special time will be next, or your special time is in the morning or whenever we have that scheduled. If there's any other siblings there, maybe, again, trying to involve them, well, you can have special one-on-one time playing with your brother or sister. You have special one-on-one time with them and I'll have special one-on-one time with your sibling and then we'll switch. Everybody gets their time. Again, everybody's different.

If you do have a partner or somebody that is able to kind of take any siblings so that you can enjoy that one-on-one time. Otherwise, sometimes I'm not saying that we want to do it for hours. But sometimes we do then, for that ten minutes or short time giving them some sort of electronic or tablet, whatever you

can think of, though, to really have that time for just that one-on-one time with that one sibling or one child.

>> ALLONNA SCOTT: Thanks, Katherine. We appreciate those suggestions. Unfortunately, we've seen many questions coming in. We wish we could answer them all, time to answer them all. But we have come to the end. And we have run out of time. But we do encourage you to overall for the topic being discussed today to please express your views of satisfaction, whether it was very satisfied, satisfied, dissatisfied or very dissatisfied. Then we also have here additional feedback that you can give on this topic or any other topic that you feel is of interest.

Down below at the bottom again, there's a section where you can download the handout. If you're in need of a certificate of completion, you have that where you can download as well.

So that does conclude our time. So I'll stop the recording.

Katherine, again, we appreciate your time today as well as all those who called in today and took time out of their busy schedule and attend and listen to our session. This will conclude our webinar for today. Thank you, Katherine. Thank you, all.

>> KATHERINE POWERS: Thank you.
(Event concluded at 1:45 PM CT)

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