

What really matters in parenting? Part 1

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SUMMARY

The podcast episode addresses the question of which parenting decisions truly impact children's lives, emphasizing that the significance of these decisions varies by age and individual circumstances. The host outlines five key factors that matter most in parenting, while also acknowledging the complexities of parenting influenced by socioeconomic status, personal values, and cultural context.

- *Parenting decisions have varying impacts based on a child's age and individual needs.*
- *A significant portion of children's outcomes (about 49%) is determined by genetics, while socioeconomic status contributes an additional 10-40%.*
- *Parenting styles, particularly authoritative parenting, generally yield positive outcomes, but the effectiveness can vary.*
- *Aligning parenting practices with personal values is crucial to avoid cognitive dissonance and enhance family well-being.*
- *Healing from personal trauma and understanding one's own needs can improve parenting effectiveness and reduce burnout.*
- *Meeting both parent and child needs is essential to prevent power struggles and foster healthy relationships.*
- *Societal factors and cultural norms significantly influence parenting dynamics and children's development.*
- *The most impactful thing parents can do is to truly see and understand their children for who they are, fostering a sense of worth and acceptance.*

[Music] hello and welcome to the your parenting Mojo podcast late last year I put up a post in the free your parenting Mojo Facebook group which you're welcome to join by the way asking what questions listeners have that they would like me to answer in an episode and listener Roberta submitted this question hello my name is Roberta Pera and I'm in New York

City so as parents we are faced with so many decisions about our children and I'm wondering what decisions actually matter so in terms of looking at the research what are the things are going to have the greatest impact on their lives so as soon as I heard this question the wheels started churning in my brain because it's such a fun question to ponder what is really important how could we know how would we decide

would it be the same for all children or different for different children and different families I also quickly realized that what matters is very different for babies and for children and yes there are some commonalities but a child who is talking and who can say no and express very different parts of their personality has a different set of needs from an infant and different things will be important at different stages in this episode I'm going to

share what I think are the top five things that matter for children and in a future episode I'll look at the same issue related to babies so let's start by putting all this into context we'll take a look at the literature on the topic so there have always been cycles of advice related to Parenting a while ago I wrote a piece for my blog on psychology today on why people claim that gentle parenting quote unquote doesn't work

where I looked at the values that parents have held in the past and that they hold today so in the 1920s parents were very concerned that their children were too independent this is American parents of course and wanted to squash this tendency 100 years ago the trend had reversed and Independence were among children was a top priority and parenting advice from the so-called experts changes all the time as well before 2016 the American Academy of Pediatrics said that children under age

two should avoid screens at all times and children over age two should have no more than two hours of screen time per day and so now the AAP acknowledges that hardly anyone seem to be following this so they say the only screen time that children under 18 months should get is video chatting with an adult and between 18 to 24 months they should watch only educational programming with a caregiver and children aged 2 to five should limit

non-educational screen time to 1 hour per weekday and three hours on weekend days and for ages six and older we should quote encourage healthy habits and limit activities that include screens and that's a lot more nuance and when you dig into the studies underneath the guide guidelines you find a whole lot of ambiguity with studies testing different ideas among different populations getting different results with nothing that looks like what parents want which is to know how much

screen time is okay and how much could be dangerous for our children the short answer on that is firstly we don't know and secondly it's likely to look different for different children which the research has a really hard time teasing out guidelines have changed on many other topics too the AAP used to recommend that children under age 3 avoid peanut butter in case they were allergic but It reversed itself in 2008 after finding that children who ate

peanut butter had lower instances of peanut allergies and we won't go super far into Co sleeping except to say that the AAP does now finally acknowledge that co-sleeping with infants happens occasionally but only accidentally and it recommends that quote if the parent falls asleep while feeding the infant in bed the infant should be placed back on a separate sleep surface as soon as the parent awakens end quote co- sleeping is much more common and much less dangerous in countries where

everyone in the family sleeps on hard beds with light coverings or no coverings at all Australia has decided to promote safe co- sleeping while the city of Milwaukee has published ads showing an infant sleeping nestled in a pile of comforters and blankets with one finger resting gently on a meat cleaver And the tagline your baby sleeping with you can be just as dangerous the same research is out there for all of these policy makers but they

decide to interpret it in very different ways and how much of these decisions about things like screen time and

peanut butter and Co sleeping and all the other choices we make on a daily basis actually impact outcomes for our children well there are definitely a lot of people who say it doesn't matter very much that a pretty big chunk of our children's potential is decided by their genes one very popular way to try to understand how heritable traits are is

to see whether twins who are reared by their biological caregivers or other caregivers end up with outcomes that are similar to or different from each other or to compare identical twins who share 100% of their DNA with fraternal twins who only share 50% a massive meta analysis of 2748 Publications including 14 and a half million twin pairs which included virtually all published twin studies of complex traits found the average heritability of traits is 49% so parents

you're responsible for the other 51% after the child is born a big chunk of the rest is determined by socioeconomic status and this has been linked with pretty much every outcome you can imagine from physical and mental health to academic achievement to employment on one side incarceration on the other socioeconomic status also affects things like parental education which impacts Children's Learning before and during school and career expectations after school it also affects the way we interact with our children so it's

difficult to sort out the effects of socioeconomic status from the actual decisions we make as parents even here we may find more flexibility than we think it's possible there's some specific aspect of socioeconomic status that confers most of the benefits if there was I would think that that would be Safety and Security and I think back to the research on the marshmallow test where researchers see whether a children will eat a marsh marow now or wait 15

minutes to get a second marshmallow children who wait for the second marshmallow tend to do better on all the usual measures but when you bring in socioeconomic status things look very different waiting for the second marshmallow is a great strategy when you're sure there will be a second marshmallow if you're in a household where food is scarce then taking what food is available now rather than waiting for the promise of more food later is actually the more rational

strategy so we might be able to improve the outcomes for the children of lower socioeconomic status by providing support with accessing food and that may have as much of an effect on the outcome as the family's overall socioeconomic status but socioeconomic status also affects things like a child's exposure to lead and to gun violence and to schools with adequate resources as well as to things that are more within our Direct Control like our approach to Parenting and learning researchers can't

even agree whether socioeconomic status functions as a proxy for all of those specific factors or whether it operates as a single coherent variable that broadly affects most aspects of our daily lives in a way that can't be reduced to the sum of its parts I would imagine that it's fairly conservative to say that socioeconomic status contributes another 10% or so to the 49% that's heritable and perhaps even more although that really is an educated guess I couldn't find any

specific statistic on it probably because of the lack of agreement on what social economic status actually represents so if you care about the output factors that the studies that look at this care about like years of education and income and lack of incarceration then earning more money may be one of the most impactful things you can do for your child although if you've been listening for a while now I'm sure you'll be surprised by me saying this this is where we start to

see that this isn't simply a question of tell me what the science says about what really matters because what really matters depends mostly on our values I personally think that the inequality that chasing after socioeconomic status has created is not a good thing High socioeconomic status might be a good thing for one individual child which is what the studies are looking at and as long as you do consider years of education and income and the like to be

the most important thing but I see two problems here firstly the difference between people who are classified as high and low socioeconomic status causes a lot lot of problems in our culture and secondly I would argue that the focus on achieving high social economic status doesn't actually benefit the people who have that high status beyond the status itself what I mean is that if money is your end goal then social economic status is the right metric to focus on

but for most people money isn't their end goal money is supposed to be a means to an end and that end is supposed to be happiness and it turns out that money isn't that good at creating happiness there seems to be some sort of cutoff point that was around \$75,000 in the 1990s maybe it's up to 100,000 now with inflation and beyond that point most people don't experience more well-being even if they have more money writing in

1998 Dr David Meers observed that quote the second \$50,000 like the second slice of pie seldom tastes as good as the first end quote so once your basic needs are met what matters much more than money is how you feel about what you have forbes's 100 wealthiest Americans surveyed in 1985 when they were probably considerably less wealthy than they are now are only slightly happier than the average person so setting aside just for a few minutes the idea that high

earnings might not necessarily be a good thing and accepting the premise that it does impact outcomes that researchers consider to be good things the actual amount beyond that that you can impact through your parenting decisions may be somewhere in the 30 to 40% range and then we factor in The Wider context Global trends like global warming which are creating wildfires that have had an impact on me and my family much bigger impacts on other families there's the

national context of the overall economic situation which shapes where parents can get jobs that they want and that pay enough to sustain a lifestyle they want to have cultural norms that communicate to us that some things are okay other things aren't through TV shows news magazines and books policies that make things like like paid family leave and child care available at a price that we can afford or not are also important there's the child's experience and the

school the physical structures they interact with like their homes and their schools which may be clean and beautiful mansions or they might have mold and lead paint on the walls there's the availability of extended family and the values of these people and whether the child is in a cohesive Community or not then there are the parents Each of which may have different styles motivations traumas histories and and other caregivers who interact with the child often like grandparents foster parents

extended family and parenting doesn't just flow down in one direction from parent to child the child's temperament and personality have a big impact on the parent and on the relationship quality any parent with more than one child knows as much as you try and treat them the same you end up parenting children quite differently I saw this when I was researching the recent episode on adverse childhood experiences which is abbreviated to Aces a number of studies

found connections between experiencing Aces and having ADHD and it's tempting to take that correlational data which says the two things vary together and say that experiencing trauma causes ADHD and it may but there's also evidence that parents treat children with ADHD like symptoms more harshly than children who don't have these symptoms these children aren't easy to parent they test our patients we not may not get as much rest because we're watching them closely which can make a

short tempered I'm not saying that all parents of children with ADHD abuse their children but the kinds of hitting that we classify as adverse childhood experiences tends to occur in families where parents are trying to cope with a lot and children aren't behaving in a way that's easy for the parents to cope with obviously we're getting pretty deeply into guesstimates at this point but perhaps we're now looking at around 10% of the outcomes being affected by

all of those other factors collectively which leaves maybe 20 20 to 30% of children's outcome that we can actually directly affect through our parenting practices perhaps a little bit more when we think that we can try to mediate the messages that they get from other people in other places I read a lot of books to Caris and I don't sensor anything we read except I did refuse to read the first book in The Warriors series about four

Wildcat Clans because three chapters in we were both hopelessly confused about which character was which but we've read all 21 books in the Famous Five series that I read when I was a kid and all 22 books in the red wall series which I was really kind of done with at about Book 15 and now we're starting the Guardians of Gul series and every one of those books was packed with white supremacist patriarchal capitalist ideas but we've

discussed them so much that she's starting to spot them herself almost every time a young female character was mentioned in the red wall series we were reminded that she was pretty but of course none of the characters outside of adolescence were pretty my personal favorite instance was when a young male and female character were locked up in the dark hold of a ship when neither of them could see a thing and the female character was still described as

pretty and so GIS asked me to insert the phrase definitely not every time the author used the word pretty and

she knows that our culture rewards girls for being pretty and demure and boys for being brave leaders and she thinks it's a load of crap so our children aren't just passive recipients of culture they form their own ideas about it and these ideas can be moderated by how we interpret the ideas there's been quite a bit of the

research on the associations between Dr Diana Bin's parenting Styles and children's outcomes the results are somewhat expected neglectful parenting has almost universally negative outcomes when we look at cognitive and academic achievement job success emotional development well-being Social Development in relationships and physical development in health authoritative parenting which is the high demandingness low warmth kind doesn't look great in most studies either although the picture is mixed for soall permissive parenting with findings

across the board from negative to neutral to positive or inconclusive and not finding any specific outcomes authoritative parenting which is the quote unquote good kind that balances warmth and demandingness is almost universally seen as quote unquote good with only a very few mostly negative or inconclusive results of course I was interested in what were those negative results and I was lucky that the paper I read that did this meta analysis included downloadable Excel tables summarizing the findings of each

paper and I found that one study had non-significant findings with exercise for girls another had a nonsignificant finding on the onset of illicit drug use frequency of drinking while a third had negative results on interpersonal dependency and I don't want to dig too deeply into these results because we've already spent a whole episode looking at how authoritative parenting is not the best parenting style it's just the best of the four that are commonly researched and this particular piece of research

actually included less studied approaches like concerted cultivation helicopter parenting tiger parenting and over parenting and the summary of those impacts is that for a concerted cultivation researchers are pretty much only looking at academic outcomes which isn't surprising given that the whole purpose of that approach is to ensure academic success helicopter parenting has an almost universally negative outcomes tiger parenting has mostly negative outcomes overparenting means being well-intentioned but excessively

controlling supporting and problem solving for the child and had really mixed outcomes that were overall weighted toward the negative side so this leaves us with two uncomfortable ideas that I can neatly illustrate with the experience of a couple of people I've worked with recently who have kindly allowed me to share their stories the first is Janu who is in the parenting membership and the second is someone I coached for whom I'll use the pseudonym Nadia so firstly

we'll look at what happens on the input side right that's the decisions that we're making about parenting and then we also want to look at the output side which is how the person turns out at the other end as I Was preparing for the interview on adverse childhood experiences I posted in both the parenting membership and in The Taming your triggers Community which was running at the time to ask what questions parents had about Aces and

Janu asked how do we deal with the fact that authoritative parenting includes behaviors that qualify as Aces when I asked her for more detail on that and what she had in mind she said that shaming and humiliation were used as standard parenting Tools in her family her parents spanked her or threatened to spank her pushed grabbed at her spanking isn't actually an ace at the moment although Dr Andrew Grogan Kaylor said when we talked that he

thinks it should be an Ace and you might remember from that episode that Dr Diana bomr who did the research that turned into the parenting Styles was an avowed advocate of spanking and she said there was no evidence that authoritative parents could do well at being authoritative parents without at least an occasional spank Jan's parents did not value her ideas and her opinions everyone was in their own little box dealing with all their own traumas and required that Janu

be small and compliant so that she didn't inconvenience them her parents self-medicated with alcohol sugar nicotine shopping and nobody supported anyone else nobody felt close to each other everyone was out for themselves and they were constantly shifting alliances and secrecy around important subjects it wasn't that her parents were bad it's just that they were dealing with their own unresolved trauma without the tools or support that they needed and that experience was really difficult for Janu Janu told me that her

experience seemed pretty normal when compared to her peers and when she went to University her friends seemed to have had even worse experiences which further normalized what had happened to her so that's the input end on the output end Janu has done very well she is Dutch she now lives in Belgium she graduated from University she has a master's in laws degree and she was working as a consultant at a top firm providing legal and strategic advice to corporate

clients on immigration issues she's married and she has two children and I first met her when she joined the taming your triggers Workshop and she'd actually thought about joining the parenting membership but she decided not to do that I was introduced to your work by a friend of mine um and at that time parenting membership had just opened and that was tough because I was super tempted and I really wanted to join I was like okay this this sounds like

exactly what I need right now but to invest the time and the money into something that was just for me was really hard for me at that point which is so silly but yeah that's that's culture for you so I'm fine with spending money on my kids on my house on my job on my husband but on me for something that's just for me and for my growth that was a really hard thing for me to De and at that time I I couldn't

justify that for me and then Tam of your triggers came along and I had had that much more time to you know mull over the parenting membership and sort of missing that opportunity and noticing these interactions with my kids particularly being triggered by something from my partner and then bringing that to my kids who are just these helpless beautiful little creatures and that being so unfair and and so jarring with my my core values so then Tam your

triggers came along and I was like okay this is a workshop this is this isn't a membership this is a workshop I can do this this is allowed so I I I enrolled and and registered and um joined that and it was just eye opening to see that I was right in in my suspicion that my interactions with my kids had so little to do with my kids and that just opened this whole world of of knowing for me so

we start to get a hint of what's to come here right Janu really wanted to participate in the membership she thought it was exactly what she needed she has the money she was willing to spend an equivalent amount on her husband the kids the house but she couldn't justify spending on herself it was only because taming your triggers was a course with an end date that was going to benefit her kids by helping her to tame her triggers around them that

she allowed her she puts it to make that purchase now what's wrong with that picture where a mother devalues herself so much where she puts herself last in the family hierarchy our conversation continued and we saw just how difficult things were and I remember your last post in taming your triggers where we were kind of wrapping up the community at the end of the course and you kind of said that you were joined hoping to get some new tools

and instead you found something can you do you remember what you told us you found yeah so yeah I I was hoping to get some more tools to make my interactions with my kids smoother and then I just I opened the garage door and it was spilled with festering garbage yeah that was necessary but not a great moment really yeah and so often we do find that right so so some sometimes parents find oh yeah there's a little pile of garbage

here and and I can I can work on that now and some parents do find they get into it and they're like oh I had no idea that all of this stuff was there from my childhood from the ways that I've been conditioned to show up in society now um and I know that you have struggled with burnout over the years and I'm curious about the intersection between um your burnout and and the kinds of things that you were

discovering in that garage yeah absolutely so actually my the formal part of my burnouts with me being put it home that was right after the taming your triggers Workshop concluded so slightly awkward timing there but kind of also necessary because I was being forced to look at that garage and everything in it and there's no unseeing that so I'm not the type of person to then just close the door back up and pretend like nothing's happened and

pretend that I didn't learn anything and didn't still want to improve my interactions with my children so so yeah it forced me to really take that pause and prioritize myself basically over just trying to keep up with everything yeah and and so to the extent that you're comfortable doing it what kinds of things were affecting your ability to show up and with your children in a way that that was aligned with your values and uh was contributing

to this burnout what what did you find in there that made that so difficult well primarily my emotion regulation so I I was showing up with a level of anger or a level of sadness that I found completely inappropriate to show up with with my kids but just because I had so much so much exhaustion at that point my prior tools of suppressing

no longer operated and because of all of this happened during the pandemic so that was

a really challenging period for a lot of people and just you know a lot of support structures that were sort of assumed before then just fell away so then you're even more isolated and and disconnected and and left without any level of support really so that wasn't helpful yeah and I I just I I wanted to be a more fulfilled and complete individual in showing up with my kids rather than just plowing through the day on whatever level of energy I had left

and particularly because I I was off on a parental burnout so I had enough energy during the day to do my work but then at the end of the day and in the weekends I had nothing left over for my family and I really love my job but I also really love my family so that disbalance was quite apparent and it's it's really tough because with burnout your whole problem is that you can't assess your energy balance so I couldn't during the

day go like okay I have to tune this down to like 50% so that in the evening I have something left over particularly with a type of job I do that's not it's a very demanding job so that's that's not feasible if I didn't give it my off things wouldn't get done and I would be the one cleaning up so I couldn't tune down on my work and I didn't have enough left for my family and that just felt so

wrong to me on so many levels all right so let's remind ourselves Janu is successful she is doing amazingly well according to most of the indicators that researchers use and inside she was falling apart she was in full on burnout she took a long leave of absence from work to recover she joined taming your triggers because she wanted wanted to find a few new tools to help her deal with her children's difficult behavior and instead she finds this whole garage

full of festering garbage and yes some of that garbage is related to things that were happening then with the lack of support during the pandemic and how hard she was working in an environment that did not support her in prioritizing family but a lot of it was much deeper than that a lot of it goes back to her own parents who were successful authoritarian parents who raised a successful looking daughter who felt anything but successful on the inside

and it was shared in our community that she doesn't really do anything playful ever one time she wrote a comment on a post about Play She said all my hobbies are productive knitting writing baking I'm particularly envious of kids finding joy in their bodies toddlers just learning to stand and taking immense joy and bouncing on their feet I think that's one of the coolest things I so miss that enjoyment in just moving my body and standing in awe of it my time

feels like gold so I shouldn't waste it GH it's a journey to allow myself the humanity to just exist to have just my existence be enough to be worthwhile to have intrinsic worth I still find it a bit yucky to think about for too long although it's empowering in the good moments that perspective is gradually giving me permission to be unproductive sometimes but I still feel guilty about it afterwards most of the time end quote so when we're thinking about what

really matters in parenting we have to consider both ends of this question we have to consider what really matters among the things we can actually affect and we also have to consider what we want to be acceptable outputs which is how we know we will be successful because I know Janu is not alone it's very common among the members of my communities to find themselves in something of a reckoning asking is this it I've achieved the education and the

job and the house and the family so why do I feel so empty inside I know some of you will be listening to this and thinking but I do want my child to do well in school and go to a good college and have a good career and be able to buy a house and get married and have children and I hear that and I also know that many of you want more than that for your children I

know I do and if we want our children to feel fulfilled and to be happy in themselves without needing a degree from a specific University or a high paying job in a specific field or a huge house but just in being themselves and if we want them to be in relationships where they feel truly equal to their partner and to have an intrinsic sense of their own worth so they can sit still doing nothing and not feel guilty about it and

to have a deep sense of joy in life and see the suffering and be able to cope with the suffering and to do work so hopefully there will be less suffering in the world and more joy for everyone then I don't think we can look to the old tools that were designed to get us academic success and a job and a house and a marriage to get us there and I 100% acknowledge this is a value choice

if you value different things than I do then your list of things that really matter will be completely different but if the list of things that I value sounds a lot like what you want for your child then I think there are some things you can do to make that happen before we get there here is a non-exhaustive list of the things that I think don't matter enough to be worth worrying about for children in the

toddler years and Beyond and I've done episodes on most of these things if you want to dig deeper and those will all be linked on the episode page okay so we got how much screen time they get as long as that's balanced by time spending connecting with you and time off screens whether your child has grit or growth mindset or can pass the marshmallow test whether your child jumps right in to new situations or hangs back to observe

first what extracurricular activities they do including what sports or instruments they play whether they do any activities or play any sports at all as long as they're moving their bodies in some way that feels good to them whether they learn to read at age two or age six if they're in school or even later than that if they aren't in school whether they learn a second language if that language is not one that you or your family speak regularly whether

you're a single parent or you're cohabiting or married or partnered with more than one person as long as you find whatever your relationship you're in to be fulfilling whether your children get along with each other now since that may have very little bearing on their long-term relationship whether you go on expensive vacations to places where they will learn about other cultures or not what toys your child plays with and I will include here all of the Toy

subscriptions that claim to match the toys they send with your child's developmental stage even though children develop differently as well as all the subscription kits the aim to teach your child a language you don't speak or about other cultures or art or cooking or science or anything else whether you've said an extra 30 million words to your child by the time they're three or not whether you do pretend play with your child or not whether you stop at one child or have

more than one if you want to have more children or the age difference between your children if you have more than one whether you give your child pocket money or how much whether your child has high self-esteem or not since self-compassion is a much more useful skill I'm sure there are probably a lot more things I could add to this list but I will stop here for now many of those things will make some tiny difference

but in my opinion it's going to be so tiny it really is not worth spending time worrying about just because there is research on it doesn't mean it's important when I interviewed Dr Ensley Gilpin about whether we really have to do pretend play with our children if we hate it she told me about all the benefits pretend play has for children and at the end of our conversation she said the effect X sizes they're finding are small but it's cheap to implement so

they keep doing research on it many of the items on my long list will be correlated with better outcomes but it's hard to know for sure if the action is the thing that's causing the outcome and for those that actually are driving the outcome the effect size is likely to be tiny there are just so few of these individual decisions that can have a real impact because there are so many other factors at play when I started

looking at what I think really does make a difference it quickly became clear this was not going to be a directly research-based list because no researchers are studying the inputs that I'm suggesting and because the outputs I'm suggesting aren't considered either relevant or studied I'm increasingly finding this is a problem for a podcast that's focused on using academic research so I'm sort of trying to muddle through as best I can using the research where that's possible and being clear

with you where I'm relying on my own opinions and ideas and experience so here are the five things that I think really do matter in reverse order number five is aligning your parenting with your values when our values are misaligned with our parenting methods we feel crummy we experience what's called cognitive dissonance which is kind of a fancy term for feeling crummy when we believe one thing but we're doing another we have to constantly try to

reconcile the tension we feel which takes a lot of mental capacity which reduces our capacity for other things that are important to us if you see that beyond the point of Safety and Security that money is not creating much more happiness for you and that in fact paying for all the things Beyond basic Safety and Security means you work longer hours doing harder work than you would like and you're doing everything you can to prepare your child to earn

lots of money like buying special toys and subscription kits and extracurricular activities and tutoring and

maybe even private school then your values and your actions aren't aligned if you feel lonely and overwhelmed and wish you had more people in your parenting Village but you're raising your children to do everything themselves that doing things individually is more valuable than doing them as part of a team and you're teaching them that leadership roles are preferred over all else then your values

and your actions aren't aligned we saw that in our recent episode on consent where our sex education has mostly consisted of putting the fear of God into boys and telling girls not to be alone with boys and we know that this combined with other factors has created a culture where sexual assault is trivialized so if we continue to use this approach with our children but we have a goal of raising people who truly respect others and who fully understand what consent

means then our values and our actions aren't aligned parenting isn't like cooking where you mix the right ingredients in the right order and bake for the right amount of time and you get a predictable result you're interacting with a complex other being who has their own ideas about how they want to live you can't know that the inputs you provide are going to create a certain kind of output but we can be pretty certain that

if we have a goal to raise children with one set of qualities but we interact with them in a way that creates an entirely different set of qualities then we're unlikely to reach our goal the more we can align our goals with our everyday actions the better off we and our children are going to be all right number four healing your own stuff and this Builds on number five because it's hard to be with our children in a way that's align with our

values when we're carrying around our own crap so we heard in the conversation with Dr naen Burke Harris and Jackie Tu Hong Wong that the impact the adverse child experiences have on us they affect our mental and physical health and well-being decades later but I know some of you listening to this will be thinking I didn't have a traumatic childhood my parents did pretty well all things considered so why do I still explode at my kids age

appropriate behavior and I coached a parent recently I'm going to call her Nadia and she's given me permission to share this story with you Nadia describes herself as a very sensitive person and her daughter has this characteristic as well Nadia actually had a pretty good relationship with her own mom although she sees that her mom would blame Nadia for her struggles saying things like why do you do this to me and Nadia and I walked through an

exercise where she brought to mind a recent event that she had found difficult that very same morning she'd been running around doing a million things and her daughter who has recently had covid and about out of gastroenteritis were saying mommy mommy mommy over and over again without actually asking for anything in particular and I asked Nadia what story she was telling herself in her own mind about her daughter and Nadia broke down in tears as she said she's so demanding

she always has been since she was born I'm crying because as I say it aloud it feels so unfair to her and this was difficult for Nadia because it touched that place in her where she was perceived as needy and demanding by her

own mom even though telling someone they are needy and demanding doesn't come anywhere close to being an adverse childhood experience it still hurt Nadia and so it still shows up in those moments when parenting is hard like when

we're distracted by a million things and our child is feeling sick and they're looking for comfort and connection and they're asking for it in a way that we find difficult to receive so when we can heal our stuff we find we can be in relationship with our children in a way that is align with her values and as a side note I was really intrigued before I met Nadia because she knows she is very sensitive she had the impression

that I wouldn't be able to relate to her and I was so grateful for that honest unfiltered feedback and we got to talk through it in person and Nadia realized she got that impression from listening to the show and seeing that my work is grounded in research and she didn't think that she could relate to me because I seem so rational and I have a lot of tools and she said she felt like she makes so many mistakes and after we

spent that time together she realized the impression I apparently give of not being able to relate to people wasn't very accurate and that a short conversation actually profoundly shifted how she perceived this struggle with her child all right so once we've looked at ways to heal our stuff we move on to our third most important point and that is finding ways to meet both your and your child's needs this one's important in the short term because it prevents power

struggles in your family when you're in power struggles it's really hard to parent in line with your values number five because you end up parenting in reaction to the hurts you've experienced number four or you override their needs because you can't see a way to meet both of your needs the key to being able to start doing this is to separate your needs from the strategies you're using to meet your needs in the back of my

book Parenting Beyond power there's a list of needs and when you're starting out it can be helpful to use a list because then you don't end up getting stuck fighting over a Str strategy rather than meeting both of your needs so if you're trying to get your child to stop jumping on the couch that's a strategy that's not on the needs list when you look at the needs list you'll find things like peace and ease and calm

and one way you can meet those needs is for your child to stop jumping on the couch but other ways might include you wearing earplugs or you moving to a different room or your child jumping on the bed or outside and because you aren't in power struggles you aren't overriding your child's consent on a regular basis with which then means you're going to raise a young adult who can be in consent-based relationships not only with romantic Partners but also

with everyone else in their life it makes parenting easier today because we feel good when our needs are met so your child stops fighting you and you get to relax all right number two most important Point working on changing our society our Western educated industrialized Rich Democratic culture is so destructive we're destroying the Earth and we're destroying the well-being of people who mine minerals and grow our food and make the things we use and we're doing all that so we can have more

money and stuff that doesn't increase our well-being either many listeners have a relatively High degree of privilege compared with the wider population and especially compared with the wider global population on average we have more money and more stuff and that money and stuff did not protect us from hurt in childhood just like it will not protect us in adulthood as long as our basic needs are met I think back to the episode called how to do right by

your child and everyone else's with Dr Elizabeth CPS where we discussed how it's our responsibility as people who have been responsible for most of this harm to the world to work on putting it right and I also know that many parents feel overwhelmed so how are we supposed to find time to do this work well firstly I think this work happens in ways that don't take time or energy or effort necessarily when we share cooking or Child Care responsibilities with a

friend or neighbor we aren't creating more work for ourselves and we're creating the kinds of relationships we need to be able to take care of each other instead of paying for the kind of care we used to provide to each other on a routine basis the second big idea that came up for me in that episode is that we spend a lot of time both doing things to get ahead and trying to get our children ahead and worrying about things that

might happen all of those things can take up an enormous amount of our time and energy Dr Crips recalled a time when she was spending a lot of time worrying about something that suddenly was wasn't an issue anymore and her sister said to her well what are you going to do now and Dr Crips said well probably worry about something else I guess but what if we didn't do that what if we spent the energy we've been spending getting our

own children ahead and instead spent it working to support everyone's children we could get involved in political campaigns in a behind the scenes role if being front and center isn't our style the organization showing up for racial Justice Works in support of organizations led by people of color and mobilizes white people to work in these causes as well you can dip your toe in the Water by joining an action hour where they'll tell you exactly what

emails and phone calls to make on behalf of their partner organizations and how to do it and at the end of the hour there's no commitment to do anything else or you can show up for more regular activities and they now have a membership as well as we're doing this kind of work we have to be really clear this is not an Us and Them kind of relationship if we think of ourselves as the privileged ones coming in to save

the day we will fail and our help will not be helpful we have to recognize we're doing this work for ourselves as much as for anyone else for the most part you and I are not among the most hurt by these systems but we are still hurt and when we work to dismantle these systems we are working for others yes but we are also working for ourselves and finally the biggest most important thing that I think you we can

do that will really make a difference in our children's lives is to see them for who they really are think back to what Nadia told us about her mom asking Nadia the rhetorical question why are you doing this to me her mom couldn't really see and accept all of Nadia because to do so would have been too much for her mom to cope with

here's how this showed up for Janu I recently realized that I don't do what my mother said to me

growing up but I do what she did Growing Up and she was a stay-at home mom and she cared a lot and she gave a lot and her whole life was basically dedicated to us so now every day that I go to work I feel like a failure because I'm not dedicating my life to my family and as you can hear Janu has not arrived at any kind of mythical state where parenting is easy but you can see that she's

actively moving toward parenting and alignment with her values she's working on healing her own stuff and she's no longer in active burnout she routinely works with her children to find strategies that work for all of them on issues like morning struggles and tears and The Sibling fighting which used to consume every moment of all of their days but is now much less because her children see that she trusts and honors their needs she sees them for who they

really are which means they can relax into being themselves rather than competing for her attention all the time Janu told me that her youngest child is a ray of sunshine bounce into action from the moment she opens her eyes she loves to laugh and joke and dance and will drop whatever she's doing to dance if she hears a song that she likes she's a Storyteller Her Imagination runs wild and she invites everyone in even though

she's easygoing and cheerful she's stubborn as a mule if her boundaries are crossed and she will advocate for herself loudly and forcibly Janu sees the difference between her child being cheerful and being a people pleaser which is where a lot of us parents get stuck you can be cheerful and know your own mind you don't have to be cheerful and a people pleaser it would be easy to see her younger child as the easy one and her

older child as the more difficult one since the older one experiences the world very intensely she feels deeply she has a keen awareness of her body her boundaries and her needs she's Moody she's exuberant incredibly creative she's kind curious and helpful she's loved and valued by her friends and peers exactly as she is she doesn't need to self-censor her thoughts her ideas or feelings to deserve love she receives love for being exactly the person she is

now and what came through to me most clearly in these descriptions of two very different children is How Deeply Janu sees and values both children for their unique qualities I introduced the labels of easy and difficult to make a point those weren't Jan's words my impression from working with Janu is she knows and understands both of her children and tries to see each of them for who they really are meeting their unique needs as much of the time

as possible while also meeting her own needs which is the key to avoiding burnout just imagine how Jan's own life would have been different if her parents had had the capacity and tools to be able to see her in this way just imagine how your life would have been different if your parents had been able to do this too honestly I think being seen and known for who we really are is at the heart of the vast majority of our

struggles we're constantly sending the message out to the world this is who I am am I lovable and we're hoping to get a reflection back yes yes you are I could have used some social skills training in my teenage years so I could have decided when I wanted to fit in more but what really would have helped me would have been when I sent this this is who I am am I lovable message out to the world would have been for my parents

or someone close to me to have responded Yes I see you and you you are lovable just as you are virtually all of the parents who show up in my taming your triggers Workshop did not get that message back from their parents or from our broader culture and now they feel an immense amount of Shame about the parts of themselves that they were told are too big and too loud and too needy by working on number four healing

yourself you're working to make your own life better today by changing our culture you're working on all of our ability to send those yet yes you are lovable messages back to all children and so I truly believe the most impactful thing you can do for your own child more than making more money certainly more than any of the other things that have these tiny effect sizes and maybe even more than improving your socio economic status and all the things

that go with that is to see and understand your child for who they really are I certainly work with a lot of parents whose families did not struggle financially and the parents are still having a hard time today I also work with parents whose families did struggle financially and the thing that they all seem to have in common is nobody return those messages saying yes I see you and you are lovable as you are so that is my list of the top five

things that I think really matter your list may be different because your values are different and that's okay you'll still be working to bring your parenting in line with your values so you'll still be on my list either way Roberta I'm sure this is not the answer you were hoping to get and I'm sorry that the research can't give us the answer that you want but I hope this will be helpful anyway I look forward to

continuing the conversation with you and others in the free your parenting Mojo Facebook group you can find the references to all of the other episodes I mentioned today as well as the peer-reviewed papers at your parenting mojo.com what [Music] matters