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SUMMARY

Dr. Diana Hill discusses Acceptance and Commitment Therapy (ACT) and its relevance to parenting in this episode of the Your Parenting Mojo podcast. She emphasizes the importance of psychological flexibility, which helps parents engage in positive practices and reduces stress spillover onto children. Hill outlines the six core components of psychological flexibility and how they can enhance parenting effectiveness and emotional well-being.

- *Psychological flexibility allows parents to stay present, accept experiences, and orient actions towards values, even during difficult times.*
- *The six components of psychological flexibility include being present, acceptance, cognitive diffusion, values, perspective taking, and committed action.*
- *Acceptance in parenting involves acknowledging difficult emotions without trying to change them, fostering a more supportive environment for children.*
- *Cognitive diffusion helps create distance from unhelpful thoughts, allowing parents to engage more effectively with their children.*
- *Values are intrinsic motivators that guide parenting decisions and actions, helping parents maintain focus on what truly matters.*
- *Perspective taking enhances empathy and understanding, both for oneself and for children, fostering better relationships.*
- *Committed action involves aligning daily behaviors with personal values, creating a supportive context for desired changes.*
- *Engaging in small, consistent actions aligned with values can lead to significant changes over time, contributing to broader social justice goals.*

[Music] hello and welcome to the your parenting mojo podcast we have a guest here today to talk with us about a tool that i actually discovered through her show and i found it to be incredibly helpful both personally and professionally so our guest is dr diana hill and she's co-host with three of her colleagues of the psychologists off the clock podcast and one of her co-hosts is dr yale

schonbrunn who we had on the show to discuss work-life balance and then dr hill actually hosted me on psychologists off the clock and we talked about homeschooling and social justice and parenting and stuff like that and now she's here with us today to discuss one of her favorite topics which is acceptance and commitment therapy which is shortened to act so dr hill has just published a book with her colleague and psychologist off the clock co-host dr debbie sorensen called act

daily journal get unstuck and live fully with acceptance and commitment therapy which isn't geared specifically

toward parents but there's so much in it that's going to help parents so welcome dr hill it's great to have you here thank you jen it's so good to be here with you and my interview with you is one of my favorites so oh cool it's fun to have the the tables turned here and talk about act and specifically around parenting because it

turns out if you're more psychologically flexible as a person it runs off it rubs off onto your parenting and then that rubs off onto your kids too so i'd love to talk more about it yeah awesome so maybe we can start there with firstly what is this thing psychological flexibility and why does it matter why does it make a difference how does it make a difference in our lives well psychological flexibility is a construct that's been

researched for decades now and some of the research is actually starting to get into the the general public and what it is is it's your ability to stay present open up to your full life experience not get hooked by your thoughts and orient your actions towards your values towards what really matters to you even when life gets difficult so you can see how even just that term could be helpful as a parent right and keep going i'm not saying it

and and what the research has shown is that there's really these six core pros which age world that help you become more psychologically flexible and when you're flexible not only do you have less chances of developing things like anxiety and depression but specifically with parenting some of the meta-analyses that are showing up with parenting is that psychologically flexible parents engage in more positive parenting practices they're less harsh as well as not super overly

permissive you see less spillover effects of stress onto kids so they did some studies looking at psychological flexibility during covid with parents and parents that were more psychologically flexible during covid not only did they have less conflict in their relationship with their partners there was less impact of the stress of covid on their kids so this type of this set of processes is turning out to be in the research one of the key factors in human flourishing

and functioning uh in lots of different domains of our lives okay i'm convinced so what are the components of psychological flexibility well there's six of them and you can kind of think of them stephen hayes who's one of the co-founders of act or acceptance and commitment therapy talks about like sides of a box so six sides of the box that together build your psychological flexibility and some of them are fairly familiar to folks we've we've all heard about being present that's one

of them being able to stay present in the moment sort of mindfulness but it's a little different an act being present has more to do with being present where it matters because you can't be mindful all of the time but in that moment when your kid is showing like pulling out stuff from your from the backpack and they're showing you a piece of artwork and you're on your phone this is the time to be present because

they're bidding for attention they're bidding for connection right so being present when it matters to you as a parent a second process is about acceptance and in act acceptance isn't sometimes that can be uh a term that people don't like it's like i don't want to accept that yeah i like it i don't want to just roll over and and let things happen yeah so acceptance is not about being passive actually acceptance is not about approval or liking

something

but it's really allowing it to be right so for me as a with my second um my uh my third child i i'm gonna start that over you could uh for for me it with my um youngest child he had a colic and for the first four months of his life he screamed non-stop and so i did all sorts of stuff to try and make him to stop crying i i bounced and i walked and i played

music and i sang and then i remember one day when i was so exhausted and burned out and uh just really tired of getting him to stop crying i decided i was gonna stop trying to get him to stop crying and instead i was going to accept that that he's this is how he is expressing himself he's working it out neurologically whatever was going on and my what i chose to do is to love him and bond with him while he was crying

instead of trying to get him to stop so that's an example of acceptance and act which is really opening up and allowing for our full inner experience yeah and just to pause on that for a second how did your experience shift after that happened because i think that's the profound part right what was what was different for you after you decided that you were just going to accept that well i think for many of us as parents

we've all had that experience of wanting our to fix our kids and when we're engaging and fixing there's actually something in motivational interviewing called the fixing reflex which is our tendency to fix things that we don't like what it does it actually can derail us from engaging the very values that that we care about so for me when i was trying to get him to stop crying i was walking around in circles of my dinner of my dinner table

and my my other child was watching like his head was circling with me i was not engaged with him because i was so focused on getting my child to stop crying right and i'm not saying that we shouldn't soothe or you know care for our crying babies but when it becomes that that you are trying to fix something some kind of internal experience inside of yourself as a parent and you're trying to make it go away

at the cost of you engaging in the world parenting in the way that you want to be then it's called something called experiential avoidance which is actually the opposite of acceptance so for me it was liberating my child did not he didn't cry less by me doing that i just related to the whole experience less and it freed me up a little bit to um just be there with him be present with him which is ultimately what he

probably really needed most from me yeah yeah thanks for sharing that okay so what are some of the other components of it okay so there's six we've got two and you can see why debbie and i wrote a book on this today yes i'll break it down and in the act daily journal we take each one of these processes and we really do break them down into little tiny nuggets that you try out on in your life day by day so the two that

we've mentioned are more acceptance based processes and there's another one that's really kind of fun because it's unique to to act or to these new modern approaches to psychology so act is sort of a research-based approach to psychology that has taken a different approach to thoughts than what a lot of people maybe even know about

like cognitive behavioral therapy and in act we do something called cognitive diffusion and i could do a little it's actually i

think this is best demonstrated not necessarily described so i'm going to have you um imagine or maybe you if you wouldn't mind being fully my my guinea pig a thought that you struggle with as a parent um let's see i thought that i struggle with as a parent it could be a self-critical thought it could be um some so some of the ones that you know are common are like i'm not doing enough or um you know even as i'm talking

people are listening to these psychological flexibility skills and they're like oh that's i'm not flexible i'm not present enough okay all right let's go with um there isn't enough of me to go around that my husband and my daughter will often talk over each other at the same time asking me for things and i feel pulled in different directions okay so one of those is i feel pulled in different directions which i would say isn't a thought that's just

an experience yeah like that we've all had that feeling of like oh i feel pulled i want to be in many places at once and that probably points we'll talk a little bit more about values that probably points to some of your values things that you care about but there isn't enough of me to be around what i hear and there is that that could be a sticky thought it could get in the way

of of you being able to be present when when your husband and child are talking over you so i want you to imagine that thought were written across your hand jen there isn't enough of me to go around and imagine you're at the dinner table with your partner and your child and that thought were just like really close up to your face so imagine it's written on your hand and put your hand right up to your face like the thought

is right covering your eyes all right okay now if that thought were written across your hand and your hand was in this spot how well could you see the thought for what it is so close up to your eyes uh well i mean it's blocking my view although it's blurry it's blurry absolutely yeah and if it's really close up actually the thought itself is blurry you wouldn't necessarily be able to read it yeah and how well would you be able to see your

uh partner and your child barely at all very little yeah so this is this is what we call cognitive fusion we're so stuck on our thoughts we can't even see what's around us now what i want you to do is slowly move your hand away from your face imagining that that thought is still written on your hand and can you look down and and read the thought if it were written on your hand okay and then could you look around the

dinner table engage with your partner have a conversation with your child right okay and notice that i didn't cut off your hand i didn't ask you to write a new thought on your hand yeah yeah you didn't change anything about the thought at all yeah i didn't tie your hand around your back and in fact if i tied your hand around your back you'd have one less hand at the dinner table to work with right but what we did is we did something

called cognitive diffusion which is getting a little bit of space from your thoughts and as parents as humans we all have thoughts all the time running through our heads what can get in the way of us being effective parents

sometimes is when we believe those thoughts to be true and those thoughts dictate our behavior or they cloud us so much that we can't see what's really happening in the present moment yeah i just want to pause there

on on what you said we believe our thoughts to be true and i i've talked about this concept with a lot of parents over the years and and from the the idea that we could believe that our thoughts are not true is is mind-boggling to a lot of people and i've talked to some people who have said you know i was i grew up in a religious commune and i was trained to believe that my thoughts

were a direct channel from god and so they they must be true they are true uh so there's sort of that perspective coming through sometimes but even if you don't have that perspective this idea that i think things and they might not be true is absolutely mind-blowing to a lot of people and so so what do we do with our thoughts if they are potentially not all true like how could the thing we're thinking not be true

well that's just what the human mind does is it produces all sorts of thoughts and actually when you look at some of the psychological disorders out there some of them have more to do with trying to stop yourself from thinking or change your thoughts than they do um with just allowing the thoughts to come and go so you know a really good example insomnia right one of the things about insomnia that's really interesting is that it's this paradoxical thing that

the more you try and make yourself fall asleep the less likely you're going to sleep right and when you have thoughts as you're going to bed oftentimes i call it the you know the middle of the night sort of crisis moment where everything seems so intense and real and true and we have to figure this out now and it's so important that i solve this problem at 2am which i basically have no way of solving right

and then the next morning we wake up and we're like oh yeah that wasn't it's not as big a deal right so if your thoughts were true then they would you would have the same feeling at 2am as you do at 2 o'clock in the year it would still be a big deal right it would still be a big deal right so the nature of our thoughts and what's interesting about the the human mind and sort of what

neuroscience is showing is that evolutionarily our brain is designed to create certain types of thoughts that um would have protected us right so things like even self-critical or judgmental thoughts are there because they were a protective mechanism right we have an error detection uh we have a warning system that's sort of like a better safe than sorry brain and that keeps us a little bit anxious we are the ancestors of people that were pretty anxious they survived

because they they thought it was a bear and they ran away but what's happened is that there's an environmental mismatch and what that means is our biology hasn't quite caught up to the current modern day environment and so where not only do we have old brains that tend to be self-critical and tend to be a little anxious and tend to be negative and also tend to create in groups and out groups right that we also live in a culture that is bombarded

by messaging through the media through our early childhood experiences through we have a culture that is feeding thoughts into our brain and and if we don't start to question them we're going to be enrolled a whole lot of a whole lot of problems even bigger than just insomnia right yeah yeah so i thought thoughts are in act we don't think about thoughts as true or not we don't actually get very entangled in them but rather what

we do is we look at is this helpful thoughtful uh helpful for me is this thought workable like and is this thought aligned with my values is it is it pointing me in the direction of the type of person that i want to be in the world and when those things are true then maybe those thoughts can come along for the ride and when they're not we let them go or we can just acknowledge like oh thank you mind you know there it is

my mind talking again it tends to do tends to do that and it tends to you know have certain qualities to it yeah yeah and just like with the insomnia just telling it to shut up you know i know there's research on um when you researchers ask participants to not think about something for a period of time and then all the person can do is think about that thing so um if you if you actively try not to

think about something or tell something to shut up or go away then then it doesn't necessarily tend to be an effective way of dealing with that unwanted thought yeah debbie writes this in our in our book we have these little vignettes we're both therapists and but we also both apply these practices as moms and as partners and friends and so we write these little vignettes of how we use these practices in our life to illustrate like this is this is

act in the day-to-day living and what uh debbie wrote this story that's so sweet about uh she tried to cut back carbs and one day she's cutting back carbs and she she sees this baked potato and she's like i can't eat the baked potato and then by the end of the day the baked potato was like you know the size of the room that's all she could think about was that one baked potato right so we've

all we've all had that experience of trying to control our thoughts and what how research maps on at this point in time is really demonstrating that our attempts to engage in thought control have a paradoxical effect that you tend to have a greater rebound of thoughts also the same is true for our emotions when we try to suppress our emotions they tend to come back stronger yeah okay all right so i think we made it through three of the six

i think we covered um let's see we did cognitive cognitive diffusion being present uh actually did we only oh an acceptance okay so um what comes next maybe values because you're just talking about how how it's linked to living in alignment with your values yeah absolutely and values in in parenting in particular is such a such a good one to discuss because sometimes we mistake values for morals or external expectations

and in act values are personal and chosen chosen by the individual so just like your favorite color may be black and my favorite color may be blue black is not better than blue and blue is not better than black it's just our personal chosen favorite right and values are also in act um it's an adverb so a lot of times when i'm working with clients i'll ask about their values and one of the first things they'll say is

i value my health or i value parenting or i value the environment and those aren't really values as much as they are domains under which you live out your values so if we were to look at parenting in that domain of your life how do you want to be if i were to follow you around in a day where you feel like you were really aligned with the type of person you want to be as a

parent and you were engaging in activities and actions that demonstrate that what what would it look like what would i see that i could be like oh yeah that person really values being playful or that person really values compassion and being present right so there are these qualities that you bring and the nature of values and the reason why values is such a powerful component of act and even just in guiding our behavior is that and as parents and i'm sure your

podcast because you're super you know up to date and educated is that values are intrinsically motivating so as opposed to like gold stars and you know good jobs values are something that are deep within you that you can pull upon when you've got nothing left when you when you are exhausted if you dig in deep to your values it can help rejuvenate your parenting it can help make you get a sense of purpose and meaning and that is very key to not only

happiness in life but also being able to pursue actions that are important to you so things like you know this summer when folks were depleted and at their limit and then you saw these incredible actions that people were taking even with nothing left oftentimes that's because they were digging deep into their values and acting from there um yeah and that reminds me of um one of the the key ideas about uh this approach that i took from stephen hayes

book which i read after i learned about it from your show which is the idea of the choice point and that when when something difficult is happening we have this moment where we get to make a decision about whether we go down this well-worn path that is not serving us or whether we move towards something an action that's aligned with our values and that has been such a central concept for me to just to recognize okay i'm at this point how do

i want to respond here do i want to go down that path or do i want to go down this path and it links to cognitive diffusion as well right because you have to have some distance from the situation to be able to to see that choice point and to decide am i going this way am i going that way and that and i'm i'm not perfect at it by stretching the imagination but i am finding

that increasingly i can make a choice that is aligned with my values because i recognize that i'm at this point right now and this is this is where i want to go yes so that this really simple skill that that we teach is in the act daily journal is pause notice choose and so crying babies was me whatever nine years ago now it's children bickering if i could choose any sound then

the sound of my children bickering i would be a happy person right give me like a drill give me a jackhammer i would prefer it to my children fighting and what that does for me in that moment is it actually i get flooded like

i get flooded with anger irritability i want to control this situation i want to get in there and get them to stop just as much as i did with my crying baby right

and so that's a choice point and here's where values come in and here's where these these components of psychological flexibility come in is that you start to get clear on okay here's here's the moment like this is it this is the moment that matters here yeah because not only how am i responding to my kids in that moment gonna lead me to feeling good or bad about myself as a parent right obviously but but it's more about what am i

modeling to my kids about how am i handling strong emotions how am i handling conflict resolution these are deep values for me of teaching my kids how to how to engage in conflict resolution how to engage in being present and perspective take with each other so that's a choice point for me and the practice of act in that moment would be pause like acknowledge it this is a meaningful moment just like the kid bringing me the

picture this is an equally meaningful although painful moment yes yes and and it is hard for me and i am struggling in this moment yes yes and struggling so there's a little self compassion in there wove that in that's the first chapter but but also pausing noticing what it's like in my body opening so that's the acceptance part like here it is this is what it feels like when i am flooded with all the neural hormones that are associated

with hearing my children bickering right and then choosing what type of parent do i want to be right here and making that move towards my values and when we do that on a repeated basis it frees us up we start to feel like wow i have choice in my life to engage even even when i'm flooded like even when i'm flooded i may need to pause and regulate a little bit right but then i can go in with intention and

it it spills over into our kids because no matter more than whatever you say in that moment to your child it's what you're doing with your child how you're interacting with them that's getting encoded into their bodies and i said stop fighting right as you're screaming i've done that no i've done that a million times this is like i struggle with this all the time i mean like i said i prefer a jackhammer but i also can see with with practice and

that's why these are all skills that can practice that you can just like you can learn a language at 45 it's hard yeah easier to learn a language it too yeah same with these skills you know but but you can do it with practice and it takes repeated practice on a daily basis there's a million choice points throughout our day and if this one doesn't quite go exactly how we want to go good news you get 10 minutes

yeah okay and so um you've sort of touched on the last couple of elements of perspective taking and committed action as you were talking us through that so um do you want to just sort of round it out with me uh how does perspective taking fit into this and then how do we get to committed action from there yeah well perspective taking is probably one of the most important skills we can do for ourselves um in terms of

developing our own self-compassion it's also key and compassion for others and one of the most important skills we can teach are children right not only because it benefits us when we can step into a grander view of things

and in in the book we call it sky mind so a lot of our our daily experience is sort of like the weather and sometimes there's big storms like when my children are fighting sometimes there's beautiful sunny days

right sky mind is the ability to step back and observe those weather systems and also recognize no matter how bad it gets those weather systems won't harm the sky so be able to um step into what's called a more transcendent version of ourselves the observer self the wise mind uh there's a someone that i study with that calls it sort of sitting at the back of the heart right and when we can do that with our

with our children and i do we do a lot of in our household not only do i do that for myself as a parent it's a perspective like there's like like this moment when you're you look at your child and you sometimes i feel like my children get older and i just always see them as older than they are right and then i look back at a picture of them and i'm like oh my gosh i thought that they were so

old when they were five and they were just tiny oh my gosh how much would i give to have that five-year-old back right and if we do that kind of perspective taking we can also then take perspective on our child right here in this present moment like they're not always going to be this way every day they get older every day i get older there's impermanence here right so perspective taking can help with that of like

getting oriented around what matters but it can also help with things like empathy and training our kids to be more empathic training our kids to have more flexible minds i do that a lot um you know everything from just the other day my so one thing about covid is that in homeschooling during covet is my parent my kids have gotten to be really good cooks because i'm not always cooking for them anymore right and the other day i came into the the

kitchen and my son it was seven o'clock in the morning and he had a big bowl of pesto pasta with broccoli in it seven o'clock in the morning and these he didn't cook this but he had got he had like gotten it out of the fridge and he was eating it for breakfast and i was like wow that isn't that's an interesting breakfast not what i would expect at seven a.m right and he said oh mom well we read that

book because we we read books as part of our home school there's this book called this is how we do it that follows children from all over the world throughout their day and it shows what they ate for breakfast what they how do they get to school what their houses look like right and then for our home school we've been writing our own book this is how i do it so that we have this perspective taking

exercise of children all over the world and all over our town do things differently and live in different environments right then we live and he said well i read that book and i saw that people have fish for breakfast and people have noodles for breakfast and so why can't i have pesto for breakfast and i was like that is psychological flexibility yeah so perspective taking is really helpful just in those little you know to get our kids you know

unhooked from shoulds right but also really helpful and and maybe think more about social justice and a desire for for our kids not to only see their world view yeah yeah okay and then that takes us to committed action and how do we live our committed action committed action is the behavioral science of it all so act at its core is a behavioral psychology and what that means is it's really based on some core uh elements of what we know about behavior

change and it really breaks down to just sort of there's a cue there's a behavior that we engage in and then there's a reward for the behaviors that we engage in and in act what we do is we try and create contexts that support the behaviors that we want to engage in our life so um for example i you know want one of my values is having more movement as a family and because we live in a

sedentary culture and also i just really believe in the mental health benefits of movement so one of the things that i did to work on that cue the the contacts that can trigger our behavior was to remove most of the furniture from our living room so there's like just this big open space where any you know moment in the day there'll be a kid like running through it throwing something tumbling right takes a little psychological flexibility as a parent to

allow some movement in your household right but it's important yeah to me that's one of my values right so creating context that support the values that you want to grow is one part of committed action another part of committed action is reinforcing and rewarding the values that you are engaging in so when you create you know when you engage in new activities making them small and then reinforcing them for yourself so say you want to

as a parent have more time as a family uh family conversations right so one of the things that you could do to reinforce that is engage in family conversations that are fun and playful and are reinforcing to to the kids and reinforcing them to you so at the dinner table sometimes we will um play games we'll do math at dinner we'll do bedtime math because we want to engage in these activities that we want to grow

with our kids but in a playful fun way as opposed to like a punishing way so that would be an example of committed action but really committed action is whatever value you want to pursue with your children that's personal and chosen by you creating context that support it and then reinforcing it in your daily life yeah and and just going back to what you said about the taking all of your furniture most of your furniture out of the living room

and and thinking about conversations i've had with parents about you know how do i get the kid to stop jumping on the on the coffee table and the the the conversation so often is focused around how do i get my child to stop doing this thing that i don't want them to do and this given that there needs to be a coffee table in the living room and we get ourselves locked into these visions of what a living room has to

look like and maybe they served us before we were parents and maybe they're not serving us so well now but we just can't imagine a living room without a sofa any because every living room we've ever walked through or seen on tv has a sofa in it um and and having the flexibility to be able to step out of this and say you know i i would

actually be more comfortable in a different kind of chair

or in a bean bag and my child would have more space to do whatever that they they might enjoy doing you're swinging from a swing in the middle of the room or something i could get myself out of this mindset the living room must look like this yes the mindsets right so that's when when my son was um three he was hanging on the towel racks in the in the bathroom and he kept on pulling the towel rack off the wall

so we put a trapeze in the middle of the play room and now and now i go up i hang from it we we spend all of our you know child's i was just talking to a parent the other day that said that in her first grade son's classroom that was on zoom the teacher spent the most of the time trying to get the cat the kids to keep their heads inside of the little box okay so it's not even like keep your

body on the carpet square anymore keep your head in the box oh my gosh so yeah so getting psychological flexibility psychologically flexible is is that really important and why what is important to me here right we spend a lot of our kids child you know keeping kids in chairs and you know sitting in boxes and then as adults we're trying to have standing desks and going to you know move more what like what is this about

but getting flexible with these shoulds and and you can tell this is the perspective taking part of it is that you can tell it's a should when it says when there's things like i always i never i have to this is just the way it is and being more playful with those things is is important because it can help you get clearer on like what are the rules that i'm holding on to that aren't really useful here

a lot of our inflexibility as parents has to do with trying to get our children to um comply yeah without the word comply trying to get our children too dot dot right and the reason why we're doing that is because there's something uncomfortable that shows up under our skin yes when our children are not complying yeah and it's everything from what do other people think when my kid is acting in this way to what my parents told me the shit's in

my head the belief systems to fear if my children don't comply what does this mean about the self story the the future tripping of like oh no they're gonna be like you know whatever wild we don't wear a lot of shoes in our house or outdoors and oh so you know there's all sorts of conversations about that right and it's freedom when you get hooked into what really matters here what are my values what do i really care about

and then how am i going to structure my life around that instead of structuring my life around getting my kids to comply or some rules or shoulds about what it's supposed to look like oh yes and i'm just thinking okay how could we actually start to do this and it reminded me of what the one of the concepts of the book beginner's mind and as i was reading through the book and reading about what is beginner's mind

my my thoughts immediately went to somebody who's in my parenting membership and a couple of my other programs as well where she uh posted in one of our communities recently and she said normally when i go for a

walk i have an agenda this is where we're going this is what we're going to do and today i went out for a walk with my three kids and we had no agenda and we just decided to see what would

happen and she said her kids spent half an hour putting little stones on a bench and knocking them off with sticks and saying that they were playing golf and she said i was absolutely in awe of them and it seemed to be such a powerful mix of being present and also having beginner's mind this idea that we can go for a walk and not have to have a destination that there there's no measure of success of this

walk and and i'm guessing she'd never even noticed those stones before that they were playing with as well and so i'm wondering you know where i want to go with this is i'm guessing our children have a thing or two to tell us to teach us about having beginner's mind do you see ways that we can learn from our children on how to do that more effectively absolutely i mean our children have our are naturally beginners minds

um because they don't have life experience that's create created mental models of the world so if you look at the neuroscience of it basically our brain creates categories and mental models to make things more like easy to navigate right so we know what this drive looks like we know what this walk looks like we know what a orange looks like for children they're approaching many many things as if it were the first time or maybe it's only the third time

they've approached it and so they'll do things like slow down and pause and get curious and ask questions and what parents do that interfere with that process is that we answer those questions i'm not kidding we answer those questions and and we answer them too quickly we also engage in a lot of scaffolding so you know this sort of like this you know we we set things up so that we our our kid will will kind of go that

direction yeah with our questioning maybe maybe we're asking semi-open-ended questions but we know where we want them to go with it right and what that does over time is two things one is that it really um limits uh creative thinking problem solving because part of problem solving and being a creative thinker and one of the things that actually sets humans apart apart from robots is our ability to think outside the box

right and so we need to have that as a skill that our children are learning to be future problem solvers you know solving the problems of our planet these are big tasks that we're passing on to our children and we don't have the solutions as parents so let's keep them fresh keep their beginners mind the other thing that is really problematic about answering those questions too quickly or too much scaffolding is that it erodes the relationship

it erodes the relationship if you come in and you answer it too quickly they're not able to just sit in the wonder and the curiosity and the reinforcement of thinking outside the box if i came into my that that kid eating pesto pasta for at 7 a.m and i said what are you doing that is not breakfast why are you eating pesto pasta for breakfast i just eroded an out of the box thinking moment because he was able to say i'm eating

pesto pasta for breakfast i'm realizing people all over the world don't eat you know muffins and bagels for breakfast and then i was able to tell me why you chose this and what was that like and what does it taste like and get curious that i can use his curiosity to evoke curiosity in me as a parent and then all of a sudden we're feeding off on each other in this place of beginner's mind curiosity and it's

incredibly rewarding to see our children in that way they open our eyes to the world in ways that we wouldn't we wouldn't be able to see because they just see more clearly yeah that's such a beautiful idea and i it actually dovetails super nicely with a couple of the approaches that we take in a membership that i have to support uh for parents to support their children's learning where we we help them basically get comfortable with the idea of doing

exactly what you just described because so much of this is wrapped up in our fears about what learning looks like and and that if i'm not teaching that my child isn't learning and uh so when we when we uh pick a what we call a learning exploration for our parents to support the child with it's something a child has chosen child is interested in and we deliberately tell parents do not pick anything that you know anything about

because if if you know anything about this topic you are going to go down this rabbit hole of teaching them and you will not be able to get your mindset out of i want them to know this this and this and it wasn't successful because we didn't look at it in this way um so there's that aspect of it and then the other aspect of it is we we go so deeply into listening and not just

listening to understand but listening with the idea that we might come out of this interaction being the one who has changed we the parent might have been changed by this interaction and that listening does not just mean uh trying to understand my child's perspective or i understand it with a perspective but then i can teach but that we may actually learn something useful in our lives by hearing truly hearing our children so it's lovely to see those worlds

collide there's my so my um my husband is his phd in education and um and specifically he specializes in equity in education and one of the things that he he teaches and i sort of i've gotten a chance to observe him teach this year and it's taught me a lot about psychology because he's home teaching he teaches two things one is these two questions that i think our listeners could take away to use with their with their children on a

regular basis and the two questions are what do you notice and what do you wonder what do you notice what do you wonder whether you're approaching a math problem whether you're approaching a conversation of a conflict between two kids hey hold on let's pause what do you notice what's happening right here what do you wonder okay the other thing that that he does and this is this is helpful he uses it in classroom environments to help with perspective

taking like perspective taking in math that other people can solve a problem differently then you can solve a problem if you can teach that then you can start to see things like people have different experiences than what you're experiencing they have different emotions they have different life experiences they have different

contextual things that are happening in their lives is that he'll do something where like for example with a math problem he'll he'll put up a series of dots and

you can imagine in your mind like four dots in a line and then four more dots underneath and then he'll ask and they're all lined up and he'll ask one child how many dots do you see and the child will say eight like pretty much you know if it's a child that can count them but the second question that he'll ask is and how do you see them and one child may say something like i see two lines

of four but then he'll ask another child to say how many dots do you see i see eight and how many do you how do you see them and another child will say something like i see four lines of two so that we can start to teach our children that it's not about the answer yeah that there's many ways to solve problems that many people have different ways of solving problems because they see the world differently and they've had

different life experiences and they and all of that is welcome here so what do you notice what do you wonder right yeah and that we're not trying to get to some kind of outcome point but that is much more about the process and reinforcing that process of divergent thinking creative thinking problem solving will not only benefit your household when you're trying to like do some conflict resolution but it'll help our planet that's what we need for the future of our planet for us to

work together to for our kids to take on some of the massive challenges that they are inheriting unfortunately yeah and this can come about through math problems but i'm just thinking i i really learned it it was probably 10 years ago we were doing some some big renovations work on the house and i learned it through plumbing but uh you can there are so many ways of of solving a problem in plumbing and i got all the code books and i read

everything i was supposed to do and um i i set up the the plumbing in a way that met the code and the inspector came in and looked at it and he kind of gave me this he's looking at the wall he's like well that's one way of doing it and so if i had been a professional plumber i would have approached it in an entirely different way but um it still met code it still got the job done

and and i probably could have come up with three other ways that it could also have met code and and got the job done and and so if we yes we can we can have these lessons as it were through math but my daughter wasn't alive then but she could have helped me go through this plumbing issue and how are we going to solve this issue and and okay well that doesn't mean code it has to be more sloped and and

we could have learned that through this life experience as well so absolutely yeah and that could have been your homeschool for the day i mean that's what i'm also figuring out right there's actually a term in psychology called the ikea effect and the ikea effect is that if you give people like you know ikea furniture that's impossible to put together yes pulling out your hair if you give people a group of people a piece of ikea furniture to put together

and you give them the instructions and then you give another group of people the piece of furniture to put together and you don't give them instructions and you let them go at it the folks that don't have the instructions it'll take them longer to put that piece of furniture together but then if the next day you give them the piece of furniture everyone gets a piece the groups get the piece of furniture but no one gets instructions

guess who's going to build it right so what we often do in life with our kids is we give them the instructions because it's faster it's easier i don't have to feel frustration i don't have to feel as irritable i get a prettier product it's the gold stars but what we're preventing them from doing is figuring out the plumbing project right or the solving the you know how to deal with ikea furniture or even just solving the problems of

of living the problems of engaging in relationships and those are the types of skills that we want our kids to have when we are not there because we're not always going to be there to give them the instructions yes yes okay so so sort of um a bit of a non-secretary but but related to that is um how do we understand the world how do we understand ourselves and um i think a really important way of

doing that that we are not taught to do is to listen to our bodies to understand our body's physical experience and i did an episode fairly recently on the physical reasons you yell at your kids and we talk about this body brain split and how information that is processed in our brains is seen as superior to information that is seen in our bodies and and if we don't sort of consciously make a decision to uh support our children in learning

about information that's coming from their bodies they're not going to learn this because our culture doesn't teach this and so um i think a first step to that is understanding ourselves how do we understand our body's signals does act have some tools that we can use to sort of help to put that into practice yeah well what you're sort of describing is the term that i would use is embodiment so i'm a yoga teacher and that my my

lineage goes back to yoga and then i studied a lot with um studied a lot of technohan and actually went to plum village and studied with him in my in my 20s and mindfulness and being present in our body is is actually it's something that we're born with children are born and bodied it's not that we have to teach them how to be embodied we have to stop teaching them not to be interested yes yeah so children your your children

have a natural hunger fullness system when they're hungry when they're not hungry we tell them that they're not hungry or they shouldn't eat we tell them that they're full when they are still hungry they know their body knows when they need to use the bathroom when they feel the feeling often times with kids all um when we're having like a feeling like just last night my child was up and he was feeling anxious before bed and and and so instead of

actually saying going straight to what are you feeling which parents want to put a word on it like what are you feeling what's the word is it anxious is it i'll say like where is it in your body point to it is it up here is it up here if it if it were moving is it moving up is it moving down where how is it moving is it a color do you have any kind of like sense is it

warm you know getting just sort of that awareness of the sensations that are happening in the physical body that they already know and they can usually just starting with point to it they can usually point to it yeah before they can put words to it yeah and as parents and as adults we often want to put words to things but some things are really hard to put words to and it's not helpful to put words to them like our body states another

thing that's really important i think with embodiment is modeling as parents so speaking about um our experience as a sort of our full experience of like i'm just noticing this in my in my body right now i'm noticing that i'm full i'm noticing that i'm hungry i'm noticing um you know all the different parts of emotions that we can model that as we're communicating to our children with act i would say the the the processes that are involved in

embodiment are things like cognitive diffusion in the sense that you are not your thoughts you aren't you know getting a little bit of space for them as well as acceptance being present perspective taking they all wrap together um in teaching about embody this i don't even want to say teaching about it and not derailing them from yeah they're a natural embodiment yeah and and it seems as though linked to that is this idea of emotional awareness

and i really appreciated your co-author debbie's uh anecdote in the book about having this conversation that she was about to have with her co-worker and she's she's thinking it's going to be hard she's putting her emotional guard up she's bracing herself she's wanting to get it over with and instead get finds a choice point decides to approach this conversation with courage and uh and be really open and vulnerable and that it ended up being a really

meaningful conversation and i think that this comes up a lot in our relationships with our co-parents and as well with our children that we um that we we we put our guard up and we we come at them with this message oh you're doing it wrong my way is the way to do it we don't have the flexibility to be able to see a perspective taking to be able to see there is another way of approaching this issue

and um it's and i think the thing that stuck out for me from what debbie said was it was the fear of the conversation that was worse than the thing itself [Laughter] um and i'm wondering what kind of tools you recommend for people who are just starting to work with this idea of showing up differently in in difficult conversations with people yeah so i think i love that story and when when we're thinking about a difficult

conversation like that and we're flooded by that fear right of say we're fighting with our partners right our co-parent and in that moment there's a lot of things that are going on like i have the story of i want to get my point across so i'm not even hearing my partner anymore because i'm just like rehearsing what i'm gonna say back i have the physical feelings of this is really uncomfortable and i'm angry or actually maybe underneath that

i feel really vulnerable and scared all of that is happening and one of the things that we tend to do with sort of this emotional um this moment this choice point of doing something that would actually be aligned with our values is we tend to try and avoid and get rid of going back to the beginning of our conversation everything that's happening the way that we do that are things like bracing our bodies trying to fix the

other person trying to get our point across because in that moment what probably would most benefit us is get present slow down and listen open up to the possibility that our perspective isn't the only perspective and then act on our values w in that little story debbie's values were clear she talked about curiosity courage vulnerability those were some of the values that she engaged in by dropping the rope with this inner experience of avoidance and in the book we talk

about something called um experiential avoidance roundabouts and the reason why i use that term is because we've all been caught in a roundabout before especially when it's like they're new to your town all of a sudden they plop around about in the middle of your town and you're like okay unless we have some european listeners but here in the us yeah for the english people among us so not so intimidating but yeah it happens on occasion just because

there are so many more of them yeah so once in a while there's like this roundabout and and you get on the roundabout and if you're not a super confident driver like me you're yeah i'm just caught in it and and the way to get off the roundabout is you have to do this move like you have to like move over a lane and then feel uncomfortable while you launch yourself off the roundabout right so we get in

these roundabouts whether it's a habitual pattern of a fight with a partner or we know we need to get off but it just oh it means like listening and dropping my point and you know or a roundabout with our with our kids we're just stuck in the roundabout or trying to fix something so so getting off the roundabout is uncomfortable but then once you're off you can go anywhere you want in town like all the streets are open you're

free now so that's that moment in those conversations to be aware of what's happening inside how am i holding on to clenching staying stuck in this avoidance and how can i loosen up a little bit be present allow and then orient myself to get off the roundabout and into my values okay and you led me beautifully to where i'd like to end up here which is on values and connecting with ideas that are bigger than us and

i talk a lot on the show about ways that respectful parenting really intersects with broader social issues like racism like patriarchy and i know that those are topics that are on your mind a lot as well and so i'm thinking about maybe a parent who's listening and thinking yeah i have i have a value related to equality um but maybe there's a disconnect there between how i'm living my life on a daily basis and the ways that that's showing up for

me and this bigger value that that is important to me what would you say to a parent from an act perspective who might see that sort of discrepancy between a value they hold true and the way that they're living their daily lives i think the first part of it is to sit in the discrepancy and allow yourself to feel that feel the discomfort of it because often times what we do is we we get busy or we push through and don't

feel the discomfort and it's actually the discomfort that points to your values that would motivate some of your behavior so allow yourself to feel feel the sadness feel the uncertainty feel that like i don't know how to do this or maybe i will need to change some things that are going to be uncomfortable for me to change and open up and allow for that and then i would say take a look at some of the self stories

you know some of the self stories that we we think about of how things need to look that um you know social justice action needs to look a certain way like during the the summer if i'm not protesting that i'm not engaging in in social justice action that we can engage in action that are aligned with our values right here right now you and i jen having this conversation is engaging in action towards social justice right

the conversations that we have while we're just chatting with a friend the relationships that we build the stores that we buy from the social media that we that we ingest the all sorts of ways in which we engage in the world on a day-to-day basis in small ways matters and it's actually the accumulation of small actions over time that make a difference it's important to take big actions too i'm not saying don't don't do the big

bold moves but the daily small actions the conversations with the kids the books that you're buying the movies that you're watching the um just the dinner time you know banter how are you bringing some of these concepts and ideas into your vernacular and i think that that's where over time um you'll feel more aligned when you take those little it's like it's like uh right now like lining up my spine sitting up a little straighter

you know opening my chest and dropping my shoulders if i did that all day long my back would probably feel a little bit better you know i don't have to go to a yoga class to do that yeah so you don't have to exit your life to engage in social justice you can actually do it right here right now in this moment hmm what an amazing note to leave that on thank you so much for being here and

and sharing information about your book and and about act more broadly did you want to hold the book up i think you have a copy right there right um so the book is called act daily journal get unstuck and live fully with acceptance and commitment therapy and you can find it online and in bookstores and link also available at your parentingmojo.com forward slash act [Music] you