

How Do I Handle Being Rejected by My Child?

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SUMMARY

The podcast discusses the challenges of parental preference, where children express a clear preference for one parent over the other, often leading to feelings of rejection and frustration. Dr. Becky offers insights and strategies for parents dealing with these dynamics, emphasizing the importance of understanding children's feelings and maintaining a strong connection.

- *Parental preference is a common phase in child development, and it doesn't reflect a parent's worth.*
- *Children express displeasure towards parents they feel secure with, indicating a safe emotional environment.*
- *Open communication about parental availability can help children process their feelings.*
- *Grounding techniques, such as mantras, can help parents manage their emotional responses to rejection.*
- *Humor and playfulness can transform moments of rejection into opportunities for connection.*
- *It's crucial for parents to support each other and establish protocols for handling rejection.*
- *Acknowledging the complexities of parental roles can foster deeper understanding and reconnection.*
- *Workshops and resources are available to help parents cope with the stresses of parenting.*

why is it so hard to find reliable answers to parenting questions how is it in 2022 parents still search on google for answers from strangers well now there's a better way introducing the good inside membership an expert guided community-powered platform redefining modern parenting in our library you'll find hundreds of bite-sized videos articles scripts and workshops tackling the trickiest parenting topics and it doesn't stop

here we've created a private community guided by me dr becky and coaches trained in the good inside parenting method here you can ask questions connect with other parents or attend a live event on a topic that matters to you this is the parenting handbook that doesn't exist this is parenting advice at your fingertips where you need it when you need it the most this is good inside membership hi i'm dr becky and this is good inside

i'm a clinical psychologist and mom of three on a mission to rethink the way we raise our children i love translating deep thoughts about parenting into practical actionable strategies that you can use in your home right away one of my core beliefs is that we are all doing the best we can with the resources we have available to us in that moment so even as we struggle and even as we are having a hard time on

the outside we remain good inside [Music] today we'll be talking about parental preference those moments when your kids say things like no only mommy can pour me orange juice or no i only love daddy he's the only one who can take me to soccer these moments feel pretty awful for everyone and if you get into a prolonged stage of

being the preferred or non-preferred parent it can feel exhausting to everyone it's really hard to always be the parent requested it's also really hard to be the parent who's constantly rejected so today we'll hear from three different parents and we'll jump into a ton of ideas and strategies to manage these tricky dynamics in your home [Music]

our first caller is jennifer with a question about her daughter hi dr becky my name is jennifer and i live in phoenix arizona my daughter emerson we call her emmy for short she will be three years old on march 3rd so in just a few weeks and there's a really tricky situation in my household going on and has been for quite a while my husband is a physician who works

quite long hours and pretty consistently throughout her entire life has missed a lot and has been gone quite a bit often he won't see her for days on end um because of his his call schedule and lately i'd say over the past few months it's sort of gotten a little bit worse in terms of her behavior towards him she has always very much favored me and lately

when he comes home from work or the the small windows that he does see her she will be very um mean to him and he will try to spend time with her engage with her read her books do bedtime and she will kick and hit him she will say no she wants him to leave i'm just not really sure how to handle it because i'm not sure where it's coming from is she angry at him for not being around

is she just obviously not close with him because he's gone so much that's that's kind of the main uh struggle that we have right now thank you so much dr becky hi jennifer before we jump into some ideas and strategies let me just say it sounds like you're doing so much seems like you're alone with the vast majority of parenting and i have no doubt that your husband's work schedule is grueling i also know that it's really

grueling to be alone with your child all the time so i just wanted to acknowledge that let you know that if it feels hard to be the solo parent it is hard to be a solo parent so you're feeling that right i also want to say i really appreciate you calling in with this tricky dynamic you're definitely not alone in having these types of difficult moments in your house i hear so much about parents pain around parental

preference around being the preferred parent the non-preferred parent what it does to the marital dynamics it's so complicated so i'm so glad to kind of jump in with some ideas so a couple thoughts first our kids of course pick up on who's there and who's not there now the only thing is that we often do something with that information that's very different from what our kids do we think oh i'm not there maybe your

partner thinks i'm not there i'm such a bad father we go into a place of guilt but for our kids it's often not just who's there and who's not there but really is somebody talking to me honestly about who's here and who's not there and what feelings i would have about that we assign meaning oh i'm a bad father i'm missing so many moments with my daughter this is actually usually not what happens for our kids what happens

for our kids is i wish someone would just explain to me my parents work schedule i wish there was a way to understand when dad's here and when dad's not here i wish my dad would give me an opportunity to express to him that i miss him for him to be able to hear that from me and take that in as with so many other dynamics with our kids it's not the feelings they have it's the

aleness in the feelings that really gives them pain and then that pain is acted out and appears with angry words or angry behaviors so let's take that framework and turn it into a bunch of strategies that you can use in your home first of all this one might be more for your partner so i hope he's listening to this as well or you can play this section for him i would want to be working on kind of

the following self-talk i want to say to myself yes i work a lot yes i do miss a bunch of things and yes i am a good father who wants to connect with my child we don't want to collapse all that into i work a lot i'm a bad parent if i was a good parent i make the time to be home when we collapse that we actually get so overwhelmed with our own guilt that we

can't even see what our child needs from us so maybe said another way two things are true my daughter has understandable feelings about my unavailability and i'm a good father who loves my daughter i'm going to say that again because it's really important my child has understandable feelings about my unavailability and i'm a good parent who loves my child this really to me speaks to us needing to ground ourselves in our goodness

before we approach our kids so this is a way we make sure we're not kind of just acting out our own guilt or our own feelings on our kids and after we can ground ourselves in this way we can talk more openly to a child and definitely even a three-year-old our kids at all ages pick up on the patterns of the coming and going of their caregivers i would encourage your partner to in a calm moment say to your child something

simple like daddy works a lot huh or i bet there's times you wish i was here when i'm at work or if it was me i'd probably had oh isn't it annoying that i'm at work a lot we're not putting these ideas in your kids head our kids tell us how they're feeling often through their behavior and if we look at behavior as a window into a child's internal experience she's saying i'm mad

under anger for kids and often for adults too is her and we really need to speak to this so we can reconnect about what's happening for your child and that connection is what can lead to changes in a relationship now to be clear when i say to my kids if it was me i work a lot huh sometimes i bet you wish i was here when i wasn't when i'm at work i don't expect my child to look at me and say oh

mom that feels so heartwarming thank you for understanding me no my child's gonna look at me and say can we keep building blocks that doesn't mean they don't get it it means it's sinking in it's a lot to process we don't bring things up to get quick solutions we bring things up to let our kids know we're able to name and label and to show that we understand their internal experience now i have a couple more

concrete ideas make a work schedule that's visible to your child i love red yellow and green color coding for young kids around parents work schedules where red is not at all available right it's kind of like a stop sign yellow is a maybe and green is go time green is uh yes i know my dad will be there and it might be in a given week the only green time is wednesday morning because your

partner's not on call then and knows he can have breakfast with emmy but that's a way emmy can orient her life and feel more in control and then yellow is thursday night we don't know if daddy's gonna be home or not it's a maybe and yellow times are probably hard because you get expectations up and then maybe you're disappointed but now you have a language around it to understand i also would say that emmy and her dad

could really benefit a lot from some type of transitional object something that exists between them when he's not there so maybe when he's at work he writes a note and leaves it in the kitchen for her to see even though he's gone in the morning and is back at let's say the hospital and it's her name with a bunch of hearts maybe they create something together on a weekend that he takes with him to his work and she has half of it with her

at home so there's all these ways where we're building connection even when the connection isn't physically in front of us those are just a collection of ideas to start and the other part i would say that's critical is for you and your husband to just talk about how hard this is it's hard on you to witness it's hard on him to get this rejection and to let him know that you're kind of in this with him to work as a family on

different ways to try to make this feel a little better for everybody [Music] our second caller is sarah hi dr becky my name is sarah and i live in ontario canada i have a two-year-old daughter and this is the tricky situation that we have been struggling with for a while now since the pandemic my husband has been

working from home as have i and i've noticed that my daughter has rightfully so become quite close to my husband um and that's totally fine it's it's been very nice in some ways it's given me a little bit of a break to do my own things as well however i've noticed that in the last few months she since she's become more vocal and she speaks she speaks her mind quite a bit she started to say things like

i only love that i only love i only love that i only like that i don't like you mama i don't love you mama and she'll tell me to go away or she'll tell me that she doesn't want to play with me and she'll say things like that that are truthfully kind of mean and you know we've we've tried a bunch of strategies that we found through your page however nothing has really worked um she'll say this it used to be once every

few weeks and it will be like a one-off that it's become a daily occurrence um and i don't really know how to handle it and i won't lie when i say it hurts my feelings it does hurt my feelings um so we don't really know what to do beyond what we've already tried in terms of you know validating her telling her that no matter what i'm still gonna love her my husband has also tried to say you

know we love mama a lot and etc and try to sort of i don't know we've tried things and it's not working so if you

have any suggestions on how we can help her to realize that you know the words that she's saying to me specifically um are hurtful or like you know i don't want to blame her anything like that so we just don't know how to handle it so um thank you that is my situation and

hopefully you have some insight on it hi sarah thank you for sharing what i know is a really painful experience and i know this in part because of my own experience as the rejected parent and i know for me there seems to be something especially painful about being a mother who's rejected like i would go on instagram or i would talk to friends i say oh my child always wants

me they always want me and they're always rejecting my husband and there'd be times i'd be thinking oh sometimes at my house it's the other way around and there seems to be something embarrassing about that or shameful about that and i i think i hear some of that in your voice so i just want to let you know i myself have been there and i know so many other moms who have been there as well and before i go further let me assure

you there's nothing wrong with you you're not failing and your child's words are definitely not a barometer for your parenting for your worth for anything about you a couple ideas and then of course some strategies that you'll be able to use kids only express displeasure for a parent they feel secure with our kids are so locked into their environment they are

so attuned to what they need to do to stay safe and they're so attuned to what would be threatening and dangerous and what that means is they know that if they say something and their parent is going to react with big anger with something scary with something that feels like massive emotional abandonment they would never say it so this is almost a backward way in to saying your child saying to you i only love dad i don't like you mama

is something that when i hear it i think wow this is a child who feels pretty secure with a parent this child does not fear retribution from her mom this is a sign that there's a lot of security i know that feels paradoxical but i'd like you to almost say to yourself right now my child feels safe with me it's not enjoyable when she says these things definitely not but my child feels safe with me and i've done a lot

to kind of co-create that with her second when our kids use these kind of powerful phrases i only love my dad i don't even like you we need to zoom out from the exact content of their words kids experiment as they get older and toddlers just like teenagers they kind of like to experiment with their power how powerful am i how autonomous am i what would happen if fill in the blank and one of the things toddlers

experiment with is language because they're just coming in to their sense of words and their ability to express ideas with words to other people it's very new so i want us to zoom out from i only love dad to something larger which is my child is playing around with the impact words have on other people this doesn't mean anything is wrong with your daughter i think some people say oh my child's a sociopath who would say something like

this your child is not a sociopath your child is exploring a new found ability now what i think about when my kids are experimenting with something is i can either act as kind of a wall that blocks this road of experimentation or i can step to the side which always leads experimentation to end a little bit sooner because when i act as that wall to block it my child bounces off me it's almost like my

child's saying hey i was just playing around with something now i'm gonna have to keep doing it and doing it and doing it with more power and more effort in an effort to knock you down versus when i step to the side and i'll explain what that would actually sound like or look like my child can experiment in a way that's normal and natural for kids but they're going to reach the end of that road more

quickly because i'm not blocking it to me blocking the wall was saying back you can't say that or that is a very mean thing to say or it makes me so upset now this idea of my child is powerful has even more power my child needs to do it in a more virulent way versus now get into this image with me imagine yourself on this road this road is your child's experimentation and you step to the side of the road where you

can definitely see the road but you're not on it and you're not blocking it now your child says i don't love you i can imagine myself almost moving my body away and looking at those words pass me by what would i say i might say nothing i might say oh and just pause i might say you're really thinking about daddy right now i might say you're really thinking about how much fun you have with dad i hear you

i might say no matter what i'll always love you no you don't understand mom i don't love you i'll never love you again i step to the side take a deep breath my child's words are not a barometer of my worth or my parenting and i say back to her i hear you i really do i hear you i'm not giving my child the response that would actually increase her desire to try to overpower me again

i'm seeing it but i'm not reacting to it now one more idea here sarah is i just want to emphasize that all of this guidance is much easier said than done you do have real feelings that come up so what i would encourage you to do now is actually imagine your child saying this to you bring up that feeling for you imagine a situation picture your

daughter picture the outfit she usually uses picture the face she would have when she says this to you almost generate a little bit of those hurt feelings inside your own body in that kind of imagined situation so you can practice some of these responses first calming your own body i'm a good parent my child feels safe with me i'm a good parent my child feels safe with me and then actually imagine those words coming from your child the i only love dad i

don't like you imagine them traveling from her body toward you and moving your body a little to the side watch the words watch the words pass by i would actually encourage you to practice this three different times a day you're giving your body practice to building new circuitry so when the moment actually comes you have already developed the skill you want to use [Music]

let's listen to our final caller luke hi dr becky my name's luke i live in vermont my kids are four and seven and um this particular situation is with my four-year-old who is at the stage where he he doesn't want me to do anything uh for him like for example uh uh bath time he literally will not let me start the water to the bath he only wants mommy to do it and uh it's you know it's tough it's

annoying because i'm a pretty involved father and i i we need to do things together but in that moment i just don't know what to do so do you have any advice how do i handle him not wanting me to parent him when i have to thanks so much hi luke i totally feel for you in this situation i am now imagining the times that my kids have yelled at me during the bath time to get out of this room and it feels

like it's just echoing and reverberating and it's not like i want to give a bath and i'm here to do it and i'm getting rejection so i completely understand how awful this feels i want to walk through a couple ideas of how to manage as you said those in the moment difficult scenarios so i want to go over three things a mantra validation and humor i want to start with a mantra we have to ground ourselves first

before we think of strategies to use with our kids why when our kid rejects us no not you only mommy can give me a bath our body reacts we won't have access to all the amazing parenting strategies we've been learning or reading about until we get our own body out of threat state out of fight or flight mode when the frontal parts of our brain are totally offline and that's

where all of those great ideas live so first deep breaths and saying something grounding to ourselves i in those moments try to put my hand on my heart and i say this this feels bad and i can get through it i know i'm a good parent this feels bad and i can get through it i know i'm a good parent we have to validate the feeling in our body

and remind ourselves of our coping abilities that's why that mantra speaks to both parts yes this feels bad and yes i can cope that's really really helpful in calming our bodies and then we can access one of the two strategies i'm going to describe validation in some ways is the easiest thing to do in that moment it's saying to your child you wish it was mommy giving your bath tonight i hear you or i've been known to say to my kids daddy

does give really fun baths i know he does the whole bubble thing and the silly boat thing and oh he does such great baths you wish it was him i am not taking it personally i'm not taking this as an affront to my personhood or my parenthood i'm kind of joining my child and understanding yeah you wish it was daddy i think sometimes in these moments it feels like our child is saying you're the worst human being

i don't like you for anything you're horrible and then we react as if that's true if we take the only mommy can give me a bath and translate it to your child saying i wish it was mommy giving me a bath tonight we're a little more able again to ground ourselves and respond with validation one more idea and this is actually my favorite thing to do when i'm rejected by my kids and it's humor it's accessing

humor and playfulness and actually get this expanding the role of rejected parent which is a complete 180 from what our kids usually expect which is to push back or tell our kids this is hurtful expanding the roll would look like this it's true i don't even know where the bath is is this the bath and then point to the toilet maybe even pick your child up and pretend as if you're going to put your child in the bath which is actually the

toilet oh i think this is the bath this is the bath right and then i flush it and then you get all clean and all the pee water and the poop water that's a bath right i don't know a child who wouldn't start laughing laughter is key to reconnecting we're taking a moment where you feel very far apart from your child and because you're not taking it personally because you've grounded yourself now you're able to expand this role

you're able to add silliness and playfulness now this moment is actually a connection moment with your child is actually really really fun the last part of making all of these different things successful is to talk to your partner in advance and agree on a protocol for these rejection moments a parent who's in that moment in the preferred parent role has to agree to stay out of the experience between you and your child if

that parent swoops in unexpectedly okay mommy will do your bath tonight we've really kind of set ourselves back because what we do is we say to our child all of us are really afraid of your rejection all of us we really don't feel capable of dealing with this it really disempowers you from that ability to ground yourself and show up with validation or humor so have this type of conversation with your partner hey i know sometimes you hear

our child rejecting me in bath i actually feel like i have some strategies now i feel like i know what i can do and i actually think key to my success is you're trusting me to figure it out so unless i scream for you please let us work it out ourselves let's tie it all together with three takeaways one stages of parental preference are normal there's nothing wrong with the in favor

parent or the out of favor parent or the child who's in that preferential stage in fact children only express displeasure toward parents they feel safe with where they don't fear retribution keep this in mind to ground yourself in your goodness as a parent remembering that your kid's rejection isn't a barometer of your parenting two talk honestly with your kids if you're currently in the non-preferred

parent role think about what might be going on for your child not in terms of oh i guess that means i'm a bad parent but maybe in terms of oh i have been working a lot or i know i'm on my phone often for work my child might feel annoyed about that or i haven't really had one-on-one time with my child in a while now watch for the potential for those thoughts to evoke guilt which can shut

us down instead use these thoughts to talk honestly to your child acknowledge these dynamics this can be the start to powerful reconnection three in the moment of rejection ground yourself with a mantra and then try to find your playfulness even expand the role of rejected parent this often brings laughter which reconnects and changes the direction of the interaction with your child [Music]

being a parent is stressful especially when you're in a stage of being the rejected or always preferred parent here's the truth of it we can't change the things our kids say or do we can work on our own coping skills and our ability to manage through tough situations so we can show up in a way that feels better to us and to our kids my managing stress and anxiety workshop gives you so many actionable strategies to cope with the stresses of being a

parent check out that workshop and many others at learning.goodinside.com thanks for listening to goodinside let's stay connected at goodinside.com you can sign up for my workshops and subscribe to my free newsletter and for more ideas and tips check out my instagram dr becky at goodinside goodinside is produced by beth rowe and brad gage an executive produced by eric kabela and me dr becky please rate and review

our show let us know what you think and what resonated i actually do read each and every review so please know that your feedback is meaningful to me let's end by placing our hands on our hearts and reminding ourselves even as i struggle and even as i have a hard time on the outside i remain good inside

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