

345: Parent Child Dynamics



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Jody Moore

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I'm Jody Moore and this is *Better Than Happy*, episode 345: Parent Child Dynamics.

Did you know that you can live a life that's even better than happy? My name is Jody Moore. I'm a master certified life coach and a member of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter Day Saints. And if you're willing to go with me I can show you how. Let's go.

Hello friends. How we doing today? I have a great episode to share with you today. I'll tell you that the reason I'm talking about this is because I've had a lot of questions lately about this topic. And I had a lot of people as I have reached out in a couple of ways asking for input on what you want to learn more about. I had an overwhelming flood of responses asking about this topic.

So, I'm going to teach you my theory on parent child dynamics and why it can be so challenging and some specific things that you can do to make it more enjoyable as you raise children, especially as your children get older. And we're going to do a deep dive in Be Bold for the month of March, our monthly workshop topic which we always have a new one every month in Be Bold, is going to be navigating your relationships with your adult kids. So, my mom actually specializes in this, she coaches people on this topic. And we had her on the podcast a little while back and talked about this.

I want to talk about it a little bit differently today. And I'm not just going to focus on adult kids, I want to talk about though the various stages that our kids go through because I think that it's important to put it in perspective in order to better understand why it feels so challenging raising adult kids and can feel challenging at any age. But here is my theory. Now, I will say this is my theory. I created this theory based on the many, many years of coaching that I've done and just observation in the world. I'm always a student of psychology and self-help.

I'm constantly reading up on human development. I have a lot of education in childhood development but that said this is just my theory. This is not an academically vetted theory or anything like that. But I think you're going to

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find that it's not totally out there. I think you'll probably find it's really just more an observation. But this is the way I like to think about it.

So, our kids are born and they're these sweet little infant babies who are completely helpless. They can't do much on their own. They can breathe. They can digest food. The things that their bodies do automatically they can do hopefully. And when they're healthy they can do all those things. But anything much outside of that they can't. They certainly can't walk, or talk, or move around, or wrap themselves up in a blanket when they're cold, or take a blanket off when they're hot. They really depend on us for everything.

So, this point at which a baby is born the child is in the ultimate one down position and we are in the ultimate one up position. So much so that I don't know what that's like for a baby. I don't really remember being a baby. But maybe frightening, I don't know. But for the adult it can be overwhelming because that child needs so much from us. At any rate that's how our kids start out.

Now, slowly over time they grow and develop until they can do some things on their own. They start rising up a little bit, if you will, and we are able to then come down a little bit and do a little bit less as they learn to walk, and move around, and talk, and put food in their own mouths. And next thing you know we have toddlers and young kids who can do quite a bit for themselves but still need us. They still need a lot from us.

We still are taking care of them and providing for them financially, and helping them navigate the world. And it's still very much a one down, one up kind of relationship with the parent being in the one up, the child being one down. It's just that those two levels are starting to move closer towards one another. Are you with me?

Eventually we have a teenager. Now, as the movement starts happening in terms of the child's dependency on us and our need to care for them, and control their world, and provide for them. As that change starts happening it can be uncomfortable for both parties. It can be uncomfortable to allow our

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kids more freedom and independence when we're used to providing for them. It's called letting go.

And it can be uncomfortable for the child to have to sometimes step out, not for all kids but for some kids it can be uncomfortable to have to step out and be independent and figure some things out on their own. So as a teenager we see the dynamic, again, there are challenges of course at all points along the way but as a teenager I think teenagers start realizing wait a second, literally all the things that I need to survive I technically am capable of.

And so, I kind of want to make decisions in my life, at the same time I don't want mom and dad too far away because I don't want to have to be a 100% responsible for myself in my life. So, there is this weird dynamic that happens. This actually happens with our toddlers and young kids too of, yes, I want you to be able to make your own decisions but also sometimes the answer is going to be no. And then we have a toddler tantrum, or we have a rebellious teenager on our hands.

And I believe that part of the discomfort is that as parents we need to be moving down the scale in terms of our authority, our control, our making decisions on their behalf. We need to allow the child to move up the scale in terms of their own decision-making, their own exercising of their own agency without us vetoing it and overriding it. And it's so tough to know how much to do that, and in different categories, and with different children, and in different families it's different. So, what's the right way?

And how many just thought out mistakes or stupid choices do we let them make when we can see the consequences of that? And the child fighting sometimes for more agency and us fighting for more control creates this conflict and this tension and dissonance in the relationship. Now, this continues on as our children continue to grow up and become at some point young adults. When, again, now we're starting to really level out in terms of how much control or authority we should be exercising in their life. Maybe it ideally should be exactly level even. I don't know.

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Again, it depends on the child, it depends on the parent, it depends on the situation. But ideally we're raising kids who are confident, and capable, and responsible, and independent, and able to do all the things on their own. The problem is not all of our kids will step into owning those things. Some of them will keep relying on us. Not all parents are good at giving up the control which is just an illusion but in their minds letting go of control. And when we don't let go at the same rate at which our child is stepping into their own independence then we create tension and friction.

Now, I know some of you are thinking, well, you don't understand, I can't let go of it because my kid will make all these terrible decisions and really ruin his life. I didn't say we let go as long as they're making the right choices and doing what we would have them do. I'm saying when the child wants more independence than what we are giving them we will create tension and friction for ourselves. Your child will be creating their own tension and friction for themselves if that's happening.

But we create it for ourselves when our level of parenting or authority in their lives doesn't line up with the level of independence that they choose to live from. Are you with me? Now, again, this can happen at all different ages of the child's life. But eventually we end up with an adult child at which point in theory, in a perfect world we both have equal amounts again, of decision-making in our own lives. We have an independent child. There's no more one up, one down position. There's just two equal people in an adult relationship.

Again, I realize that it's not an ideal world, that that doesn't always happen. But in theory that is the way we develop as human beings. Now, here's the interesting thing. As that relationship continues oftentimes we as parents, as adults now start to move down the scale in terms of our ability to care for ourselves.

Maybe we get sick, maybe we just become more fragile in various ways, maybe we really have some kind of illness. Maybe we develop dementia or Alzheimer's, or something like that that puts us in a really far one down position requiring a child or someone else to be that one up authority taking

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care of us. Ultimately we will all get older and die. So, whatever that looks like of course, very different for all of us. But I like to picture the child continuing to move up the scale of responsibility, capability, independence, all of those things.

And we just sort of continue to move down, so we go from the child being completely one down and us completely one up to sort of the opposite where we're one down and they're one up. Isn't that kind of fascinating to think about? And if you think about what that means in reality and how challenging that is for everyone, and how much we resist redefining ourselves in relationship to people in our lives, especially our children, then it makes sense that these relationships would be so complicated.

It makes sense that it would be so challenging to navigate because it's so hard to know what our role is in relation to one another. And what the child wants in terms of our support, help, opinion, involvement, etc. is often not going to match what we think it should be or what we desire. I think that's one of the most common things I hear in relationships with adult children is. And I've coached many, many people in both situations. I've coached the parent of adult children and I've coached adult children about their parents.

And the most common thread I see when I'm coaching the adult child is either I wish my parents were more involved in my life, I wish that they were more interested in what's going on. I wish they wanted to come to my kids' soccer game or watch my kids on occasion etc. Or I wish they would give me some space. I wish they didn't feel like they need to be at every game or come to everything. I wish I could have some independence to raise my own family without feeling like they're right there all the time. It's the most common thing I coach on.

And same for the parent of that adult kids. Most common thing is I'm worried about my child. And I've suggested these things and I wish they would change in this way but they don't want to hear my opinion, they don't like that, or even they don't want me in their life in the way I want to be in their life. Or, my child wants so much of my time, or attention, or for me to help out in various ways, or take their kids etc. And I want some freedom to

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live my life. I don't want to be responsible for all their problems, I've already done that, it's their turn.

Now, of course there are many other different situations that come up in these relationships, different challenges, problems, trials, different things we coach on. But most commonly is a disconnect in what we believe the relationship should look like, a disconnect in how connected, or involved, or codependent you might say the relationship should be especially as adults. It's so fascinating to me to watch. So, what do we do? What's the solution?

Well, I think definitely being aware that the dynamic is going to change, throughout our entire lives it's going to change. And being willing to examine it for yourself and redefine what you want from your relationship with your either parent or child. In this case I'm talking mainly to the parent. So, what do you want your relationship with your adult child to be? Now, remember I'm not saying that you would sit down and go, "I decided that I want to see my adult children every week." Because they may not want to participate in that.

But you still get to decide what is my relationship with them going to be in terms of how am I going to think about them? If I want to be involved in their lives, what's a respectful way for me to do that? You could even decide you want to invite them over every week. Just don't be mad if they don't choose to come necessarily. And of course, you can make requests and have conversations about it but redefine what your relationship is.

For some of you it's needing to learn to say no, and to not people please, and to set boundaries, to say, "I love you so much and I'm just not able to come to all of those soccer games. I just choose not to, I have other things going on." It's just defining for yourself who do I want to be in relation to my adult kids? And what is a way for me to respect their wishes and their privacy, or their needs and everything and still show up as the person I want to be?

Now, I want to give you three specific strategies. And these will apply not just for your adult kids. We're going to get into adult kids' stuff like I said in

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much more detail in Be Bold starting next week, which the doors are open right now for just a few more days. So, if you're not in there come and join us even if you just want to join us for the month of March, you can totally do that at jodymoore.com/membership. But for today I want to give you three parent child dynamic strategies to consider that will apply again to your kids at any age that come from some of the most common mistakes that I see when I'm coaching.

So, number one, when you're making decisions about how involved to be in your child's life, is this me trying to control them? Or is this just me just being a good parent? Should I hold them accountable to this thing or should I not? Should I have a rule about this or not? When it comes to those kinds of decisions I want you to make them from faith and abundance rather than from fear.

Here's what I mean, rather than go, "Well, if I don't", let's say you have a child vaping or something. Do I have consequences for that? And what are those consequences? Do I throw him out of the house for vaping? Do I simply take away his phone or something? Or do I just tell him that I'm disappointed and I don't think he should be doing that but I just let it go and I don't have a consequence? What is the right decision? I couldn't know that. Only you know. Make the decision though from faith and confidence, don't make it from fear.

Here's what I mean. A lot of times we want to make these decisions from fear. If I don't hold him accountable in the right way then he's going to become a drug addict and ruin the rest of his life. That's a fear based way to make a decision. Make it from faith and abundance. No matter what happens my child will have the exact life experience he's supposed to have. It will be a 50/50 experience, half amazing, half challenging, now what? Who do I want to be? I'm not going to parent in order to try to control my kids, that doesn't work.

I'm just going to parent because I want to feel like I'm being the best mom I can be. Now, what's the answer? Either way it's going to turn out amazing. Either way my child is going to learn some things and struggle in some

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ways. And we can have a connected relationship either way, now what? Do you see how that's coming from faith and abundance rather than from fear? It's the difference between parenting and controlling.

The second thing I want to offer you, and this is a big one, I feel really strongly about this. I might do a whole another episode on it. But I would love to see us do more parenting from mutual respect. There is a temptation to think about your child in a really disrespectful way simply because they are less mature than us at some points of life. Eventually maybe they become more mature than us. But when they're younger they are less mature, they're less developed, their brains are less developed. That does not mean they are less worthy of respect.

And I hear a lot of disrespect. I want you to just pause and listen to yourself, the way you think about your children. Do you talk to them in a way that we would say, "That's kind of a disrespectful way to talk about or think about someone." It is not uncommon for parents to say to me, "He's just a really difficult child. He's just kind of a brat. Or, "She lies, or she steals."

I was coaching someone today who said, "My daughter steals." And I said, "Okay, what does she steal?" "Clothes, eyeliner, lip gloss etc." And I said, "Okay, so when did this happen last? Were you guys at Target and she's putting stuff in her coat?" "Oh no, she took it from her sister's room." So, in her mind she's probably borrowing eyeliner, and clothes, and lip gloss. But we just immediately label it steal. It's pretty disrespectful to our children.

Now, I get it. It's tough. They act in a way that makes it challenging for you to think about them in a respectful way. But I promise you, you will feel better and be a way more effective parent when you're coming from mutual respect. There's no reason you can't have a conversation with your child from respect and teach them, "Hey, let me explain to you about boundaries, and stuff, and what we believe in our home, and why we respect one another's stuff. And I want to hear your thoughts, what do you think about that? What do you think is okay to do?"

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And you can guide your child through a respectful conversation rather than be frustrated with them and disrespect them in the way that you're thinking about them. I promise you, they will feel that and read that.

I went through an elementary education teacher credential program after my bachelor's degree. And in one of our classes I remember them talking about that the type of education that is most effective is the type that comes from mutual respect. We're not really able to do a lot of it because of the way our school system is set up but ideally you would involve the kids in as much of it as possible in terms of making decisions about what are we even going to study and how are we going to go about studying that.

One example they gave was with a young group of kids, I want to say maybe first graders. And even the classroom rules they approached with mutual respect for the kids. They said, "Hey, kids, what do you think our rules should be?" And I remember this because the kids said, "The class rules will be no smoking." These were first graders. "And no throwing books at the lights." That was the classroom rules. And guess what? Everybody followed those rules and others because they were involved in the process of creating them.

Okay, no throwing books at the lights might not seem like a necessary class rule but does it hurt to add it to the list if they think it's important? No. If it shows respect, it shows we value your opinion, even where you're at developmentally, we value it, and appreciate it, and you're not doing anything wrong. We're not any better than you. When I say one up I don't mean better. I mean a little bit more mature, a little bit more capable. But still 100% worthy of respect. We need to be having more of these discipline type conversations I believe from mutual respect.

And then the third and final tip I want to give you today is to focus more on who you want to be and less on who you wish they would be. And this my friends is just good advice for anything in your life because you have 100% control over who you want to be. And you have a tiny bit of influence on who they will be but nowhere near as much influence and certainly not the control that your brain thinks you would have or wishes you would have.

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So, your brain is going to want to put all the focus on them, on what they're doing wrong, on how we wish they were different, and how they're so frustrating etc. That is where you spin in powerlessness as a parent. Focus less on who you want them to be and more on who you want to be. In other words, if I have a child who let's say lies, we'll go back to even the example I gave earlier of the child who takes things from other people in the house. I told her we're not allowed to call that stealing anymore because it's not stealing.

But anyway, let's say you have a child that takes things that belong to other family members and you don't want that in your home, you feel it's disrespectful, it's not okay. Alright, so let's focus on who we want to be then. What kind of mother do I want to be? I asked her, "What's the consequence for that?" And she realized after a minute that there really wasn't one. And I said, "Okay, what do we want it to be?" My client said, "I honestly don't know."

Okay, that's where we need to put our brain to work, figuring that out, not spinning on how the child is doing it wrong, and all the judgment and everything and disrespect that we have of the child. We need to put our brains to work on, okay, well, what do I want to do then? I'm going to have to get creative. I'm going to have to think outside the box. Maybe I'm going to have some respectful conversations with that child and other family members and we're going to decide together, like no throwing books at the lights. I mean that wouldn't be the thing.

But what will be the thing, let's see what they can all come up with. Let me talk to this child about why she takes things. Does she feel that she doesn't have what she needs? Does she need to be taught something about how to earn money and how to get more of what she needs? Or what's going on? If we approach it from respect instead of from judgment we can learn a lot about our children and connect with them. And then again, put the focus on us. That's hard enough to figure out. Who do I want to be? How do I want to enforce it?

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What do I want that conversation to sound like? What's the appropriate consequence that I'm going to be willing to enforce over and over again because the child may still choose to behave as she has been? So, keep the focus more on you and less on the child. Your brain will already be paying attention to what your child is up to. You don't have to tell it to. You will have to tell it to focus on you. Who do you want to be? How do you want to feel about this child? How do you want to think about them? How do you want to make decisions on their behalf?

How do you make them from faith and abundance, not from fear? Again, we're going to do a deep dive on navigating all of this with adult children. And I have a lot more tools that I'll be offering you in the workshop in Be Bold, so I can't wait to see you there. Have a beautiful rest of your day and I'll talk to you next time. Bye bye.

Hey there, if you enjoy this podcast or even if you just find that it sort of piques your curiosity, or it makes you think, you're going to love the book that I wrote. It's called *Better Than Happy: Connecting with Divinity Through Conscious Thinking*. And it's available now at Amazon in print or kindle version. Or if you want me to read it to you, head over to audible and grab the audio version. And why not grab a copy for your sister, your best friend, or your mom while you're there too. Just saying.