



Episode 390: How to Raise an Adult: Break Free of the Overparenting Trap and Prepare Your Kids for Success With Julie Lythcott-Haims

Child: Welcome to my Mommy's podcast.

This episode is brought to you by Joovv Red Light Therapy that I have talked about for a really long time, and that is a regular part of my daily routine. I wanted to make sure to talk a little bit more about them today. You've heard me talk about red light therapy before because it is part of my daily routine. I feel like this is an extremely effective health modality. And it's something that I make a priority all of the time. It's been wonderful for my skin and my thyroid, also my energy levels. And I've written on my blog quite a bit about the many health benefits of red light therapy. I found more and more in the research that light is such an essential part of health. We think about nutrition and sleep, and a lot of the other aspects of health, but we often forget just how drastically important light is to our health. And red light therapy is one of the important types of light that we often don't get enough of. Many of us are exposed to all kinds of artificial blue lights in our homes, but we don't get enough of spectrums like red light and like all of the spectrums that come from the sun every day. And the way that I remedy this is totally inexpensive way of spending time outside every morning in the natural sunlight, and also using red light therapy daily. Anyone who's dabbled in red light therapy has probably heard of Joovv because they are the leading brand. They have pioneered this technology, and it's the light that I've had in my home for many years. Joovv is just now launching their next generation of devices and they made upgrades to what was already incredible red light therapy systems. Their new devices are sleeker, up to 25% lighter, and with all the same power and intensity that we've come to expect from them. But with their new intensified version, you can stand as much as three times further away and still get the recommended dose. They've also upgraded the setup so it's very quick and easy to mount, and set up, and can fit in just about any space depending on what size you need. And they have a cool new feature like recovery plus mode, which uses pulsing technology to give yourself an extra boost to recover from a tough workout or a tough day with the family. Also, as a busy mom, I need all the sleep I can get. And I find that using a red light device at night helps to wind me down from the day. But now they have something called Ambient Mode for calming lower intensity light at night, which I mentioned avoiding blue light at night to help your body and your natural circadian rhythms. And adding in soothing spectrums of red light can also be really, really helpful. So, definitely check it out. Exciting news, for a limited time, Joovv is going to hook you up with an exclusive discount on your first order, and you can find out all the details by going to [joovv.com/wellnessmama](http://joovv.com/wellnessmama) and using my code Wellnessmama on your qualifying order.

This episode is brought to you by Alitura. You've probably heard me talk about that. This is a skincare company I love, and it's founded by a dear friend of mine, Andy, who created these incredible products when he was in a horrible accident that left him with scars on his face. And this sent him into an incredible research phase to figure out ways that he could hopefully heal those scars and not have them with him for life. And he's developed some incredible products that have allowed him to do just that. One of my favorites is their face mask. And if you've seen me on Instagram with clay all over my face and hair, this is likely the one that I'm using. It's a simple mask that does incredible things for the skin and contains dozens of really, really beneficial ingredients. I notice a big difference in my skin tone when I use it regularly. They also have something called the Gold Serum, which I find especially nourishing for my skin without being too oily. And I love to use that, especially before we go outside or if I'm gonna be in front of the red light. I just find it's really, really beneficial for my skin. I love all of their products because they use completely natural ingredients, and not just natural

but incredibly beneficial ingredients. Andy goes above and beyond to make sure that everything that is contained in these formulas are so beneficial for the skin. And his skin is certainly a testament to how well they work. And I've gotten incredible feedback from many of you who have tried these products and loved them as well. They're much less expensive than spa variations of skincare products and I found that the quality is so, so much better. And I don't worry at all because I know they're so natural. I would love for you to check out their products and find out all about the different formulas they have by going to [alituranaturals.com/wellnessmama](http://alituranaturals.com/wellnessmama). And they've generously offered a discount of 20% with the code WELLNESSMAMA, all capital, all one word.

Katie: Hello, and welcome to the "Wellness Mama Podcast." I'm Katie from [wellnessmama.com](http://wellnessmama.com) and [wellnesse.com](http://wellnesse.com). That's wellness with an E on the end, my new line of completely natural personal care products, including hair care, shampoo, conditioner, dry shampoo, toothpaste, and hand sanitizer.

This episode is one of my favorite ones I've ever recorded with someone who I greatly admire. I'm here with Julie Lythcott-Haims, who is the author of The New York Times best-selling book, "How to Raise an Adult." It's one of my favorite books. She has a TED talk by the same name. And I think the message of this is incredibly, incredibly important. She also is the author of her award-winning prose poetry memoir, "Real American." And her third book, "Your Turn: How to Be an Adult" will be released in 2021. You can find links to all of those in the show notes at [wellnessmama.fm](http://wellnessmama.fm).

But I'm so excited to have her on today to share her perspective because she is a mom and also a former corporate lawyer, and Stanford Dean, and has a very unique perspective on how some of the ways that we are parenting our children are actually creating huge pitfalls for them later in life. She's highly qualified to speak on this topic and she has a BA from Stanford, a JD from Harvard, an MFA in writing from California College of the Arts. And she serves on the boards of the Foundation for College Education, Global Citizen Year, Common Sense Media, and Lean.In.Org. And she volunteers at the hospital program No One Dies Alone. But I think her perspective on these aspects of parenting are so important, especially right now, as many of us navigate new dynamics of parenting and school, and all that comes with that. So, so much practical information in this episode. Like I said, one of my favorite ones I've ever recorded. I've been a big fan of her work for a long time and excited to share her with you now. Julie, welcome. Thank you so much for being here.

Julie: Katie, thank you so much for having me. It's a pleasure.

Katie: I have wanted to have this conversation with you for such a long time. I'm a tremendous fan of your book, "How to Raise an Adult," and of your TED Talk. I think your message is so important for parents, especially in today's world and I think even maybe more timely right now, while so many parents are spending even more time with their kids, directly as we navigate all of this kind of changing world that we're in right now. But to start I'd love to have you kind of walk through some of the broad overview of the points you bring out in both, your TED Talk and your book about why American parenting maybe needs to change a little bit if we want what's actually best for our kids.

Julie: Awesome, yeah. Thank you. Let me start by saying, if I may that in addition to being an author and a TED Talk speaker, I'm a mom. I'm a mother of a 21-year-old son and 19-year-old daughter and anything I'm about to say is informed both, by what I have learned in a more scholarly sense and what I experienced as a college dean working with other people's kids, and what I've observed in my own family about our dynamics, about my own behaviors. I'm not unique in having that vantage point of both, "expert" and parent who's complicit in the problem I'm describing. But I think my manner of being is really a humility about, look what we parents have done, okay.

I am in the "we" and I want everybody listening to know that. I'm not judging any of you. I'm not judging you. I'm not judging myself. I'm saying there's a problem. How do I know? Because I've seen it other people's kids and I've seen it happening in my own house because of me. Broad overview, 25 to 30 years ago now, believe it or not it began that long ago. Parents began over-parenting. We began arranging play through playdate. We began observing every single kids' soccer practice and piano practice and we began trying to baby-proof the environment to make sure they never had even so much as an owie. And we began micromanaging their homework, and we began just being a part of childhood in the form of like a hovering cloud, like a hovering gray cloud. Which for our children, they experience as anxiety. My parents are always watching. My parents are always worried. My parents always have to know every single minute aspect of my life. And this has contributed to the explosion in anxiety in children.

We think that our hovering and our handling of every little task and the reminding. We think it's helpful but what we're learning from study after study out of the field of psychology is that we are turning natural kid fears into anxiety. For example, when we say, "Oh, you're afraid of the dark. You're of being alone. You hate eating these kinds of foods or you only eat these kinds of foods." When we manage the environment so they're never in the dark and they're never alone and they only eat the things they like? That tells their little developing mind, "Oh that fear is so legitimate and might be so terrible for me to actually experience that my parents are going to curate my environment so I never have to deal with it." We think it's a loving helpful thing. It's doing the exact opposite. It's terrifying our kids, actually. So that's an example of how with the best of intentions because we're just trying to love these little people so much and we do. We end up over-helping which undermines their skill development. It undermines their ability to build emotional strength and resiliency. And, fundamentally undermines agency, which, is the sense each of us must have in order to be mentally well. That, hey, I can do the task in front of me as opposed to, oh, hey, I'm going to have my parent you know micromanage my every move. So that's the overview.

Katie: Yeah, I think that's such an important point that you mentioned that every parent obviously wants what's best. We want what's best for our kids. Nobody's doing this out of ill intention in most cases. What caused this shift? You said it was about 25 years ago. What do you think was the impetus for that?

Julie: Well, actually in the front of my book, I detail these five things that I kind of just quickly ran through. In the mid '80s actually, so more like 35 years ago, we were seeing these things start and then we began labeling it in the early '90s. In the mid '80s, in 1983, let me be specific. "Stranger Danger" was born. It was not a

concept before a made for TV movie in 1983, which, freaked everybody out about stranger abduction, which, of course, is a horrific thing but so, so rare that it does not warrant curtailing our kids' freedoms for. But that concept was born in '83.

The playdate was born in '84. The notion that parents would setup play with other parents rather than kids organically creating their own playdate. That parents would monitor that play, and manage it, and tell them what to play with, and intervene if they weren't getting along. All of those things used to be managed by children, which taught them how to be with one another and how to be around their fellow human and negotiate conflict and decide what to do when they were bored. You know this is why we have so many young adults who can't manage conflict and need to be told what to do all the time, it comes back to the playdate. We became very safe in cars and bicycles in the '80s. Extensively a good thing, carseat laws, bike helmet laws, seatbelt laws, all rolled into effect across our 50 states throughout the mid 1980s. Made us safer in cars and bicycles but led to the mentality of bubblewrap the entire house. Which means the kid doesn't learn, ouch, I shouldn't do that again. You know, that hurt. We're preventing the harm, all, even the most minor harms from happening so our kids don't ever benefit from the learning that would come if they bumped themselves and bruised themselves occasionally, which, would be life teaching them, oh, don't do that again, which is the experience they need have.

We also became very obsessed around academics with a book published, called, "A Nation at Risk." Saying, American teenagers needed to be taught differently, needed to test better. We became more obsessed with teaching to the test. And, so all of these things taken in...oh, the final thing is we began showing up on the sidelines of kids activities and rooting and rawring for them, you know and yelling at other parents. I mean my parents used to just go to games, like your championship game. If you're GenX, you're lucky if your parents showed up at all. You know maybe they came to your championship and they didn't come to every game and they sure as heck didn't come to a single rehearsal. But in with these sort of the praising culture of like the, you're amazing, you're awesome in the 1980s with millennials. It was we're going to applause your every move. We're going to give you a trophy for every single group you're a part of, every single sport you play. And, that's you know taking into account, taken in the aggregate, these five things contributed to what I'm describing as this kind of gray hovering cloud over childhood, the grayness being this kind of omnipresence of well-meaning but over-involved parents.

Katie: Yeah, and you make such a strong case for some of the problems that come with that over-structured over-parenting and I feel like that even has shifted for me. I'm in my 30s. But from looking at my childhood versus my kids' friends today, how much more drastically structured their entire lives are. And I know parents do that hoping to give our kids the best start. Especially as the college landscape has gotten more and more competitive. But what are some of the problems that we're seeing with these young adults now, entering college who I feel like and I fell into this category, too. Of like kind of being trained poodles of like I was great at school and taking tests and jumping through hoops but that's not necessarily applicable life skills.

Julie: Well, I couldn't put any better than that, Katie. You're not supposed to be trained poodles but that's precisely how many parents are raising their kids these days. I joke with parents that it's like you're the trainer, your kid is the dog and you're going for Best in Breed at you know a fancy dog show. The point is, we're

humans, we're raising humans. And, a dog is never going to be, you know if your dog always needs to be on a leash and they go off leash that's like terrifying. Where is my dog? How does my dog know how behave when I'm not yanking on its leash? I mean that's how we're raising our kids and it's just absolutely devastating to them, psychologically.

Adulthood is a wide open landscape. There is no path. There's no correct path, there's no right school, there's no right profession. You know, successful adulting and this is actually the subject of my book that's coming out in April is all about figuring out who am I? What am I good at it? What do I love? What are my identities? How can I go be that person in the workplace and in my own personal space? You know, that person who achieves that, that is a successful happy person and that's certainly what I want for my kids. So this drastically structured childhood as you called it, which I call the checklisted childhood is designed to lead to the right outcomes but ends up being this confinement, almost like a straitjacket.

Bosses for example in, "How to Raise an Adult" I quote employers in the workplace who say kids raised this way with this kind of structured checklisted childhood. If a boss says, "Hey, we've got a problem. I need you to think it through, come up with some solutions. We have a meeting in three days." They can't do it. You know they need the steps. They need you to say you know this is step A, and this is step B, and this is step C if we're going to get to D. And, you know it's hard to test this thing and prove that this is the cause and the effect but you know in the aggregate it seems that young people raised this way are showing up in the workplace not able to kind of be that stellar employee regardless of how high their test scores may be because they've never been made or allowed to think for themselves.

Katie: Yeah, that's such an important point. I think that was the fundamental shift that you illustrate so well or you talk through in your book is that we do this thinking that we're giving our kids a better start. But we're actually protecting them from some of the very things that they need to actually be successful. And I think part of that reframe for me that I did somewhat when my kids were really little. And then, certainly after reading your book was to tangibly define what does success look like for in my kids? What do I want to help them like get...what point do I want them to get to? At what point do I consider success in raising them and I realized that was much less about academic achievement and much more about them being self-sufficient, kind, adult human beings who contribute to society in a meaningful way. And that's likely going to look different for each of them but if that's the goal then kind of working backwards of how do we best give them the tools to do that? And it may not be like you say in this checklisted way of making them check all these boxes so they can fit some perfect college mold. But letting them work through challenges and overcome them. And you make a really great point about authoritative versus authoritarian so can you kind of differentiate those when it comes to parenting?

Julie: Yes. I'm taking notes because you're saying so many great things. Just a second. This is like pay no attention to what's happening right now as the interviewee takes notes. Okay. You've said some important things that I want to be sure to circle back to. But, yes, I will answer your question about authoritative versus authoritarian. And this is best, really, it's a picture that you have to draw in your mind. And I wish I could like easily find it in my book to say, "It's on page whatever of my book." But, here, I just found it. Awesome. Because I hardly have any pictures in my book so I was able to find it. If you have my book, "How to Raise an

Adult." It's on page 146. It's basically this cartesian scale or, yeah, scale. It's like an XY chart that shows you the different types of parenting, there are four. Three of which we're supposed to avoid and one that's great.

So the scale is basically, how responsive to your kids' needs are you, or unresponsive? That's kind of on the Y-axis that goes up and down. And then, the X-axis that goes across is are you less demanding of your kids or more demanding of your kids? And so where we want to be is so the authoritarian parent is very demanding and not at all responsive to their kids' needs, wants, and feelings, and so on. This is the parent that's like, it's my way or the highway, my house my rules. If you don't like it, get out. Maybe there's some you know verbal or physical violence or, you know, abuse or anger that comes with this authoritarian mindset. We definitely do not want to be doing that. We also do not want to be doing its opposite, which is highly responsive to our kids' needs and wants, kind of acting like their best friend and never having any expectations about their behavior so it's the utter, it's the mirror image of the authoritarian is what's called permissive or indulgent, okay?

The parent who's not at all demanding and not at all responsive, that's a negligent parent who's neglectful, not even available. Maybe they're having their own issues around mental health challenge or extreme poverty and lack in the environment such that they really can't focus on what needs to be provided for the kid. None of us hopes to ever be in that category. The category we want to be in is authoritative. It takes the very responsiveness of the permissive and indulgent parent and adds to it the demanding side of the authoritarian parent. It's having high expectations around their work ethic, around their character, around meeting obligations, around you know adhering to boundaries established. But, also, highly responsive to their needs and their wants. It's not being the best friend who doesn't really care whether they do their chores, you know. And, it's not being the authoritarian you know drill sergeant who doesn't care at all about their needs. It's that sweet spot that is, I have high expectations but I also care deeply and profoundly about how you're doing and about what you need. That's what we're supposed to be aiming for, authoritative parenting.

Katie: Yeah, that distinction was so helpful for me in reframing that and it's something I've tried. My parents were incredible in many ways but there definitely was that probably too much of a push toward academics a lot of times and I definitely at times felt like maybe love and approval were kind of connected to academic performance. Which like I said, I think every parent goes into it doing the absolute best that they can but I wanted to really try to avoid that with my kids and you gave me such tangible advice in that book for how to do that. And one thing I tell my kids all the time is, "I love you unconditionally. There's nothing you could ever do that will take away from that or add to that." But I admit that also, but yet I do have high expectations for you and we talk about that a lot. You also make a really strong case for not overpraising. So can you walk us through why this is important? And what happens to a child's psyche when we overpraise?

Julie: Yeah. I'm learning so much from you. I love what you just said about how you have raised your six with this, "I love you unconditionally. There's nothing you could ever do that will take away from that or add to that." I think the "or add to that" piece, Katie, is something many parents don't realize they also need to be saying. I mean that's the proof that it's unconditional. My love is my love. It's like the sun. It'll come up tomorrow and it will set tomorrow night and you can count on it and it doesn't change like the sun. You know that's what I was hearing when you said that. I think it's beautiful. You can't, there's nothing you could do to

add to it. I don't love you more when.... And that's actually a beautiful segue into your question about overpraise.

So as part of this checklisted childhood, as part of these changes we broadly label as over-parenting, we, parents have decided good parenting is constant praise. This began with the self-esteem movement that I alluded to earlier in the '80s, ribbons and trophies and certificates for every little thing instead of for actually winning. A climate around let's not have the kids win or lose. Let's just say everyone played a good game. Like that feels easy on the emotions. It feels good. It doesn't feel good.

First of all, kids end up thinking they were amazing when they really were mediocre or just, you know meh. Why are we teaching that? We send them out into the workplace and they expect their boss to say, "Great job, buddy. You're amazing." The boss isn't likely to say that even if they were amazing, let alone 80% of the time when they were just fine or meh, right? So we are setting them up to expect life to applaud them at every turn when we do this, which is really bewildering and we saw this when folks your age began entering the workplace and they were like wait a minute, my boss doesn't like me or my boss is mad at me. Why? Because my boss isn't telling me I'm amazing. Why do you expect that? Because my parents always told me that. So that's an example.

Another example, which, is much more psychological is it's telling the child when you're constantly needing to comment on how well they tied their shoes or how well they drew a picture or how well they didn't hit somebody? It's reminding your child that you are always watching. And, as they age, that really gets creepy. I've just written an essay that's going to be in a book that comes out in October. My essay is on what I call the rise of stealth parenting. And it's on the impact of, this is a bit tangential to your question but let me just finish the thought. It's on all of this GPS tracking and video cameras in the home and parent portals where we can see grades in the moment.

We think knowing everything about our child every moment is awesome because then we know and then we can intervene and fix, and remind, and nag. And, until these recent technologies which I think are you know, they're enabled by technology but they're also the offshoot of this constant praise because the constant praise is sitting on top of always being with our kids. You can't praise them constantly unless you're constantly with them, okay? This is, we used to only observe people to this extent if they were incarcerated or they were in a psychiatric ward. But we've made the constant surveillance of children normal.

And I know that in 10 or 15 years, we will have longitudinal studies that have looked at this and can demonstrate this harms a kid's developing psyche. None of us wants to be watched or managed all the time. It creeps us out. It makes us feel untrusted and even that you know taken out of the negative realm of like surveillance parenting, just back to the constant praise. The point here is stop. Get a life. Have a life that is beyond your children. You know demonstrate to your children that they are not the center of your universe. That turns them into little narcissists. They need to know you know they're not the center of your universe. Your life entails having children but also entails having a partner, perhaps, having work, perhaps, having volunteer things that matter to you, having hobbies, having friends, having time for yourself. We have to

demonstrate to our children that a healthy adult life might include having children but children don't become the focus. It harms them to feel like they are the focus. You know, this is a complicated point I'm trying to make but I'll just leave it there and you can follow-up if it's not clear.

Katie: Yeah, I love that point. I think there is so much pressure in that. And I think like two parts of that is releasing them of the pressure of feeling like they have to always be amazing. Because when you tell a child they're amazing and they're smart, they feel the pressure to keep being amazing and smart or whatever it is you're praising them for. And, also, if they feel like they're the center of your world, that's a tremendous amount of pressure for a young psyche. And, so to release them from those things gives them the freedom to have a childhood. I know one objection when I've written about kind of over-structured childhood that I get a lot is, yeah, well, but it's not safe now. It's not safe like it was when we were kids and it's fundamentally less safe in today's world. And I know you address this in the book but let's touch on that a little bit. Of, is it actually fundamentally less safe right now for kids to be kids?

Julie: It is fundamentally more safe right now for kids to be kids and that's not because of helicopter parenting. It's more safe for all humans in this country. Violent crime is down. Every type of violent crime that you can imagine including harm that comes to children is down since the '70s, since before helicopter parenting became a thing. We have fewer people behaving in criminal ways in this country so we are objectively according to FBI statistics, more safe so that begs the question, then, why are we so misinformed?

One of the reasons is we have a 24/7 365 global news cycle, which tells us about something horrible happening to a child wherever it might've happened on the planet, in our country, in our state. It used to be we didn't hear about those things infinitesimally small you know as their occurrences are, we hear about them whenever they happen because of the internet in our pockets and so that triggers our fight or flight response. It's like there's a threat to a child, that could happen to my child and we feel that trigger. Of, oh, no, I have to worry. I have to safeguard my environment to make sure it never happens. Let me now frame it differently.

A child is more likely to be hit by lightning than to be abducted by a stranger. They're more likely to die in a car crash than they are to die at the hands of a stranger, yet, we put them in cars all the time. And we don't freak out when there are storms and say, "You can't go outside because you might get hit by lightning." And so these are examples of risks that we take, run of the mill, all the time, put them in cars, shuttle them everywhere where we actually are putting their lives in greater danger than is statistically likely to happen at the hands of a stranger. So it's just we're wrong. It's more safe now and, yet, we are making them less safe by treating them like fragile creatures.

Look, the big picture here is and let me just say this, Katie. I mean this is harsh but I'm going to say it. We're going to be dead one day, okay, and we are mammals. Which means our offspring stay with us until they've learned the skills and we can have confidence that we've passed our genes onto the next generation. And, they're going to survive and have their own offspring. I mean that's our biological imperative. Okay, we're not mama turtles that are going to you know lay eggs and leave and the eggs are going to hatch and be all by themselves and get picked off by birds. No, we're humans. Like elephants, we stay with our young until they

have developed the maturity to be on their own. For humans, that has always been 18 years. Lately, it's like 21 years, or 24, 29, whatever. At some point, we, parents must have confidence that if I was to die tomorrow, my kids are going to be all right because they have learned to care for themselves, their bodies, their environment, their decisions, their obligations, their relationships, okay? We have to parent for the long-term. Which is, we will be gone and we will have failed them and failed at parenting if that's when our kid finally has to be able to make it through a day or a week or a month on their own.

Katie: Yeah, I think that's such an important point and you drive that home so well and I love your TED Talk, too. And I feel like this is a hard thing as a parent. Because we are so attached, it is difficult to let them go through those challenges but it helps to reframe and realize just like an adult, like these are giving them the tools they need for later in life. And, I know as an adult and an entrepreneur I can now look at and see you know failure is actually can be a wonderful thing. Some of my best lessons in life came from failure. And, yet, it's easy to fall in that idea of trying to protect our kids from failure when instead of letting them have an environment to fail safely when they're young and learn from those lessons. Then, we have the opportunity to reframe those things for them and to make it a positive of great, what lesson did you learn from this? And to reframe their mental thought process when it comes to failure and it seems like an area this often exhibits when it comes to schoolwork or especially homework. And, I have a number of friends who spend hours and hours per day helping their kids with homework every single night and going over every answer and making sure everything is perfect. I'm curious to your thought about that because it seems like parents are much more involved in schoolwork and homework than they were when I was a kid. And, certainly, when my parents were kids. I think my grandmother would've laughed at the idea of helping my dad with his homework.

Julie: You're absolutely right. And, this is where the generational divides just are super clear. So you're in your 30s as you said. I'm 52, which makes me GenX. My own kids are 21 and 19, as I've said. And I have observed in the time my children have been alive and in schooling, this encroachment of parents into homework that just astounds me for I think three main reasons. Number one, it is completely...when I say parents involvement, I mean parents doing some portion of the homework, okay? Correcting things, making sure it's perfect is kind of a derivative issue here. But let's go one step further and admit that in many communities, parents are staying up all night with the glue gun because they're going to do the project. They are editing the essay themselves, not giving feedback, which, is appropriate. Inappropriately crossing a line and rewriting. They are cleaning up the math to make it accurate. Sometimes outright doing the homework themselves, okay?

And that is, A, unethical. B, it means the teacher has no idea what the students are capable of because parental involvement is all up in the work. And, C, it harms our kids' psyche because it's basically us saying, "Hey, kid, you're actually not capable of succeeding in the fourth grade without my tremendous involvement." Can you imagine? My goodness, it's another example of how our, you know, good intentions have gone completely awry. Our kid's mind learns my parents don't have faith in me. They don't think I've got it. They don't trust me. They also feel, my future is so important, this piece of homework matters so much to my future that my parent has to drop everything in order to make sure it's perfect. That's placing a huge heaping load of anxiety on them. It's just backwards and wrong and we must stop but how do you stop when you know everyone else is doing it? And this is where we really need schools to step up and blow the whistle and say,

"Parents, behind the line. Behind the line." Or, "Stay in your own lane." This is an area ripe for reform at the level of schools enforcing inappropriate parental involvement in homework.

Katie: I agree. And I think maybe even especially uniquely right now with all the changes with virtual schooling and also with it seems like the college landscape's changing a little bit that we might start to see some of those changes. But you bring up a great point. And so for parents listening who are resonating with what you're saying and want to make sure that they are giving their kids a great foundation to actually be successful in life and not over-parent. Let's turn around and talk about the positive for a minute. How can we create a good atmosphere that we're not over-parenting and it's not over-structured and we're not overpraising. What are some of those tenants of a good nurturing atmosphere for our kids to get to have a less structured childhood?

Julie: Well, I think the philosophy, first, is we, in our minds, and heart, and spirit as parents, have to say, "My child is not my pet dog or my project that I work on or my trophy that is the proof of my worth." And, that's work we have to do within our own selves. And if we have trouble with that work and believe me, I get it. I am in that work myself. That's what a therapist can help us with, right, unpacking why does my ego so badly need for my kid to get that opportunity or get an A on that thing, or get this grade or score, or get into this college. What's going on for me such that I feel judged by my kids' outcomes? Getting right with ourselves will help us be, meaning working on our own stuff will help us show up in our kids' lives as the healthy confident adults they need us to be. That's number one.

Number two, your beautiful point about what do you say to your kid? You say, "I love you unconditionally. There's nothing you can do to take that love away nor to add to it." That's a kind of message you want your kids to be hearing on a regular basis, as a matter of family values. Next, you want to be teaching your kids skills, okay? I have this four-step method for teaching any kid, any skill. And, actually, Katie, the Atlantic Magazine did a cute little cartoon depiction of what I'm about to tell you with me as the voiceover and I'm going to send that to you for the show notes because I think it's so adorable and it makes it so clear, visually. It's like a picture is worth a thousand words so I will get that to you. But let me try to describe it.

We're supposed to teach them everything from cross the street to use the stove, to remember to put your stuff in your backpack, and remember to take your backpack to school. And, to your earlier point of failure being a great teacher. The only way kids learn is by trying and fumbling it or failing outright and then trying again. That's how humans learn, period. Very few of us are perfect at anything right out of the bat. And none of us are perfect at everything right off the bat, okay? So a good parent is invested in teaching children to do for themselves and here's the four steps. I'm going to use teaching your kid to cross the street as my illustration example. Step one...I'm going to say the four steps. Then, I'm going to breakdown what they look like.

Step one is you do the task for them. Step two is you do it with them. Step three is you watch them do it. Step four is you don't have to be there. They can do it independently. So let's look at crossing the street. Step one, the child is an infant or toddler up to say, maybe three years of age. You're carrying them or you know, yeah, you're carrying them let say. Let's say they're infant or toddler. You're carrying them as you cross the street,

okay? They're literally doing nothing. All they have to do is be held, okay? That's step one. Step two, it's as if they're still in utero, okay? You are literally carrying them.

Step two...sorry. You do it for them. You do it with them. So step two means they're old enough to hold your hand. You're going to say, "Hey, buddy, we're going to learn to cross the street today. We're going to start today. It's going to take a lot of practice but let's start." You're narrating with your teaching voice. "Okay, so here is where we stand. And, here is how we look left, and right, and left." And, see, how slowly I'm speaking. And in real life, you'd probably do it even more slowly but it's excruciatingly slow. The point is you are teaching your child. So don't lead a life that's so busy that you can't pause to slow it down and teach your kid how to cross the street, okay? You do step two enough times that you can let go of their hand and move to step three, which is terrifying.

Don't move to step three if your kid is still at that age where they're darting into traffic. This is now a kid who is not going to be leaving your side. And you say, "Hey, buddy, now we're going to do the next level of learning to cross the street. I'm not going to hold your hand and you're going to be the one making the decisions but I'm just here to listen just in case." And your kid says, "Okay, daddy. Okay, mommy. I look left, and right, and left." And you say, "Slow it down, buddy. Slow it down little one," right? You're teaching, you're teaching. The kid slows down. Looks left, and right, and left. He says, "Okay, I'm ready." And steps out onto the street. You see the garbage truck. You know sometimes cars are hiding behind garbage trucks. You put your protective hand on their shoulder. Step three, you're still there just in case. This is a just in case. You say, "Hey, bud, look, there's a garbage truck. Sometimes, sure enough, there's a car hiding behind that one. We've got to start over and get back on this curb. Left, right, left," you're teaching. You do step three enough times, you can move to step four. Which is, your child can cross the street while you are somewhere completely different from them. You can see that it takes effort, it takes intentionality but your goal always is you know your mindset should always be what skill can my kid develop this week, or this semester, or this year, depending on the size and scope of it, okay? That's what we're supposed to be doing.

Katie: Yeah, I love that. That's so tangible and gives them like you said, the skills and knowing that they have the foundational skills and knowledge they need to actually accomplish this and hopefully take some of that fear out of it for parents. But also, as you said, being willing to confront the fact that a lot of times, this is our fear that's leading these behaviors, not actually reality or what is necessarily best for the kids.

This episode is brought to you by Joovv Red Light Therapy that I have talked about for a really long time, and that is a regular part of my daily routine. I wanted to make sure to talk a little bit more about them today. You've heard me talk about red light therapy before because it is part of my daily routine. I feel like this is an extremely effective health modality. And it's something that I make a priority all of the time. It's been wonderful for my skin and my thyroid, also my energy levels. And I've written on my blog quite a bit about the many health benefits of red light therapy. I found more and more in the research that light is such an essential part of health. We think about nutrition and sleep, and a lot of the other aspects of health, but we often forget just how drastically important light is to our health. And red light therapy is one of the important types of light that we often don't get enough of. Many of us are exposed to all kinds of artificial blue lights in our homes, but we don't get enough of spectrums like red light and like all of the spectrums that come from the sun every

day. And the way that I remedy this is totally inexpensive way of spending time outside every morning in the natural sunlight, and also using red light therapy daily. Anyone who's dabbled in red light therapy has probably heard of Joovv because they are the leading brand. They have pioneered this technology, and it's the light that I've had in my home for many years. Joovv is just now launching their next generation of devices and they made upgrades to what was already incredible red light therapy systems. Their new devices are sleeker, up to 25% lighter, and with all the same power and intensity that we've come to expect from them. But with their new intensified version, you can stand as much as three times further away and still get the recommended dose. They've also upgraded the setup so it's very quick and easy to mount, and set up, and can fit in just about any space depending on what size you need. And they have a cool new feature like recovery plus mode, which uses pulsing technology to give yourself an extra boost to recover from a tough workout or a tough day with the family. Also, as a busy mom, I need all the sleep I can get. And I find that using a red light device at night helps to wind me down from the day. But now they have something called Ambient Mode for calming lower intensity light at night, which I mentioned avoiding blue light at night to help your body and your natural circadian rhythms. And adding in soothing spectrums of red light can also be really, really helpful. So, definitely check it out. Exciting news, for a limited time, Joovv is going to hook you up with an exclusive discount on your first order, and you can find out all the details by going to [joovv.com/wellnessmama](http://joovv.com/wellnessmama) and using my code Wellnessmama on your qualifying order.

This episode is brought to you by Alitura. You've probably heard me talk about that. This is a skincare company I love, and it's founded by a dear friend of mine, Andy, who created these incredible products when he was in a horrible accident that left him with scars on his face. And this sent him into an incredible research phase to figure out ways that he could hopefully heal those scars and not have them with him for life. And he's developed some incredible products that have allowed him to do just that. One of my favorites is their face mask. And if you've seen me on Instagram with clay all over my face and hair, this is likely the one that I'm using. It's a simple mask that does incredible things for the skin and contains dozens of really, really beneficial ingredients. I notice a big difference in my skin tone when I use it regularly. They also have something called the Gold Serum, which I find especially nourishing for my skin without being too oily. And I love to use that, especially before we go outside or if I'm gonna be in front of the red light. I just find it's really, really beneficial for my skin. I love all of their products because they use completely natural ingredients, and not just natural but incredibly beneficial ingredients. Andy goes above and beyond to make sure that everything that is contained in these formulas are so beneficial for the skin. And his skin is certainly a testament to how well they work. And I've gotten incredible feedback from many of you who have tried these products and loved them as well. They're much less expensive than spa variations of skincare products and I found that the quality is so, so much better. And I don't worry at all because I know they're so natural. I would love for you to check out their products and find out all about the different formulas they have by going to [alituranaturals.com/wellnessmama](http://alituranaturals.com/wellnessmama). And they've generously offered a discount of 20% with the code WELLNESSMAMA, all capital, all one word.

And another thing you touch on that I think is really important to be delved into is kind of the idea of the self-esteem paradox. Because I think that maybe is also a driver with the overpraising as we want to give our kids a strong self-esteem because we think that relates to them doing well in life and feeling confident. And I love, I think the idea that you mention in the book of they have to actually work for their dreams. They can't just believe in their dreams. They have to actually be willing to work for it, too. But can you touch on the self-

esteem part and what actually does give our kids not just self-esteem but the confidence and the skills to accomplish these things.

Julie: So self-esteem and self-efficacy are similar terms in the field of psychology. And, both, get to this the knowing that we need to have inside of us that we can achieve things. Agency is a related concept. And what a kid needs is, it also relates to what motivates them, intrinsic motivation is something we want them to have rather than be just motivated by our praise, or our scorn, or our money. So all of these things pivot around our kid having connection, meaningful connection to people who love them, healthy connection. And then, autonomy, which sounds paradoxical, like how could I ensure that everything goes well for them if I let them be autonomous you know?

The point is that if you step back and allow your kid to step forward into their lives, that's how they're going to ultimately have that sense of, yes, I can do things. Yes, I am capable. So it's this dance we have to do of healthy emotional connection. And then, giving them space. We have to walk away when they do their homework. We have to say, "It's homework time. Let me know if you have any questions. If you need my help you know, I'm in the next room." You might have to manufacture something for yourself to do to ween yourself off of the need to sit there with them, okay? They have to learn to care about their homework, they have to learn to do it. They have to learn to remember to put it in their backpack. You know, you might not lay all of that on a kindergartner right off the bat. But by fourth grade, if you are still like, "Have you done..." You know like sitting there with them, that's really an overreach.

Certainly seventh grade. We have parents walking into seventh grade, eighth grade classrooms in the pre-pandemic days to sort of situate their child. And, outside of a child having a significant learning challenge or mental health challenge or physical need health wise, there's no business an adult parent has walking up into the seventh grade classroom and, you know, just making sure everything is right with your child. You're just infringing upon their ability to kind of handle things for themselves and that's what they need in order to feel that self-esteem. Remember, every time you remind, every time you handle it for them, you're telling them, "Hey, kid. I don't think you can. I'm desperately afraid that you'll mess this up if I'm not here or if I'm not reminding you." That's what your well-intentioned messages are actually saying to your child's mind. I have an example about this but I want to pause and just see if there's time for that. Let me know.

Katie: Absolutely. That was a perfect explanation but, yeah, go ahead.

Julie: So I got a phone call from a mom sometime ago. Who said, "Julie, you know I'm a fan of your book. I'm a fan of your TED Talk," just like you've said today, Katie, which is awesome. And, she said, "I finally got it and here's how. I have two sons. One, my eldest is 16 and he's my biological son. Then, my younger son is two years younger and he's my adopted son. And, I love them both fiercely. You know the adoption or non-adoption doesn't make a difference I thought," she said.

"Here's what happened. My older son, my biological son was having a lot of difficulties. Ended up having to go to a therapeutic boarding school and we have family therapy with him once a week." Or twice a week or something like that. I forget the details. But she said, "Julie, just this week on our family therapy call my biological son said to me with his therapist there, "Mom, every time you remind me of something it makes me feel that you think I can't ever do it." And he said, "And I think that makes me feel like I can't do it. And, maybe becomes me not being able to do it also. Sometimes it makes me want to defy you and say, fine. You felt like you had to remind me you know, the heck with you. I'm not going to do it because you feel the need to remind me," okay?"

Then she goes, "Julie, here's the brilliant thing I realize I'm so sad hearing my son say this. I get it. I can totally envision every single moment of every day when I'm reminding him. And I realized I only do this with my older son. And I've come to realize that it's because he's my biological kid and his genes are half mine that I feel that his achievements and outcome and effort is a reflection of me. Whereas with my adopted son, whom I love no less, who I love no differently. I don't feel responsible for what he become in the world because he is genetically not mine." This was brilliant I thought.

She came to appreciate, she has a healthier relationship with her adopted son. Her adopted son does not have these emotional issues and traumas that her biological son has. And, she's pretty sure she has a clear sense of why. Now, many of us don't have like the child who has our genes and the child who is adopted and doesn't share our genes. Many of us can't conceive of it that way so let me offer this if this resonates with you.

Think about how you treat your nieces and nephews, or the children of your best friends. Let's say you go over to that person's house. Their teenager comes home or their elementary school or middle school or whatever, comes home in a huff because something went wrong at school. Say it's a high schooler who's just like, well, I just blew my chemistry test, you know. Or, it's a little one who says, "I left my backpack at school," you know. If you're not their parent, all you're going to do is offer a loving response. You're going to say, "Oh, buddy, I'm so sorry. That must not feel very good." And then, you're either going to change the subject or you're going to say, you know, "I have some thoughts about that. Let me know if you need help." But then you say, "What is good about today? Or, tell me about that guitar you started to play, or, how's soccer going?" You turn to something different. You know, you empathize and move on.

If it's our own child, we're like, "What do you mean you failed the chemistry test?" And we feel the need to call the chemistry teacher, email the teacher, interrogate the teacher, interrogate our kid. Like we are so worried about chemistry that we act like it's our very future that's on the line. And, that creates this emotional intertwinedness that prevents our kids from actually to actually showing up in their own life and being their own person who cares about their own outcomes. Okay, the situation I've described with the "adopted" son and the "niece, or nephew, or best friend's kid," that is the healthier parental response. That's the psychological distance, a healthy psychological distance we need to have between us and our children, in order for them to develop self-esteem, self-efficacy, agency, intrinsic motivation, all of that. We have to stop acting as if their lives and outcomes are basically our own.

Katie: That's such an important point. And it's probably in many ways so much easier said than done but that is amazing, how that illustrates that. If you don't mind a somewhat personal question. I'd actually love to hear, you mentioned your kids are both grown. I would love to hear how they've, basically, what they think of all this? And the relationship you guys have now if you don't mind sharing some kind of broad details?

Julie: Sure, sure. I write a lot about my kids in my book, always with their approval. I speak about them when I do my keynote for, "How to Raise an Adult." And, I'll just say this. My 21-year-old would be comfortable with my saying he is working through a lot of stuff right now. He has got an anxiety about just living life that is pretty hardcore. And, he's taking a break from college to focus on that. And, we are happy that he's doing that. And, we're trying to support him appropriately in that work.

By which I mean this was a kid who always had a little bit of anxiety and ADD but was always you know the way that I would characterize it, so smart, so high-achieving, so capable that those things never really seemed to be in the way. And, we didn't spend enough time learning about those things. We never put those things as kind of the forefront of what mattered. It was always like, yeah, yeah, yeah, there are those things but he's really smart and he can achieve so let's go. So here's the best way I can frame it for you.

When my husband and I realized at the end of our kid's sophomore year of college that he was really struggling. We began...struggling with his ADD and anxiety that had just become the dominant factors in his life. We, I'm embarrassed to say this but I'll admit because let's just be truthful about what this can be like for us. We had not purchased so much as one book on ADD or one book on anxiety since his diagnosis in the fourth grade. And, now, here he was like 19-20, 20-years-old. And, so we bought a bunch of books and shared them, and flagged them up, and made notes, and we were like learning so much.

He comes home from this year of college, which was pretty defeating. You know because when things start to go poorly, then you get into this downward spiral. And, I know that from being a dean, working with other people's kids. I know that from struggling myself, in college occasionally at the beginning. And, so my son comes home from college and he sees this stack of books accidentally. Like, we had had them in my husband's office. And, my son went in there to like get something out of the printer that was in his dad's office. So my son comes out to me and he says, "Mom, I saw the books on dad's desk."

Oh, Katie, my heart just leapt into my mouth, just thinking, oh my goodness you know, what have we done? He's going to feel pathologized, angry, you know I don't know. And he put his hand on my shoulder and looked me in the eye and a smile came to his face. And he said, "Thank you for taking an interest in knowing who I am." And that was so emotional. Because that told me in one sentence that he was feeling pretty unseen and unsupported in the challenges that are very much in his way. Things we were brushing off as, yeah, yeah, you'll be fine. You're so smart. We love you. You know, just we had not been supporting our child according to his needs.

And, so we are trying to be the parents of this, now, 21-year-old man, young adult as we now say in today's parlance. You know when I was growing up, 21, nobody would've said is a young adult. Very much a young adult we would say today. We're trying to step up where we need to, step back where we need to, do the work we need to do to support this kid on his growth trajectory and it's hard and we're in it with him, and it's hard. And I love this kid to death as I love both.

My second one is in college. She's back East in college. I live in California. We live in California. She's 3,000 miles away. She's living off-campus in a pandemic environment. It was her way to have some control over her living. I didn't want her university to say, once again, "Oh, you've got to move out because of the virus." So I'm watching this kid adult from afar. She is negotiating conversations with landlords, and the DMV, and renter's insurance, and buying herself food. And, figuring out how long food lasts in the refrigerator without spoiling. And, she's frustrated sometimes, and crying sometimes, and proud of herself you know probably less often than she should be. I'm sitting here, going, "Wow, kid, look at you. You are doing it. It's hard but you are doing it. And, every time you get back up and try it again and figure it out, you get stronger and more capable."

Katie: I love that. And, it's the perfect example of the points you've made about not overpraising and I've also heard said you know like if you're going to praise, praise the effort. Praise the hard work, praise the tangible thing that can increase, versus the innate quality. And, that was a perfect example of that. And, I appreciate you sharing so vulnerably about your own kids. Because I think that illustrates, too, what a great relationship you have with them, now, as adults, which is certainly one of the top goals for me. And I love that you're willing to share that so thank you for that. I can't believe how fast our time has flown by because you are so incredibly easy to talk to. A question I love to ask selfishly at the end of interviews is, if there's a book or a number of books that have had a dramatic impact on your life and if so, what they are and why?

Julie: Well, it's funny. There are plenty of books and they're not necessarily in the realm of parenting so I'm just going to say to anyone who might need this. My favorite book is "Good Woman," by Lucille Clifton. She's an African-American woman, a poet, she died within the last 10 years. I can't remember exactly when. But reading her poetry in my 30s, made me feel if she's possible, if these words are possible, then, maybe I am possible. And, that may seem like what? What is Julie saying? She's on here as this expert, she's written books and has a TED Talk.

Yes, and I'm also an African-American woman and bi-racial, and I was taught by many people in this country that I should loath myself because of my race, because of my skin color. And, even though I was outwardly successful as a corporate lawyer and then a university dean, I really was just trying to perform well-enough so that I would never be called the N-word again, and that happened to me in my all-white high school on my 17th birthday, which I never told anyone because I was so ashamed of. So this book of poetry, "Good Woman," by Lucille Clifton, was so raw and revealing about femaleness and womanness, and motherhood, and mothering, and birthing, and bodies, and all of that, and blackness. And, for some reason it just spoke to me and just pulled me out of wherever I was hiding if that makes any sense. And I know it's not sort of relevant to this podcast but I just, that is the honest, most honest answer to your question. In terms of parenting authors I love, there are so many and, you know, off the top of my head who comes to mind? Jessica Lahey, "The Gift of Failure," Madeline Levine, "The Price of Privilege." Her work in the "The Price of

Privilege," really led me to my work for, "How to Raise an Adult." Because she's a psychologist who was seeing all of this over-parenting showing up in the form of mentally unwell kids in her practice. And, there are so many other people but those are the first two whose books come to mind for me.

Katie: I love that. I am adding those to my reading list right now. And, I also want to mention actually your book, "Real American," which I've ordered. I haven't finished, yet. I just started but so far it's incredible and beautiful. And, you didn't mention it but I want to highly recommend that and all. I'll put links to those in the show notes at [wellnessmama.fm](http://wellnessmama.fm) And like you mentioned, you're coming out with another book next year so definitely, we'll make sure to mention that when it comes out as well. But like I said in the beginning, I so much appreciate the work that you're doing. And, this is so vital for parents and especially right now. And, I'm honored you would spend the time being here today and sharing with us.

Julie: Katie, thank you so much. There is one last thing I would love to say. Could I just say the name of my next book because it is actually pre-orderable now? And I would love for people to know what it is and to help me give life to it by taking an interest in it.

Katie: Absolutely. And I'll link to the preorder. And I would love to have you back on again, to discuss that close to launch if you'd be willing but, absolutely. Go ahead.

Julie: I would love to be back on. You are a great interviewer and you have an amazing podcast and community. It's such an honor. My book is called, "Your Turn: How to Be an Adult." And it's for 18 to 34-year-olds struggling with adulting. And, most of the adulting books tell you how to iron your shirt and how to file your taxes, and change a tire. And, yes, adulting is part of that but that's like saying adulting is like...that's like saying high school is like how to find your locker you know?

Adulting is about wanting to adult. It's about having to adult. It's about picking yourself up when things don't go well. So it's about the terror of it, you know, being reliant on yourself, and the joy of being self-reliant. And like, this little place I'm renting might be humble and all the stuff might be secondhand but it's mine and I'm in charge. And, that feels good, and I get to decide." You know there's just such a delicious feeling and agency and that's fundamentally I think what this book is about. It's about what I call the arch of adulting, agency, resilience and character. These are the three things that will carry us to a delightful, wonderful, successful future.

So that book, "Your Turn: How to Be an Adult," is coming out April 6, 2021. Pre-orderable right now and I would love it if anyone's got a young adult in their lives that they love, I would love for you to get it. If you are somebody who's listening and you are a young parent. You're like, "Hey, I could use some tips on adulting," I think you might find this speaks to you as well.

Katie: Amazing, I'll make sure that's linked, as well as your TED Talk, and your books, and the article for the Atlantic you mentioned. Those will all be at [wellnessmama.fm](http://wellnessmama.fm) for any of you who are listening while you exercise or drive. You can find all the notes there. Julie, I am so honored, like I said you are here. This has been one of my favorite interviews and I'm so grateful for your time.

Julie: Katie, thank you so much. Delightful being with you. Thank you for all you're doing to help us all be better parents.

Katie: And, thank you as always for listening and for sharing your most valuable resource, your time with both us today. We're so grateful that you did and I hope that you will join me again on the next episode of the Wellness Mama Podcast.

If you're enjoying these interviews, would you please take two minutes to leave a rating or review on iTunes for me? Doing this helps more people to find the podcast, which means even more moms and families could benefit from the information. I really appreciate your time, and thanks as always for listening.