



**Episode 439: An Interview With My Five-Year-Old
About Family Culture**

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Katie: Hello, and welcome to the "Wellness Mama" podcast. I'm Katie from wellnessmama.com and wellnesse.com. That's Wellnesse with an E on the end. And this episode is a special one for me because I am interviewing my youngest child, my 5-year-old. And we talk about, as you would expect with a 5-year-old, many things, but about our family culture a little bit and answer some reader questions from you guys. I try to avoid using her name so that one day she will have the choice to be online or not. But I wanted to capture some of her references to our family culture and use this as a way to answer some recent questions about our family. As the youngest, she's definitely gotten the benefit of what I've learned about health, and parenting, and education the most since I've learned as I've gone.

And I've talked before about how I believe that children are born with many of the skills they need to thrive as an adult, things like creativity, imagination, ability to connect the dots with pattern recognition, critical thinking, kids are natural "why" askers and many others, and that much of our work as parents is just keeping them from having these skills trained out of them. But I wanted to share a glimpse into her take on some things in an unfiltered way. I didn't catch them on this recording, but she's the one who has said things in the past, like, when asked why she was so cute, saying, "Because my mommy made me from scratch." Her answers to a lot of questions are just funny. And her part of this podcast will definitely be more humor than information, but perhaps a look into what my daily life looks like with her.

But before we jump into her take on imaginary friends and unicorns, I also wanted to share some aspects of our family culture in a little bit more structured of a way so that you can, kind of, understand the culture that she's grown up in her whole life. A lot of this stems from our family manifesto, which is in our home, we create a place of love, order, happiness, calm, harmony, and adventure to help each of us work toward our purpose, mastery of self, and goals so that we can create positive change in the world. And that's very top of mind in how we raise our kids. And so she's seen aspects of that her whole life. Some of these ideas in our manifesto are represented in quotes or artwork around our home, especially on our family culture wall, which lives in our kitchen.

I'll link to some of the prints I've drawn for our culture wall in the show notes at wellnessmama.fm. But a few that you've probably heard me say before that are a big part of our family culture are, "You were made to do hard things," which was inspired by Wonderling Family, which they're on Ista, some good friends of ours. And our kids hear us say this phrase a lot. In fact, they've started saying it back to us. They're all a little bit more fearless than I am these days. And often I hear these words back at me as much as I say them to them anymore, at times like when I was too scared to cliff jump in water, and they'd already all done it, and I eventually ended up doing it too.

This message is really important in our family because in life, we're always gonna encounter things that are difficult but we have a choice in how we frame those things. And so we try to avoid as adults and also help our children learn to avoid framing something as bad just because it's hard or uncomfortable. It's become part of our family culture to tackle challenges in a fun way. And I now see this play out with my kids in their own way as their own little tribe. And they encourage each other in their various adventures, whether it's pole vaulting, or chess, or learning backflips, or Rubik's Cubes, or climbing trees, whatever it may be, they often lean into this aspect of our family culture that they were made to do hard things.

We also put daily reminders of this all over our house, and things like the gymnastics mat down the hallway, or the rings, and climbing holds in their room. It's things that we put in their way to encourage both activity and also that constant ability to do hard things. And these things also remind me to keep working towards some of those. Another recurring message in our home is, "I love you unconditionally. There's nothing you can do to take away from that or to increase it." And this one's pretty self-explanatory. But I think it's something important for kids to hear often, especially the second part, that they don't have to earn our love and that there's nothing they need to do to increase it by getting approval through their activities.

Another one very prominent in our house is, "Go to sleep smarter than when you woke up." Curiosity and learning are another big part of our family culture. And with little ones, I try, not always successfully, certainly, to answer their questions. And if I don't know the answer to research it with them. I'm fond of saying like, "I don't know, but let's find out together." And this is the initial way children learn before they can read or have access to technology. And so, their questions, while they can be definitely exhausting by the fourth or fifth-hundred one of the day, are a great teaching opportunity. And my parents were great at this. And while some days it's an extreme test of my patience, it's a great way to help kids learn quickly. I think one time recently

when I traveled with just the youngest, and I was determined that I was just gonna answer every single question she had that day without losing patience. And throughout the course of the day, and airline flights, and driving, she asked several hundred questions and I was very tired by the end of the day.

I also try to avoid using the words "because I said so" and to help kids figure out the answers to questions by asking them clarifying questions back rather than just giving them the answer whenever I can. So, for instance, when they ask why something happens or why something is the way it is, I love to ask them back, "Well, what do you think," or, "What might be a reason it would be like that?" And then let the discussion flow from there. We also build this into our family culture with things like watching TED Talks, lots of reading and access to books, and constant exposure to new things to learn because the brain is engaged in a different way when it's learning something new. And kids naturally are learning so many new things because so much is still new to them. But by maintaining constant exposure to new things, we can help maintain that child-like curiosity that is a commonality of a lot of the world's most successful people who had a positive impact on the world.

The only two items in our family budget that I consider almost completely unlimited are books and reading material, and supplies for learning or experiments. And this has led to things like 3D printers in our house, super worms in a closet in my son's room, a foundry in our backyard where they melt metal, and lots of other fun projects. But just like I said, kids are born with this skill set. It's just getting out of their way and giving them the tools to explore.

And also the phrase, "Everything will work out perfectly for me." This one is inspired by Tina Anderson from Just Thrive. And it's a good reminder that everything will work out. And while it's often easy to focus on the acute when we're in a problem, everything will work out and things that seem difficult now are often barely even memories in 5 to 10 years.

In this episode, we also talk a little bit about our family food culture. And you'll hear her even mention eating sugar a couple of times. You guys ask me often what my food approach is with my kids, and I mention that I don't limit or try to control their food choices when they're outside of our home. And you'll definitely hear this from her. I talked a little bit before but my philosophy is I cook nutrient-dense foods at home and educate my kids early about how food affects their bodies in different ways. I try not to restrict food beyond that or to overly control it when they aren't home because I don't want food to ever be a forbidden thing or for them to think of any food as good or bad. And personally, I now eat a huge variety of foods. And there are very few things that I can't or won't eat. But I also don't eat anything every single day.

My hope is that they adopt a sense of balance from an early age and learn how to listen to their bodies. I've seen this play out in my older kids. And my teenage son often won't eat at all if he's not hungry or sometimes will eat one really large meal at night when he is hungry. And my older ones are all making relatively good health choices and food choices almost all the time, even not at home. And the older ones have even created their own culture around healthy eating, and cooking, and cooking different foods with their friends.

And all of these things, the commonality, I find is that developing a strong family culture is much more effective at helping kids want to make good choices than just telling them they have to or, certainly, having really strict rules about these things. You know, like, leadership is aligning motivations and getting someone to want to do the thing you want them to do, which is certainly much easier than trying to force a child to do something they don't wanna do. And my youngest has had the advantage of this her whole life. You'll hear her perspective on some of these things in this episode, along with a little more detail about our family and what a day in the life is like, and also just a little bit of humor because she is completely unfiltered. So, without further ado, let's join my 5-year-old who wants to be called Elsa to protect her privacy.

Hi, honey. Welcome to the podcast. Are you having a good day so far? Yeah? What have you done today so far?

Elsa: Eat breakfast.

Katie: What else?

Elsa: Watched chess.

Katie: And watched chess a little bit? Do you like chess?

Elsa: Mm-hmm.

Katie: What do you like about chess?

Elsa: The unicorns.

Katie: The unicorns? The knights? Yeah, what other pieces do you like? Who do you play in chess?

Elsa: Tony.

Katie: Your siblings? Have you played anybody else besides your siblings?

Elsa: Hmmmmm

Katie: Can you tell us about what your days are like? What do you do during the day usually?

Elsa: Play with friends.

Katie: Play with friends? What else?

Elsa: That's about it.

Katie: That's about it? What about school?

Elsa: A little bit.

Katie: A little bit of school? Yeah, we don't like to do too much school, do we? How long is your school usually?

Elsa: Long.

Katie: Long? Like, an hour? Yeah. What kind of things do you do in school?

Elsa: I make crafts. I make art.

Katie: So you make art? What kind of art do you make?

Elsa: Snowflakes and monkeys.

Katie: And monkeys? And do you do math sometimes?

Elsa: Mm-mm.

Katie: Not so much? What about after school? Where do you like to play with your friends?

Elsa: Outside.

Katie: Outside? What do you do outside?

Elsa: Play with friends and climb trees and pick leaves.

Katie: Oh, what kind of leaves?

Elsa: Leaves off the trees and off the ground and tear them apart.

Katie: What are you do with them?

Elsa: I just put them on the ground. So I crumble them up and then I put them...then sprinkle them. I also pick up leaves a lot and go...I also do...

Katie: Do you throw them in the air? They've probably never seen our backyard where you play. Can you tell them what it's like?

Elsa: Well, there's a trampoline, spider web swing, bars, treehouse. We used to have a tiny treehouse with a slide but we gave it to my friend, but I'm not gonna say his name. I'm gonna keep the privacy.

Katie: Okay. But what do we have? What kind of treehouse do we have now?

Elsa: A big one.

Katie: And what are some of the things that are on the treehouse that you can play on?

Elsa: A lot. The bars.

Katie: Monkey Bars? And pole vaulting bars?

Elsa: Yeah, but Mom...Oh. And the bar.

Katie: Also, we have a slackline.

Elsa: Slackline.

Katie: And then what about what's on the patio? What do we have on the patio?

Elsa: But the woods.

Katie: Oh, and the woods, yeah, to play in the trees. What's on the patio?

Elsa: And climb the trees and blend in.

Katie: How high have you climbed on a tree?

Elsa: Not that high.

Katie: How high have you climbed on a rope?

Elsa: High.

Katie: High? All the way up? Like 20 feet?

Elsa: Not 20 but 10 abouts.

Katie: 10 abouts? Yeah, that's about 20 feet. You don't think it's that high? Does it feel high to you?

Elsa: Fifteen feet.

Katie: Fifteen feet? Okay, we'll go with 15 feet. What else is on the patio besides the rope to climb?

Elsa: Table.

Katie: Table?

Elsa: Cat food.

Katie: Cat food, yeah.

Elsa: But we keep the cat food by the bowl and water.

Katie: And then what else is on the other side of the patio that the adults go in a lot?

Elsa: Another table.

Katie: And the sauna? Do you ever go in the sauna?

Elsa: And a cold tub and a hot tub.

Katie: And a hot tub? Do you ever go in those?

Elsa: I only go in the hot tub.

Katie: You did go to the cold tub sometimes, so what does that feel like?

Elsa: Really cold.

Katie: Really cold? Do you know what else is in our backyard? Our pets. Who are our pets? How many do we have?

Elsa: Five.

Katie: And what are they?

Elsa: We have three dogs and two...I mean, three cats and two dogs.

Katie: Yeah. And what are the dogs' names?

Elsa: Lollipop and Hemingway.

Katie: Lollipop and Hemingway. Do you remember how Lollipop got her name?

Elsa: Because of me.

Katie: Because of you? Because you wanted a puppy, right, and you talked Dad into it so we surprised you, and then when we picked her up I said, "Let's think of a name." And what did you tell me?

Elsa: "No, Lollipop, no, Lollipop, no, Lollipop."

Katie: Yeah, you said, "Mom, I gotta say this nicely one time. I'm pretty sure her name is Lollipop."

Elsa: Nuh-uh. I said, "No, Lollipop, no, Lollipop, no, Lollipop, no, Lollipop, no, Lollipop."

Katie: And why did you like the name Lollipop?

Elsa: Because it's a cute name.

Katie: It's a cute name?

Elsa: And because I eat lollipops a lot and candy.

Katie: Oh, okay. And what's our other dog's name?

Elsa: Hemingway.

Katie: Hemingway.

Elsa: My Mommy named him.

Katie: And he's still a baby. Yeah, and then we have three cats. Who are the cats?

Elsa: Fluffy, Thor, and Harry.

Katie: Fluffy, Thor, and Harry, yeah. And they live in the backyard and they kill snakes.

Elsa: And rats.

Katie: Yeah. And then we have one more pet inside. Who's inside?

Elsa: And we have one more pet inside. It's a hedgehog. It's my brothers hedgehog and he named his hedgehog Athena.

Katie: Yeah, Athena. That's right. And then inside our house, we have...what do we have in the hallway?

Elsa: A gymnastics mat too.

Katie: Yeah, and what do you do on the gymnastics mat?

Elsa: We jump do gymnastics on them.

Katie: Yeah, what do your big sisters do on it?

Elsa: They do gymnastics.

Katie: Like, backflips and cartwheels? Yeah.

Elsa: And back springs.

Katie: And back springs, yeah. What do we have in the kitchen in the doorway that people can hang on?

Elsa: A handlebar thing.

Katie: A climbing handlebar? Yeah, you're right. And people ask a lot of questions about our kitchen because we cook so much stuff there and you sometimes help me in the kitchen. What are the things you like to do in the kitchen?

Elsa: I like chopping, chopping down.

Katie: You like chopping things? What do you usually help chopping in the kitchen?

Elsa: I help chopping carrots and cucumbers.

Katie: Using your crinkle cutter? Yeah.

Elsa: I chop pickles sometimes.

Katie: Oh, yeah, that's right.

Elsa: And eat pickles.

Katie: Do you remember that time I asked you what's your favorite food and you said chocolate?

Elsa: Sugar.

Katie: I said, "What?" And you said...

Elsa: I said what I said.

Katie: What do you think our family is like? What would you tell people our family is like if they didn't know us?

Elsa: I can't explain that one.

Katie: What are some things we say in our family?

Elsa: Like, go to bed.

Katie: Like, got to bed. We do say that sometimes. What about, "You were made to do hard things?" Don't we say that a lot? Yeah. If we had an airplane to take us on vacation right now, where would you wanna go?

Elsa: Disney World.

Katie: Disney World? What do you like about Disney World?

Elsa: Because there is ports and lots of stuff.

Katie: If you could change anything about our family, what would it be?

Elsa: To like princesses.

Katie: Your siblings to like princesses?

Elsa: To make them like princesses.

Katie: Oh, to make them like princesses? It could be anyone...

Elsa: Because you like princesses, don't you?

Katie: But we have different princesses because when I was a little girl, the princesses were like Belle in "Beauty and the Beast" and Pocahontas and Princess Jasmine and you have princesses like Moana and Elsa, right? Who's your favorite princess?

Elsa: Elsa.

Katie: Elsa? Is that who you told me you could be, you would be Elsa. Why is that?

Elsa: Because she has ice powers.

Katie: Ice powers. What if you could be any animal, what would you be?

Elsa: A unicorn.

Katie: A unicorn? What would you be a unicorn?

Elsa: Because they have powers and they have a horn that can do anything. They even have wings.

Katie: If you can wake up tomorrow with a superpower, what would it be?

Elsa: That's a hard one.

Katie: Or who would you be? What superhero would you be?

Elsa: Diana.

Katie: Diana, Wonder Woman? What's cool about...?

Elsa: Mom, it's not Wonder Woman, it's Diana.

Katie: It's Diana. What's cool about her?

Elsa: Well, because she has a rope that can connect to anything.

Katie: If all your clothes had to be one color, what color would they all be?

Elsa: Rainbow.

Katie: Rainbow. That's a good way to get all the colors. What would be your favorite day? If you could make a perfect day, what would you do?

Elsa: If I had magic?

Katie: Sure.

Elsa: I would use my magic and I would make princesses come and make them be so nice to me.

Katie: What would you guys do?

Elsa: We would do so much things. They would even take me to the dock.

Katie: The dock? Oh. Tell people about the dock.

Elsa: Well, there is water, and there is...there is benches.

Katie: Somebody asked me to ask you what is your favorite thing to do with your mom?

Elsa: Cuddle.

Katie: Cuddle? Yeah, we like to cuddle and read books.

Elsa: When it's morning, when I wake up.

Katie: When you wake up you like to come cuddle, yeah? Somebody asked, is a closet fort better or a couch fort?

Elsa: Who is that?

Katie: Carmen. Someone named Carmen asked is a couch fort or a closet fort better?

Elsa: Couch fort.

Katie: Couch fort? You make those a lot. Somebody asked you what would you like to be when you're older?

Elsa: Mom, is that who I met when I was a baby?

Katie: I don't think so. These are people who I know on the internet, but I don't know...some of them, we don't know in real life yet. What are some things that you would like to be when you grow up?

Elsa: Elsa.

Katie: You wanna be Elsa when you grow up? What things do you like about homeschooling?

Elsa: Because you get playing stuff and take breaks.

Katie: You can take breaks? And then what do you do between the breaks?

Elsa: I eat snacks and do a lot of things. That's even on my lesson plan.

Katie: On your lesson plan. And sometimes you watch videos and learn things, and sometimes you do projects with your hands. Which way do you like to learn things more?

Elsa: I do projects with scissors.

Katie: How do you explain to other kids why it's important to eat healthy food instead of junk food?

Elsa: You mean soda?

Katie: Yeah. Like, how do you tell other kids why it's important to eat healthy food?

Elsa: You mean not...protein you mean?

Katie: Protein and vegetables.

Elsa: Because soda is bad for you.

Katie: What does it do to you?

Elsa: Makes you get a tummyache.

Katie: Yeah, what else?

Elsa: Well, also, it's really bad for you.

Katie: It's really bad for you? Does it make you feel tired sometimes? Too much sugar or hyper?

Elsa: Hyper.

Katie: Hyper? Yeah, should we tell a funny story about how one time you had never really had much sugar or food dyes and you went to that place locally and you got cotton candy ice cream with cotton candy on top, and you had...

Elsa: No, wait. I got rainbow ice cream and then cotton candy.

Katie: And all the food dyes and you had never had those and your brain...

Elsa: No, I had cotton candy before and rainbow ice cream.

Katie: Oh, you did? Okay. Do you remember what you told me that day?

Elsa: What?

Katie: You said, "My brain has never felt like this before."

Elsa: Nuh-uh. I said, "My brain was lighting up."

Katie: Oh, your brain was lighting up.

Elsa: And it was...and a candy bar.

Katie: And a candy bar? What kinds of healthy foods do you eat?

Elsa: And I have a friend named Marty and she brought me there.

Katie: Yeah, she brought you there. What kind of healthy food is your favorite to eat?

Elsa: Huh?

Katie: What kind of healthy food is your favorite to eat?

Elsa: Carrots.

Katie: Carrots? What else?

Elsa: That's about it.

Katie: What about shrimp?

Elsa: That's not healthy.

Katie: That is healthy.

Elsa: Soda.

Katie: Shrimp?

Elsa: Oh, shrimp.

Katie: What about...Do you like oysters yet? Yeah. What other vegetables are yummy?

Elsa: Broccoli.

Katie: Broccoli and salad. Yeah. What's your favorite game to play?

Elsa: Sequins.

Katie: Sequins? What's that?

Elsa: It's a game where there is cards and pieces, and there's also a board, and there's animals, and you can fold it, the board, that board. And so you pick a card and you put it in a pile. You put it in a pile that you make where you wanna use those cards and there's also a dragon. And you can take someone off in that. Oh, and also speaking of that game, you put the pieces on the animal of the card that you have. And then I made a planet. Mom, can I tell them my first word when I was a baby?

Katie: Do you remember your first word when you were a baby?

Elsa: Hi, hi, hi. And when I was a baby my first word was, "Hi, hi, hi, hi."

Katie: Yeah, do you remember how much you like people...?

Elsa: Mom, my second one I think was actually please, please. And so my second one was, "Please." I would point to stuff and say, "Please." And then what was my second word? I mean my third word?

Katie: I think Mom.

Elsa: Mommy. And then my next word was Mommy.

Katie: So let's talk a little bit about your oldest brother.

Elsa: But Mom...

Katie: What?

Elsa: What about my other word that I had?

Katie: You said so many words. I couldn't keep up with them all. And then you haven't stopped saying words ever since then, have you? Do you ever run out of words?

Elsa: No.

Katie: No. Not ever in the day?

Elsa: Nope.

Katie: Do you get to the afternoon and think, "Oh, okay, I said enough words, I'll stop talking now?"

Elsa: Mm-mm.

Katie: No? Do you ever run out of questions?

Elsa: No.

Katie: No? That's good though.

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Katie: So let's talk a little bit more about your biggest brother because he's been on this podcast too, hasn't he? Why was your older brother on this podcast?

Elsa: Oh. Because he has a cookbook.

Katie: Have you looked at his cookbook?

Elsa: A little bit with him. And he can make all kinds of things.

Katie: And what else does your...?

Elsa: And that's why he got on this podcast, and he did one when he was little.

Katie: Yeah. And now what does he do?

Elsa: Well, he cooks more.

Katie: He cooks a lot, doesn't he? What kinds of things does he cook?

Elsa: He sleeps in so loud. I mean, not so loud, just a lot.

Katie: What kind of things that he cooks do you like?

Elsa: Well, he likes to cook hamburgers and tortillas.

Katie: And sourdough pizza?

Elsa: Mm-hmm.

Katie: What does he keep in his room in that bin in his closet?

Elsa: And he has a lot of bins in his closet, and it has worms, beetles... And eggs that hatch the beetles and the worms.

Katie: Does he sometimes eat those worms?

Elsa: Mm-hmm.

Katie: Did you eat any of them?

Elsa: Only one.

Katie: Only one? What did it taste like?

Elsa: I don't remember.

Katie: Were they good?

Elsa: Mom, I can't remember.

Katie: It's okay.

Elsa: But I can't remember if it's good.

Katie: What else does your oldest brother do now?

Elsa: Well, I don't know...

Katie: What does he play a lot with your other brother?

Elsa: He plays ping pong.

Katie: Ping pong? And what else?

Elsa So he plays ping pong a lot with his friend, Wee-Wee, which I call him that. His real name is William, not Wee-Wee.

Katie: And they play chess?

Elsa: Mm-hmm.

Katie: You got to go to chess club for the first time, didn't you?

Elsa: For a little while.

Katie: What was that like?

Elsa: Not much. And then I went home and my mommy got me fruity cereal with marshmallows, tiny ones, all kinds of colors.

Katie: What is your favorite book and why? Or what book has influenced your life and why?

Elsa: The book Elsa because she has the frozen power and because lots of things that are interesting to me happen.

Katie: What about the snuggle puppy book? Do you remember that when you were little?

Elsa: Uh-uh.

Katie: That became your nickname?

Elsa: So I did not stop saying it, and I loved that book and I would just dance with it. And I would always say, "Please," with it. I would go get it off the bookshelf say, "Please," to you. I would point at it. I would hold it like this and say, "Please." And you said no, so I would do, "Please."

Katie: Okay, we'll wrap up there then. Can you tell everybody, "Thanks for listening," and hi?

Elsa: Thanks for listening. Hi. Bye.

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