



Episode 16: Natural Parenting Tips

Katie: Katie, welcome back. Thanks for being here.

Katie Kimball: Hey, Katie. Great to talk to you again. Thanks for having me.

Katie: Awesome. If anybody missed the last 3 episodes, I would encourage you to go check those out. We've talked to Katie for 3 episodes so far about baby steps eating real food, about real food shopping tips and tricks, especially on a budget, and my favorite with teaching kids to cook real food and all the benefits that has for the whole family. If you missed those, please go check them out at wellnessmama.com/podcast.

Katie is back for a final episode to talk about natural parenting tips. I've gotten to see Katie in action as a parent and also to spend time with her wonderful kids. They truly are great kids and they're so respectful and kind and helpful, so I can't wait for Katie to share some of her tips and wisdom about that as well. Welcome back, Katie.

Katie Kimball: Well, thank you. Your compliments are hard to hear because I feel kind of humble about my parenting. I don't feel like I'm a parenting expert at all, but I do feel like I have wonderful kids so something must be right. I'll give it my best shot talking about it.

Katie: Awesome. I think all of us are just doing the best we can, but I really do think you are doing an incredible job with your kids. Like I said, I've had the privilege of spending time with you guys in person and I love that even my children got to spend time with yours because your kids are really, they are so kind and helpful, and just I enjoy being around them. They're such good kids. I'm sure that probably doesn't seem like it to you every single day, but can you share some of the ways that you have fostered these different personality traits with your kids?

Katie Kimball: I will do my best. I've been thinking hard about this for you because it's not a topic I talk about quite as often as real food and natural stuff in my house. I definitely, like I said, my husband and I feel like we try very hard and maybe that's the key, is just that we're super intentional about like, we do not want to fall down on this job. This is a massive responsibility to raise these children up to be as incredible adults as they possibly can be and we're certainly not perfect. I know I snap too much and sometimes I expect too much out of him. I look at the end of the day and I go, oh, I messed up here and I messed up there. I have this unfortunate tendency of being very self-deprecating, but in the end we're trying really, really hard and I think our major key is consistency, as far as once we say something we know we're locked in and we have to be consistent.

My husband said, because I'm like, what am I going to say about this topic? I don't know what to do. He said, "You know what? I think you and I are both very good at delayed gratification, more so than most people, where we see the end goal and we know that even though it stinks right now and it's really hard to be in the trenches, and it's draining every last ounce of energy to say 'No, that's what we said, we're going to stick to it, it's what we said. No, you can't, I'm sorry. I hear your begging for the umpteenth time, I'm still not changing my mind.' The kids, they can literally suck every last ounce of your energy out, but we have to stand strong." So both my husband and I really work hard to be consistent.

Again, he said, "I think we're more consistent than most," and I'm like, not that it's a comparison game, it's not about winning against the other parents or anything, but when I do look at my kids in a group of other kids I'm like, huh, they are more calm than the other kids and I can see qualities that I'm really proud of in them. I think being consistent has been super important.

I can remember one in particular time where I hated being consistent. We were going to the library one summer morning and I think it was before number 4 was born so I had my girl and my boy and we were all excited to go off to the library, I think we were even meeting friends there, and something silly happened with toothpaste. Maybe he was squeezing it too hard or he was not listening, and I said, "If you don't do such and such, you are not going to the library," because I was sure that he would do the such and such that I'd asked. Well guess what? Of course, he pushed me and he did the opposite of what I'd asked and I'm like, "Huh." My jaw just dropped and my heart sank into my feet and I went, "Oh my gosh, I can't believe you just did that." I don't want to not go to the library, what did I do? Everyone really wanted to go to the library, I totally messed this up. I'm like, darn it, I'm the parent here. I said what I said, and if I back off I'm breaking the parent handbook rule of being consistent, but I really wish I hadn't said that. I totally messed up.

It was a huge scenario. We ended up, luckily, I didn't have to wreck my daughters day. She got to go with the friends to the library, and poor John had to stay back home with me and we did boring things like chores, and it was awful. It was like pulling teeth. He threw a huge fit and just wept and sobbed and threw himself down, but to me, that in my brain is one of the good examples of where I won the battle. I have battle scars, it was not fun, it was awful, and in the future I need to think harder about when I throw out a big consequence or a little thing, because they're not always going to do it right, but I stayed consistent and I didn't back down. It's so, so hard, but I think that's a huge page in the parenting handbook that everybody need to do. Once you say it, you do it, so you've got to think about what you say.

Katie: That brings up a good point about not ... I think it's tempting as a parent sometimes to really levee the huge, looming, big consequence, or to, in the heat of an angry moment with the kid, be like, "You are never watching TV again if you don't do this right now." Then if they actually don't do it you're like, oh no, that was ... There's no way to be consistent with that, so having realistic consequences that actually fit the action, I think that's such an important point, and not letting yourself get so emotional that you throw out something that you couldn't ever enforce.

Katie Kimball: Yep. If we do ... Sometimes I do that and I'm like, that wasn't smart. I will have conversations with my kids and admit my mistake and say, "Listen, Mommy said this and that wasn't the right thing to say and here's why ..." and backtrack. That's probably another tip that's important for parents, is to let kids see you work through your mistakes and acknowledge the fact that you've made a mistake and you're trying to do better. I know that my older kids, especially Paul, my oldest, he understands that parenting is a process. He's actually said to me before, "Wow, Mom, good parenting move."

Katie: That's hilarious.

Katie Kimball: The fact that he even realizes, that he has that consciousness in his mind that parenting is a thing, is an activity, I think that's more than most kids even know. They're parents are just their parents and they're there and they do stuff for them, so we must ... I think we're making it more intentional. We're very intentional about teaching our kids to think about others and think outside themselves. We're Catholic Christians and so we pray for people all the time and so we're always thinking about others and being thankful for our day. I think that has to make an impact on their personalities.

We do lots of acts of service. Not the, put them on the calendar, we're going to the soup kitchen kind of thing, because we don't have time and we have a baby. We just can't do service acts like that, but when I say acts of service I mean the little things like we all serve each other our drinks and we help each other out in these little tiny moments all throughout the day. "Leah, can you get John's pants for him from his room?" Or, can you help someone do this. We're just constantly encouraging our kids to help each other as siblings. I think that's part of having four, you just have to. If you just have one or two, you might have to work harder to make that happen, whereas you have four, it's like, "Oh, my gosh, please. Somebody help somebody else." It's a good thing though because they end up thinking about others and getting through that egotistical phase, that self-centered phase of childhood a little faster because it's a very consistent part of our family culture that we think about other people, we think about our impact on the world.

One thing that drives me nuts, do you ever go to a family gathering or party or potluck and you see a child with their plate loaded up with food that they'll never eat and the kid takes a couple bites and they're distracted by their cousins running around and they run off, and the whole plate of food gets thrown away. That totally kills me and I contrast that with my kids where we talk all the time about taking only what you can eat or trying a few bites, you can always go back for seconds, and not wasting. If my kid did load up their plate, I would probably eat it, because I can't stand wasting food. I think we do, again, we create a lot of family culture things and being conscious of the world around us and being conscious of people around us and how our actions affect other people. They're not really specific strategies, it's not like we have buzzwords for these things, it's just the way we talk. It's just the way we do things.

Katie: Yeah, and I love just the small acts of service for each other because I think that's one of those things as a parent that you can genuinely praise and feel good about every single time. In the last episode you talked about with kids cooking, when they develop an actual skill, they get to take ownership of that and they feel so good and it builds their self esteem and you can actually say things like, "Wow, you did a great job chopping that," or whatever it was, and they can feel good about that, then it's not just, "Ooh, yeah, pretty picture that you colored." I think that's another great example is when they're helping out their sibling. There's never a time when you can't genuinely say, "I really appreciate that you just did that for your sibling," or "Thank you for helping out your little sister," or whatever it was, because you as a parent, do actually really appreciate that, and because you're seeing your kid develop that virtue and it's really neat to see as a mom.

Katie Kimball: It is. We call it the "trickle down parenting" and "do it right the first time". If you're going to have multiple kids, spend a lot of time with that first one because I constantly catch my older kids literally teaching stuff to my little ones, and whether it's like kitchen skills, I know my daughter has taught the one below her, my younger son, some of her kitchen skills that she learned in the cooking class and she'll start teaching them to him. The other day she was teaching our 18 month old how to wash his hands. "Here's what we do, we sing the ABCs, you do it every time ..." I'm like, oh my gosh, she is helping to raise him. This is so wonderful. Trickle down parenting, man, if you get the top one right, it just kind of falls down and you don't have to do quite as much work on the rest of them.

Katie: It's true. Just because that, like you said, the family culture and the positive peer pressure just encourages it more easily. I think that, and watching my kids read their younger siblings are some of the most special moments as a mom. Just to watch that you're like, wow, it's amazing.

Katie Kimball: You're so right.

Katie: You actually are a teacher and you taught school before having children, is that right?

Katie Kimball: I did, yeah. A couple of years in 3rd grade.

Katie: Okay. Has this shaped the way you parent at all or do you have any advice from a teacher's perspective that would relate to parenting?

Katie Kimball: Yeah, I think because I spent a lot of time with children I learned the value of consistency before most parents probably do. You hear it, you read it in the parenting books or whatever, but when you have your first child there's so much to think about and there's so many different ways of discipline or whatever, but at the very least, I wonder if that gave me a leg up because I knew how vital it was because I'd seen what happens when kids don't believe you. If you're not consistent, that's the risk, is that you'll say something and they don't believe that you're going to follow through, therefore your words are null. I totally understood that.

I think also, being a teacher, I'm very academically minded and I have really high expectations for my kids right from birth. When we were talking about grocery shopping maybe 2 episodes ago, we talked about the value of talking to your kids all the time and so I've always talked to my kids and I don't really rely too much on kid language. I'm not afraid to use big words around them and we do so much reading and make it fun so that they want to read all the time and we do so much conversation about the world.

I don't know that being a teacher made me do certain activities, but I think the fact that I have a teacher's heart and a teacher's mind has helped me to teach my kids how to learn and how to be curious about the world, how to ask questions and look for answers and dissect things and the value of conversation and of talking about what you don't understand, just because that's what we do. That's naturally what I do as a teacher, is looking at the world and what can I learn about this today. I think that has created a lot of my kid's ability to learn I guess. They're pretty good learners in school because they know how to learn and how to be a good questioner and a good curious, creative person, not just following 1, 2, 3, 4 instructions but thinking about what can I do with this and how can I learn about the world.

Katie: Yeah, that's a good point. I can say from a home-schooling mom's perspective that I have so much respect for teachers who have a whole classroom full of kids because I on days, at least feel like I have the hang of teaching my own kids. I always say, I don't think moms ever have days where we're just like, "I did spectacular today. I totally have this motherhood thing down," ...

Katie Kimball: Right.

Katie: ... But I have days where I feel pretty good about it. Then I think about having a classroom of 20 kids the same age and I just have so much respect or teachers because that's a completely different animal. That's some good advice and I think, as a home-schooling mom, my kids are always home so I don't even think about it, but this is the time of year when my friends who have kids in school start going, "Oh my gosh, the kids are almost home for the summer," and usually by the end of summer they're going, "I don't know how you do this with your kids home all day long," but it made me think about, with summer vacation you do have kids home all day and most parents don't just want to park them in front of the TV. You have something called "A summer vacation survival kit." Can you talk about this and give us some ideas and tips of what you do with your kids during summer break?

Katie Kimball: Sure. What's kind of funny about the summer vacation survival kit, it's not really my personality. It's 20 things that you can do with your kids and it ranges from a couple of recipes to some crafts to some games and stuff like that, but it grew out of a kit that I had created when I was still a teacher for an auction that our school had and I made the kit with all the supplies you would need in it and put that in the auction. It was called "the rainy day/snow day/summer survival kit" or something. You're just ready if the kids are suddenly home and you weren't prepared.

I try to push myself a little bit in the summer out of my comfort zone because I'm not a crafty person. One thing we did, it's probably been 3 years ago now ... I'll give you the link to this post on my blog. We did what I call the lazy summer vacation organizational system, where we just put some ideas of cool activities or things that we thought we might like to do, and divided them into 3 categories, learning, chores, and fun activities, so learning, work, chores, and fun activities, and we just wrote them on little pieces of paper and put them in envelopes and then at the beginning of each week we pull a couple out and stick them to a piece of paper on the wall. Again, I'm totally not crafty.

It wasn't pretty, but it worked. That way, each morning after breakfast, before they could go off and play with their friends, we needed to do a chore and a learning work and hopefully had time for the fun activity too. Again, it was super loosey goosey, I didn't happen everyday. If we had a summer camp we were going to we totally didn't do it, but that was the beauty of just having these little pieces of paper. It wasn't a schedule, we could just move them around and pick one here and there, but it pushed us a little bit to do some of those fun things that you see on Pinterest that you feel like you'll never actually do but you feel like you would like to because it looks like fun.

We've done a couple of those things that are from the book, but really, for us in the summer, beyond making sure that we have some routine, and I like to connect it with breakfast because they're there, everyone's still there at breakfast and they haven't played yet, so that's my strategy. Before you can play and after you eat you do this. You do your chores, you make your bed. We had a ton, we had great consistency in the summer because they weren't always running off to school, and I loved it. I love having my kids home in the summer and I don't under- To me, when parents are like, "Oh no, I'm not looking forward to summer," it makes me kind of sad because I love having my kids home. It gives me a chance to be with them. Maybe I'm lucking out but I've never had my kids say, "I'm bored." Perhaps they know that I'll give them the chore. That could be it. They might know. They might know that if I hear the word "bored", I'll be like, "Oh I got something for you to do." I'm kind of old school that way.

We encourage a lot of creative play and just letting them make their own life in the summer, make their own pretend play activities. We're not very structured, other than making sure that something good and learning focused or chore focused happens right after breakfast, but other than that, they're off making forts and they're playing house and they're playing in the sandbox and they're just being kids and I love that about summer is that they don't have to be so structured and I know they're learning. You know they're learning by playing. So much research talks about how kids play to learn and to build their brains and all that stuff, so I'm always thrilled when they're just running around and knocking each other with sticks or whatever. As long as they're not sharp sticks, they're fine.

Katie: Yeah.

Katie Kimball: Seeing them get moving and get roller skating ... They need to learn things climbing trees and how to roller skate, not just reading and writing and math.

Katie: Yeah, that's such an important point too, I love it. I'm excited that we're almost to that point for our kids and just the act of building forts outside, and our kids have actually done that together, they love it and it's like a cherished memory for them and they're just really playing with sticks in the back yard but they love it. It's awesome.

Katie Kimball: Yeah. You see they end up learning so much. One thing I was thinking about when I knew we were going to talk about parenting is ... Anytime you talk about parenting there's that whole nature versus nurture dispute and because most of the time I spend my time writing about food and the environment, I thought, does that connect at all to our conversation here? I almost wonder if the real question of nature versus nurture is nature versus nurture versus environment. How they're born and what your genetics say is one part of your personality, what your parents teach you in the experiences they give you is the nurture part, but then there's the nurturing physical environment, what you put in and on your kid's bodies. There's no way to prove it I don't think, we're too complex, but I do wonder.

I wonder if part of the fact that my kids do seem to be calm and have some self control more than their cohort group often when I see them in a big group of kids, is it possible that what we do with food and what we do with the cleaners we use and the plastics we don't use. Is it possible that that's giving my kids that leg up? I'd love to think so. I have no idea, but if I'm going to throw my chips on one side or the other, I'm going to throw my chips on the side of feeding them whole food and treating their bodies and the environment well and hope that it does give them a little bit of a leg up on being able to have self control and discipline and kindness and generosity and all that stuff.

Katie: Absolutely. It certainly doesn't hurt anything for sure. Perhaps you're right. Maybe the question isn't nature versus nurture at all but more of a both/and.

Katie Kimball: Mm-hmm (affirmative).

Katie: Especially with seeing all the rising rates of problems that a lot of kids are having in today's world, we probably should be especially focused on all of those factors, not trying to debate which one's more important but just improving all of them as much as we possibly can as parents.

Katie Kimball: Exactly.

Katie: Awesome. Do you have any other thoughts or parting words that you want to leave parents with when it comes to parenting and natural parenting?

Katie Kimball: I think just loving your kids. I heard a great study done on dads and girls, and you will love this. It showed that dads who show love to their daughters through physical touch, like hugs and snuggles and whatever, throughout their whole lives, those girls are less likely to be sexually promiscuous and taken advantage of and more likely to have high self esteem. I'm like, that is fantastic because that's so easy.

Katie: Yeah.

Katie Kimball: So easy to do, just love your kids and touch them and make sure they know they're loved every day. It sounds like, especially dads, is important. I am so grateful to have the husband I have. He's an amazing dad and the kids know he loves them so I'm grateful.

Katie: That's a great tip. Yeah, something so small but it's kind of easy to forget in the day to day business of just giving your kids a hug or just touching their arm when you talk to them, making eye contact. Those little things probably do make a bigger difference than we realize on a day to day basis.

Katie Kimball: Mm-hmm (affirmative).

Katie: Awesome. Katie, it's been such a fun four episodes of the podcast with you. I appreciate your time so much. I know as a mom of 4 you're very busy and I'm so honored that you would take the time to come share all your wisdom with us.

Katie Kimball: Goodness, I'm honored that people are going to listen to this. All my tips in my whole life. I hope it makes a difference.

Katie: Oh it absolutely will. I'll include links to everything we've talked about under each episode. Like I said, if any of you listening have missed any of the episodes, please go back and listen to them. They were not only so fun to record but there's just so much valuable wisdom in them for parents. Katie, thanks again for being here.

Katie Kimball: You bet. Thank you so much, Katie. It's been my pleasure.