



Episode 579: My First Principles Parenting Approach and What Works for Me

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Katie: Hello, and welcome to "The Wellness Mama Podcast." I'm Katie from wellnessmama.com, and this episode is a solo episode that I recorded to answer some questions from Ben Greenfield for his podcast, but I wanted to edit and air here as well because while I've talked in passing about parenting on this podcast, and it's something I have written a little bit about and have actually written and not published a whole lot more about. I think this is one of the more important topics for us as moms, and one that I have put a tremendous amount of thought, energy, and research into since becoming a mom. And I feel like my parenting approach is a little bit unconventional in some ways, but so far it has worked really well with my six kids. And we have a largely chaos-free home, and I just feel like some of the counterintuitive approaches I've taken have really contributed to this.

So, I'm answering questions that Ben asked. You may hear me referencing Ben. Since he's not directly asking the questions, I'm mentioning that he is asking them. But these are my answers, and I wanted to share them here as well. You can also listen to the full version on Ben Greenfield's podcast if you're interested. But I wanted to just share these with you guys, and I would love as always to hear your feedback, and what you do similarly and differently if you feel like commenting in the show notes on wellnessmama.fm, or on social media. And as always, thank you so much for listening and for being a part of this community and for caring about health and wellness, and raising healthy kids.

And in this solo episode, I'm going to be answering some questions that were sent to me from Ben Greenfield. He is working on a parenting book. And I actually have been for the past several years, as well. And so these are some thoughts that I've gotten to hash out in my almost 16 years of being a parent, and also in the last few years of kind of committing these to paper and actually hashing through them, myself. And I think this is a very, very important topic, obviously. I think moms especially have a very unique ability to kind of form and shape the next generation. And that while parenting might be the most important thing we do, it's often not a thing we do entirely, intentionally. And there's all the jokes about parenting doesn't come with an instruction manual. But I would argue that it's something that we can, in some ways, write our own, or at least kind of formulate ideas around. And that doing that can be really, really helpful.

And in my family, this means that we've created a family culture that has been intentionally thought through, and that is shared and communicated with our kids that they were part of creating. And I feel like this family culture is actually one of the keys to a lot of these parenting things I'm going to talk about. I've very much taken an outside the box approach to a lot of aspects of parenting, including some that would surprise people considering my work in the health and wellness world. And I'll get into some of those today. But I wanted to share some of these ideas in a high-level sense, and with a few specific examples. And this is a topic I've also talked about on my own podcast, a decent amount, and we'll be sharing more there, and as well as in my new book, within the next year or so. So I'm happy to get to talk about some of these today and grateful for the opportunity.

I'm going to go through the questions in order as Ben sent them. And I will try to answer them one by one, and also make sure I state the question so it's clear and easy to understand.

Ben's first question was, how many children do you have? How old are they? What is their profession or passion? And why, in particular, are you proud of them? And I have six kids, ages from currently 6 to 15 years old, two boys and four girls. And they are all very much each their own person. But I think I would actually reframe this question a little bit, instead of why am I proud of them. One thing that I've always kept very top of mind, as a parent, is that it's not about me being proud of them. I want that to be a thing that comes internally from within. I want them to be proud of themselves, and also to be able to objectively and thoughtfully analyze their own character, and let their... How they analyze their character and whether or not they're proud of themselves, let that come hopefully from an informed place internally. Of course, I also want to say my kids are not grown yet. So I'm very much still in the testing phase of this. I don't have adult data to share. But I am really impressed with their character now. And it's been a beautiful, amazing thing to watch each of them develop individually.

I also think it's very important to say that they are each their own people. And this is going to be a theme that I talk about quite a bit today. But that I try to be very aware that it's not at all about me being proud of them, which I know Ben is going to touch on in some future questions, as well, but them learning to be proud of themselves. So even when they do something great, I don't even say like, "Oh, I'm so proud of you." I will try to point out specific things that I personally thought they did really good, usually their effort. I try not to praise based on any things, but on effort, or how hard they worked, or how they thought outside of the box, or were creative, or whatever the case may be. And then I try to say, "Do you feel really proud of yourself?" And then also give them the other side of the feedback as well. Like, what did you learn from it? What could you have done differently? And also making sure that they don't feel like they're dependent on approval from me.

One thing I say to my kids, I try to say every single day, and I'm pretty good about saying every day, as much as possible, is that, I love you unconditionally. There's nothing you can ever do that will take away from that. And there's nothing you ever have to do to earn that. And I think the not having to earn it part is a big key. Because

I think often, we don't get told that. I don't think I was told that as a kid. And even if it may have been true for my parents, there were times when I internalized that love seemed a little bit tied to approval, or toward accomplishment or achievement. So I tried to make sure my kids get both sides of that spectrum. And that they hear that they never have to earn it. And also that nothing they can ever do will take away from it. And then I try to nurture the core values that we have as a family and that they've talked about being important to them, and to give them specifics to build from. And that if I compliment something, that it's based on a specific that they have control over.

Ben also asked, were there any elements of your parenting approach that you would consider to be particularly unique? And I think in general, every parent and every parenting style is incredibly unique as is each child. And I would say I actually have six different parenting styles for each of my kids. But I think there are some commonalities that perhaps are different than, at least, the norm. And so I'm going to try to call out some of those today and explain them. I think one area that I do that's probably a little unique is what I call first principles parenting. And you might be familiar with the idea of first principles. A lot of people throughout history have talked about this. A lot of people credit this with their success. And people who have mentioned using it or who are famous for this process are people like Elon Musk in modern times. Throughout history, people like Richard Fineman, Albert Einstein, Leonardo da Vinci, even as far back as Copernicus and Aristotle. So this is certainly not something I've created, but it's something I try to apply in a lot of areas of life.

And the basic idea is that you are breaking something down to the absolute base concepts, the things that can be known without any other information, or without any assumptions, and then trying to build the best process or outcome from there. So think of it kind of as a Lego set, you're breaking it down into the individual bricks, and from there, anything can be built. And like I said, I try to apply this in a lot of areas of life. I think applying it to parenting is somewhat unique. This isn't something I've heard other people talking about. But for me, this helped me to really refine, because a lot of parenting can be reactionary if you don't think through these things in advance. So when my kids were really little, and even when I was pregnant with my first, I tried to think through, you know, what are the actual goals of parenting? What are the things I'm trying to accomplish? What are the core things that I can know about parenting without knowing anything else? And then to build my parenting style around that.

I'll give some examples throughout the episode, but this has led to me doing things a lot differently than maybe some parents would, in lots of different ways. And whenever I run into frustration with parenting, often, if I boil down to a first principles approach, I can find a kind of novel solution. And it also helps me, I found, when I refine things to that level, to be able to stay calm, which is another unique thing that I do, that I think a lot of parents actually strive for and do well. But I don't yell at my kids. I can't actually remember a time that I've ever yelled at my kids. And this, of course, has taken some restraint on my part. But it also is in realizing that anytime I had the instinct to yell, that that came from something within me, not actually something within them. And children are wonderful mirrors of ourselves. And so these have been great learning opportunities for me. But I try very, very hard to maintain a no yelling approach. That doesn't mean I'm always okay with what they do, or that I don't tell them when something they've done wasn't okay. But I try to do that in a conversational and constructive way, not by yelling.

One thing that helped me really kind of anchor this early on, was the idea that, of course, children often can have meltdowns, especially when they're younger. They can yell, they can get upset. And when we yell back, as parents, we're having the same emotional response, and often telling them it's not okay for them to have that emotional response. Whereas it's much more effective to model the calm behavior, even if that requires at times removing myself from the situation or putting space, giving us both time to cool down. But by

modeling the calm, we're giving them at least an example of that, and a tool to do it, versus just trying to shut down their own emotions. And I think kind of tied on to this, is the idea of not shutting down emotions. It can be a very normal human instinct when a child is crying or mad to say things like, "Oh, don't cry, it's okay." Or, "Don't be mad," or "Don't yell, that's not okay." And I think it's important to step back, kind of to the idea first principles, and separate the elements that are actually going on.

So the child might be yelling, or having an emotional reaction. And they might have done an action that's not okay, as a result. But we have to separate those and give them the tools to separate those because having emotions is valid. And that's important that they learn, and can understand, and regulate those emotions internally. And also, that doesn't mean we can act in a bad way against another person, just because we're having emotions. And times like that, as a parent, are wonderful opportunities to parse that out with our kids. And so usually, it might not be in the moment, it might be an hour later when they've calmed down. Those are great, amazing conversation times, when we can talk about, what are you feeling? What is the emotion called? And trying to get them beyond just mad, or sad, or the base emotions, and help them to really understand what are the intricacies of that emotion and where did it come from? And then validating that it's okay to feel that. As an adult, I feel mad sometimes too. And where do you feel that in your body when you feel mad? What does it make you feel like? But then also giving them the tools to separate that emotion from any action that may have come from it.

So, an instance being, if one child hits another child, helping them separate, okay, you feel anger, and anger is a valid emotion. Let's talk about it. Let's feel it. I'm not saying that it's not okay to have anger. And also, you hit your sister. And you used the phrase, she made me mad, and so I hit her. But those things are actually separate. She couldn't make you mad. She could have done an action as well, but you chose to get mad. And then you chose to make this action of hitting her, because you were feeling anger. So, what could be done differently?

Also giving them tools like stepping back and asking themselves questions like, is this thing that I currently feel, is this true? Could something else be true? I interviewed and really respect the work of Byron Katie. She has a great process called the work, which I've done loosely with my kids, since they were little, to help them kind of parse through that and separate. And then we have conversations around how we are most calm and in our power, when we focus on only the things that we can control.

So what are the things we can control? We can't control what happens to us always. We can't control what other people do. We certainly can't control what other people feel. We can feel our emotions, even if we can't always control the experience of them. We certainly can control our actions and our words. So what can we learn from this situation? What can we do differently? What will be a more effective way to handle it?

Another part of this that's very mainstream in my parenting approach is the idea of radical self-sufficiency. And this also stems from first principles, and the idea that my goal in raising my kids is actually to raise responsible adults and to make them have the tools and the foundation to be self-sufficient. And that doesn't happen magically when they turn 18. Because it's a process that begins from day one, and so how can I best nurture and create that. One of the ways I do this is with a simple rule for myself, which is that I don't do anything for them that they're capable of doing themselves. And this means that by age four or five, they're doing their laundry, and they're keeping their rooms clean, they're helping in the kitchen, often even cooking, because they're capable of doing those things.

And certainly, these can be great bonding experiences. And we often spend a lot of great time together while they're doing that, but I won't jump in and save them when something's hard if they're capable of doing it. I

will help teach them, I will help mentor them, I will answer questions. But I'm not going to take away the ownership and the responsibility they have once they're capable of doing something. And this has led to, even with six kids, a very calm and often very, almost no chaos household, because they have that ownership. And this also segues into the idea that I'm very big on, of natural consequences. So anytime I'm able to let consequences happen naturally, and not be the one who enforces them, and not be the one who reminds or nags about jobs, I tend to let that happen. And so whether that's things like them learning to do their laundry and forgetting, and not having clean clothes, or whether that be if they get in a fight with a sibling and they get punched. I'm not necessarily going to jump in and stop that right away. Because I think natural consequences are great teachers. And as adults, we certainly very much get to feel the results of natural consequences. And so this is something I love for them to be able to experience and learn at an early age, in a pretty low risk way. So that they aren't learning these lessons in a much harder higher stakes way when they're adults.

And as a little bit to touch on the health and wellness side of this as well. Being Wellness Mama online and being in this world for a really long time, a lot of people ask questions like, how do you make sure your kids eat healthy when they're not with you? And how do you force them to make good healthy choices? And all these things. And the answer sometimes can be surprising, I think, to people, but the answer is that I don't. We talk about, in our house a lot, the division of responsibility. And what I consider my responsibility as a parent is to, of course, feed and nourish them, and make sure that we always have nutrient dense food available. And that's what we do in our home. Their responsibility is to learn to listen to their bodies, to eat when they're hungry, to not have to eat when they're not hungry, and also to have the natural consequences of choosing not to eat. So I prepare food, they often help me with that. There's always nutrient dense food available. And if they, for instance, don't like something that's in a meal, I don't force them to eat it. And they can always choose, without me getting offended, not to eat. But my responsibility was to make the food, their responsibility is to get to choose to eat or not.

And if they choose not to eat, a natural consequence of that for that particular meal might be hunger. Which is fine, because hunger is a great teacher and I'm yet to hear of any child dying from missing one meal. And so I don't let them make something else or make something else for them, but I also don't force them to eat. As an extension of this, my responsibility is to provide nutrient dense food in my home. When they're not in my home, it's still their responsibility to figure out what they're going to eat, or if they're going to eat, and for the natural consequences of that. So if my kids are at someone else's house or at a birthday party, and they choose to eat something that we wouldn't normally have in our house, that's entirely their choice. And we have, since a very early age, educated them about food and the way that food works in your body, even in a pretty scientific way, so that they understand how nutrients interact, even on a cellular level, even with their genes. We've talked a lot about that. So they're aware of how foods can benefit or harm the body. And I trust them, back to that self-sufficiency, to make that decision when I'm not there.

I find that, over time, very often, they make the choice I would hope for them anyway. But it's their choice. And there are times when they absolutely don't, and they eat the food dye, you know, cupcake with gluten and vegetable oils. And that's fine, too. Sometimes that means they get a stomachache, which is a great natural consequence, that's pretty low risk because they don't have any life-threatening allergies, any of those things. And that's how they learn. I don't want to create the dynamic where something has been forbidden, or I was their external governor of how they felt about this thing, so such that when they leave my home, then now this is a forbidden fruit that they suddenly have access to. I want them to be able to self-regulate from a young age, and them experiencing that as natural consequences of a stomachache from eating junk food at a

birthday party is a pretty low risk learning experience. So all that to say, I'm not their external enforcer of that, I just cook nutrient dense foods at home. I educate them, and I trust them to make the decisions.

Along those lines, I also would guess that I have much fewer rules in my home than a lot of families do. And this also goes to the idea of not being their external source of rules or action. I want them to be able to make decisions and learn from their decisions early on. So we have a few non-negotiables, obviously, about them not fighting or hurting each other. And of course, I can't absolutely make sure that those things don't happen. You know, I've heard the adage that if you want an exercise in futility, try to make a two-year-old do something. But the fact remains that as soon as kids are mobile, we truly cannot physically force them to do anything they don't want to do, or stop them from doing something they do want to do other than, obviously, if it's a potential for bodily harm, or death. And even in those cases, it can be difficult to stop them. And so this, of course, also goes back to education. Making sure that they have the ability to make good choices, and then letting them make those choices, letting them make decisions.

As an employer, I find that in a lot of my younger employees, one of the bigger struggles they have is that they have a lot of trouble making decisions. And I think part of this is because in our culture for a while, kids haven't been allowed to make decisions and to fail. And I understand entirely the urge as a parent to want to protect them from those hard things and the results of their actions. But that's an important key to learning to make decisions. Even if it's things like climbing a tree that might be a little too high, and they could fall off and break their arm. That's part of how they learn risk analysis. Choosing to interact with their friend in a way that was mean, they might lose a friend, they learn from that. But giving them the ability to make decisions and then not protecting them from the consequences. And that, of course, does not mean that I'm not going to step in if any of my kids are in actual danger of long-term injury or death. Of course, those are instances when I would step in. Thankfully, those situations tend to be extremely rare. And more often, I just find that it's my protectiveness as a mom kicking in, and that they can learn more from being able to make that decision.

And so, I have very few rules and I very rarely tell my children no. But I also make sure to load the other side of that with giving them lots of tools to make good decisions from a young age, and teaching them to trust themselves to make good decisions, to trust their intuition, and to process failure if they don't make a good decision, because we've of course, all been there. And I think failure tolerance is another unique aspect to my parenting approach. I think it can be very tempting as a parent to want to protect our kids from failure and from pain. And I get that entirely. At the same time, I can look back at my own life and realize that some of the things that were hardest in my life, were some of the things that were the most impactful in becoming who I am today. And while I can't, as a parent, and wouldn't want to purposely make their lives difficult so that they can develop character in the same way, I don't want to protect them from the normal and natural difficulties of life that would be learning opportunities for them. Of course, I'm not going to, like I said, create things that make their lives harder. But as a family, this is why we really like traveling with the kids as well, because I think travel has its own set of unique difficulties and circumstances. And it's a beautiful learning opportunity for that as well.

But all with the core idea of nurturing failure tolerance, and both modeling and educating kids, and letting them have opportunities to fail in small ways. I know as an entrepreneur, this has been a part of success. Every entrepreneur has had failures of some sort throughout their time as an entrepreneur. And I want my kids to see from an early age that failure is not fatal. And that it often is a wonderful teacher. And so we have conversations around that. I try to be very transparent whenever I've gone through something difficult or have tried something and it didn't work out. And to let them see that I definitely don't get it all right all the time. But also, hopefully, let them see me learn from those failures, and just having conversations around it. I think,

often, kids are so much more capable than we give them credit for. And certainly, capable of understanding when we educate them at a young age. And so this is just an ongoing conversation in our house. And I touched a little bit on decision making, but ability to be competent, and making decisions is another really big core principle in my house. And this even is, like, little stuff, and going back at me not having rules.

So for instance, if one of my kids wants to climb on the roof, and we have a pretty steep roof. While my instinct as a mom might be to say no, because it's potentially dangerous and I don't want them to, I also realize that they need to learn how to make those decisions. And that when they're teenagers, I won't always be there to tell them no. So I'd much rather them get to learn these lessons now. And so I ask them if they think they can do it. And ask them, well, what do you think could go right? What do you think could go wrong? What would happen if something did go wrong? What would we do then? Let them think through that. And also trust them that if it's within their ability level, that they are actually making a good decision about that. One other unique thing we have, or that I have that is non-negotiable, and I think maybe different than a lot of families is a verbal contract with my kids that they can't have a phone or a car until they have a successful, meaning, profitable business for one year. And this was very intentional.

Back to that first principles approach of parenting. I think that entrepreneurship, even at a small scale, teaches a whole lot of the core values that I want to impart to my kids. In a very hands on way, it lets them try things and often fail at them. It lets them learn things like consistency, and attention to detail, and management of numbers. And especially when they have to do it for a year, it teaches them how to consistently show up even when it's hard. And so this was a decision I made early on, and one that we've talked about since they were little. As an example of this, my oldest has actually now had a couple of businesses that were profitable. One of them was, he wrote a cookbook called "Chef Jr." with several of his friends. And they spearheaded the whole process. They created the recipes, they worked with an agent, they pitched to publishers, they handled all of it, they negotiated, they got an advance, they paid a photographer, they mapped out the whole book, they wrote it, they went through the editing process. And that book has been selling and making money now for well over a year. So that was one of his first businesses. And it was a great learning experience.

He also, through that one, learned a lot about writing, and a lot about editing, and a lot about cooking. And now I have quite the immature chef in my house, and he cooks dinner as often as I do these days. It could be something as simple as pet sitting, or babysitting, or a lemonade stand, or doing yard work, or anything that creates value. And that's led to some wonderful conversations as well about entrepreneurship, and how in order to start a business, find a problem that is a pain point and solve that problem. And that when you provide value for someone, that's when money is used as an exchange. So that's been a great learning experience. And it's also helped us avoid them wanting a phone at age eight. And I feel like that has actually been one of the better things that we've done. Another thing I still am very much working on, but I try to be very, very aware of with my kids, and I touch on this with the separating emotions from actions is giving them foundational tools to process emotions. And speaking to their inner child while it's still their inner child.

I think so many of us as adults have had the experience of having to kind of reparent ourselves or work through things that happened as a child, because of how we interpreted them. And so I try to be extremely proactive with my kids, and having those conversations early, helping them understand and talk through their emotions, helping them validate their own emotions, and not shutting down the emotions, not telling them not to cry or saying it's okay when they don't feel like it's okay. Validating their experience, sharing some of the tools that I didn't learn till I was an adult, and how to process and release those emotions rather than fight those emotions. And also making sure we have the conversation around separating emotions from actions, and giving them the tools to do that going forward. I think this is something that it can be a really helpful

approach. It also tends to lead to a much calmer home. And even if kids still have kind of emotional spikes or outbursts, they tend to get shorter and shorter as they get older. And also, I see this even in my kids, the older ones, especially, emotionally regulate. And then the younger ones regulate after seeing them model that. And I think like anything in parenting, modeling is, of course, a really big key here. And I think when our kids see us do this, it also gives them the example to be able to do it as well.

Another thing I do that I think is unique and unusual, is that I highly encourage my kids to ask and answer questions and to always ask better questions. And I know very much firsthand the decision fatigue and the question fatigue that comes with being a mom. And I've seen averages ranging from the average toddler asking 200 to 600 questions a day. I think it probably varies by toddler. But I've had at different times, several toddlers at once. And I very much know how many questions they can ask. And I committed early on not to say, because I said so. Because asking questions is very much how children learn, especially in the beginning, and truly throughout life. And I didn't ever want to shut down their curiosity or their questions. In fact, curiosity is one of the core values of our family and also of our educational experience, which I'll talk a little bit about in a little while. But I actually encourage them to ask questions. And I try to always answer their questions, even if sometimes that means I say, "I am in the middle of a business meeting right now. And I can't answer that question right now. But let's circle back and I will come talk to you about that when I'm done."

Or we often look up answers to questions together. So if I can't answer a question, because I don't know, I want them to see me say, I don't know. But how can we find out together? And we'll research and we give them tools for being able to research. And often I will find them on a computer googling an answer to a question. And they have learned, I would, guess more by doing this than they have in school. As a little bit of a side note, in school, they actually have something called topics, which is where every day they just look up an answer to a question that they're curious about, and write one paragraph about it. And this has led to really fun, random knowledge that often comes up at dinnertime. But I try very, very hard, like I said, not to ever say, because I said so, because I want them to actually understand. That doesn't mean I'm going to answer their question immediately or maybe in the way that they want. But I do try to always answer their question. And if they ask questions a lot, I'll ask them often back, well, what do you think? What would be a one possible reason that could be the case? Or what would be a reason maybe that's not the case? And we try to think through it together.

But this also circles back to the idea of first principles, because at its core, all first principles is asking why over and over and over, until you can't ask any more whys. And children come out of the box inherently great at this. So one thing I was very, very conscious about was trying to not shut down that natural curiosity, and whenever possible, even at the extent of my own level of exhaustion someday, to try to nurture that. Because I think some of the people that change society the most in a beneficial way are the people who ask the best questions.

A little bit of a build on the self-sufficiency is the idea of ownership and lots of conversations around what is within our control, what is not within our control. And also letting them have ownership for things at a young age, and help out with stuff even if it takes a little bit longer. Kids naturally in their early learning phase and their curiosity want to help with things. And often we want to shut it down because it takes more work for us, or it's more patience to teach them early on. But I try very hard to really nurture that even if it takes longer and makes it more frustrating for me. And this has paid dividends with the older kids who are so, so self-sufficient and take ownership for almost all aspects of their life now.

Ben asked, what books, systems models, or resources did you rely heavily on or considered to be indispensable in your own parenting? And like I said, I didn't really rely on any outside resources, I tried to

really go to first principles, and then tailor kind of our family culture to our specific family, and then also tailor my parenting approach to each individual child. I did have conversations with parents that I admired, including, like, relatives in my own family, but also other people who I had seen them parent and admire parts of their parenting approach. But I really kind of just took pieces from those conversations for the most part. I realized early on that each child is so individual. So when you have figured out part of how to parent one child, you have figured out only how to parent that child. And one approach doesn't work across the board. And so I try to keep that top of mind and adapt to each child and to our family in general. I would say the books that have been most impactful actually in my parenting were not parenting books at all. They were books like, "It Didn't Start with You." And I interviewed the author of this book, Mark Wolynn, as well.

This talks about generational trauma. And he talks about how trauma can actually be physically passed on through DNA, but also about how the patterning of trauma can be passed on generationally. And it was really important for me, this is a pretty recent book, but to kind of unpack that on a personal level, so that I could present and show it better as a mom, and hopefully break the cycle of presenting some of these problems that have been somewhat generationally passed on through families. Like, we pass on our physical genes, we also pass on our patterns and habits. And this is true in nutrition, this is true in speech, this is true in how we interact with the world. And so when we become aware of that, it gives us tremendous ability to intentionally choose the ways in which we're doing that. I also read as part of my own journey, a book called, "The Body Keeps the Score," about how pain, and trauma, and negative experiences can actually physically store in the body. I recommend this book to a lot of people. But that one helped me just to keep top of mind how things can impact, especially a child so deeply, and to try to really be aware of that in my interactions with my kids, especially when I was frustrated, or exhausted, or angry, to not hopefully pass on some of those things that I had to deal with as an adult. And I think this one's really, really helpful.

An interesting takeaway kind of from that and my research around it, is that, kids are actually really great somatic processors. And two-year-olds have temper tantrums and then they're usually fine. And if you parallel this in the animal kingdom, humans are the only species walking around with PTSD. Animals are very good at somatic processing, they don't let trauma store in their body. And animals can have near death experiences all the time. And they're not walking around with PTSD. And part of that is because they're not judging the emotions and holding on to them. But also because they're letting that experience process. So this reframed for me, trying to, like, shut down things like childhood temper tantrums. And again, that separates the emotion from the action.

That doesn't mean that kids can hit someone else when they're having a temper tantrum. But I don't shut down them somatically processing something, because that's actually a great way for them to process emotions, especially when they're younger. So I actually encourage, in their bed, in a safe place, temper tantrums. And if you need to hit the pillow and yell, let's do that. If you want to talk about it, let's do that, too. And I think that there can be great lessons around that. One I would recommend, I've interviewed the founder of this one, is, "Positive Parenting Solutions." They have a lot of really good tactical, tangible things for specific parenting instances in different ages. So while I didn't have that, or rely on that when I was a new parent, or really until the last year or so, I do think there's a lot of really beneficial things you can pull from that system.

Ben asks, what traditions, habits, routines, or rituals were most important, memorable, or formative for your family? And I don't know if he's asking about my family growing up, or my family now, so I'll kind of touch on both. Growing up, we had family prayer time, which I didn't always like, admittedly. But I always appreciated the consistency of that. And in our family now, this is more... There's elements of prayer, but also just meditation, gratitude, time spent together, and shared experiences. And I think I'll touch on this more in a

future question. But I think this is a really important one however it's done in a family, to have as a touchstone.

A fun one that we do in our family now that is very kind of silly, but really, like, the kids remember, and we actually all look forward to is something called soft rock Saturday breakfast. So on Saturday mornings, we cook breakfast together, we put on some classic rock playlist, we also clean the house a little bit during that time. But those are just fun, very silly tradition that we do. Another tradition in our family is to value experiences over things. So we're not big on gifts and lots of material possessions, but we very much prioritize and budget for experiences. And I wanted this to be part of our culture. So birthdays center around experiences versus just cake and a party. We try to, like, kind of really just build that into our culture at a base level.

We also have the family motto that you were made to do hard things, and kind of teaching them not to back away from challenge, and also to find experiences that are challenging and fun. And admittedly, this one has come back on me a couple times. So I've been telling my kids that since they were little. And one time on a family road trip, we were at a blue hole that had this cliff, and you could jump off into freezing cold water and then you would swim to the side. And it was not a super high cliff, probably like 20, 25 feet at the most. And my kids were jumping off of it. And I very much did not want to do that and was kind of just going to hang out with the baby on the side. And my kids reminded me, "Mom, you were made to do hard things too." And I ended up jumping off and I survived. It was all fine. But it's fun because it's become so much the culture that they now give it back to me as well.

Ben asks, what rites of passage or significant moments of maturation to adolescence or adulthood did your children experience, if any? And admittedly, we're still in the early stages of this because my oldest is not 16 yet. But it is something I have thought about, and I want to create space for as they get older. I think part of this is giving them ownership and ability to make decisions early, so that they get to feel more adult and more mature, just naturally as a progression. And as they get older, and especially when they start hitting the teenage years, my goal is to not restrict them at all, if possible, because hopefully, they have a foundation to make good decisions. And even if they're going to make decisions that could have natural consequences. They're not dangerous or big, natural consequences, so I can let them do that. And even with teenagers, I often...even if there's something I think is slightly out of their ability level that they want to do, I'll put the burden of proof on them and say, "Well, convince me. Tell me how you're mature enough to handle this. What's your plan? How would it work?" And I listen. And sometimes they actually do convince me and they get to do those things.

But some kind of experience-based rites of passage that we have with them, is that on their 10th and 16th birthdays, one or the other of us as their parents will take them somewhere for their 10th birthday, somewhere in the United States, and for their 16th, somewhere else in the world. And those are great bonding experiences. And of course, like I said, travel is a great teacher. And those are kind of rites of passage, and those give us chances to have conversations with them. And hopefully, to kind of, like, cement, that coming of age. We've also done a lot of things like international travel with them already, camping trips, road trips, all kinds of things that have been great teachers, and that have some of that natural hardship built in. But I think one of the things I'm most aware of about coming of age in children is the modeling aspect of that. And also of talking about and setting boundaries, helping them be able to do that from the inside out. I've interacted with a lot of young adults who have trouble with boundaries. And so this is something I wanted to make sure that my kids had a solid foundation for early in life. And so as they get older, and especially in the teenage years, we have more and more conversations around those topics. So that hopefully, they have a lot of good resources in their toolkit to do that.

Ben asks, who did you look up to as parenting mentors? And I don't have a lot in this category. My own parents were admittedly, actually amazing parents, and I have learned a whole lot from them. As a side note, my parents are both hearing impaired. And my dad's legally deaf, and he can hear now pretty well with hearing aids, but hearing aids weren't as good when I was growing up. So I had a very, I think, unique childhood, in a relatively silent home. But I also really admired how my parents modeled aspects of a lot of what I'm talking about today, even and especially the answering questions. My mom always embraced our curiosity, and answered questions and gave us tools. I decided to get into sewing at one point, she made sure I had tools to actually learn how to sew, and that became a passion for a while. Same thing with art, same thing with math. They let us really kind of pursue our creative passions. So I've definitely looked up to my parents quite a bit in developing my own parenting approach. And even when there were things that I decided to do differently than my parents, I was able to pull a lot of wisdom from their approach. I also looked up to some extended family members and learned from the generation before my parents, before a lot of them passed away. And I would say beyond that, I also looked at the parents of people who had a positive influence on the world in some way, and tried to pull lessons from that.

And so just like in first principles thinking, I looked at, like, people who have done this well, people who have parented well, who seemed to have had good relationships with their kids in adulthood, whose kids went on to do something positive in the world. What traits do they share? What can I learn from them? And really building from there. And so I really love reading biographies of people like that, because you often get tidbits about their parents. And then now in modern times, you can often research and find out quite a bit about someone's parents. In my business experience, in interacting with lots of other entrepreneurs, that's a question I often ask them, if I'm really impressed with someone or the work that they're doing. I'll ask them lots of questions about their parents and their childhood, and what it was like growing up, and what unusual things do their parents do. And I would say I've learned a lot and been able to take some really valuable parenting advice and strategies from some of those conversations.

Ben asks, what did you teach your children about raising their own children? And again, my kids are not grown yet, so none of them have their own children yet. But I think that my approach to this very much is almost entirely based on modeling and realizing that the older my kids get, they listen to less of what I say and hopefully still pay attention to more of what I do. And I would guess that that bell curve might eventually shift again, and they might listen more when they're in adulthood at a certain age. I know that was the case for me. And all the jokes about how when you're 16, you can't believe how dumb your parents are. And by the time you're 25, you can't believe how much they've learned. And so I realize there's a progression there. And I've tried very hard not to feel at all negative emotions related to the fact that kids naturally separate when they're teenagers. But I think, for me, modeling is the most important part, especially modeling the part about every child being individual and every family being individual, and realizing that my kids will likely raise their kids in different ways than I raised them. But hopefully modeling some good approaches that they can start from and use as a foundation. And at the very least, showing them a way to parent that doesn't involve yelling, or stress, or chaos, and giving them some of those tangible tools.

I also try to teach them and make sure that they know, like I talked about in the beginning, that their approval doesn't need to come from me, being proud doesn't need to come from me, those are internal things, they are their own people. And that is something that I hope by modeling, they will carry into their own families one day, is respect for each of their children in their individuality and in their autonomy. I also think it's really important to model not projecting my expectations on them. And it's something I have seen, it seems that some parents do, is kind of live vicariously through their children or projecting their experiences onto them. And I try very hard to make sure my kids feel empowered and safe in becoming their own people. And also

supported in doing that. And I hope that by having that experience, that's something that they will then in turn do for their children.

I also talk about parenting, and I talk about being a mom, and about the hard part and the great parts. And I make sure that they understand I'm not just a being who exists only for them, and for their benefit, and to be their mom. I also exist in other arenas within the world. But I want them to understand and have a clearer picture that parenting isn't always easy. And often it does take a lot of work. And also, it's incredibly amazing and rewarding, and I'm so grateful to get to be their mom. But I want to really pass on to them the idea that while parenting has parts of it that require work, it doesn't have to be hard. And it should be fun. Because I think that mindset is one that will benefit them as parents one day. And Ben had some follow up questions for layers that I'll go into a little bit more detail.

Ben asks, did you or do you have any philosophies or strategies for educating your children outside of traditional school such as homeschooling, unschooling, self-directed education, or other alternative creative outside-the-box forms of education? This is another area where I very much went back to first principles, and I developed something that I now call Unstitute, which is our own method of schooling. It has elements of unschooling, but there is structured school as well. And this, like I said, came from first principles as well. So when my oldest was approaching school age, I started asking the question, you know, what would best prepare him for adulthood? And what even am I preparing him for in today's world? And using first principles, worked backwards, and I realized that none of the existing models, including homeschooling, actually seem to very accurately prepare children for an uncertain future. My job didn't exist when I was five, so I couldn't have directly prepared for it. But what are the things that universally make children have a good foundation, make them able to succeed and work hard in whatever area and whatever path they may choose?

And this went back to some of those core things like, creativity, curiosity, critical thinking, asking good questions. So I built our system from the ground up around those core ideas. And it looks much different than traditional schooling, which is often talked about as having not innovated much in the last 100 years, but not much has been done to change that. And I think as parents, we have the ability to change that and not wait on it to change. So it's a very hands on approach to homeschooling that minimizes book work. I definitely want them to learn math and all the traditional subjects in school, but I want to do that effectively, and efficiently, not just the way it's always been done. So our goal is to minimize the amount of time spent doing book work. We focus on mastery, not proficiency. And not just, they don't have to just keep doing every page in a book once they understand the concept. The goal is for them to actually learn and understand it. And if they can demonstrate that, they can now move to the next thing. We also want to build in lots of time for them to pursue their own passions and to have time to maintain that curiosity and to learn.

And so our bookwork portion of school usually only takes about two hours a day. And much of that is self-directed as they get older. And then the rest of the time during the day, they have time to keep up with their responsibilities around their house, which goes to that ownership piece, but also to pursue the things they're interested in, to do sports that they like or creative pursuits. Currently in our house, that looks like pole-vaulting several days a week, chess club, gymnastics, tennis. Art happens relatively often. They have youth groups that they're involved in. They have a lot that they do and it often changes, but making sure they have time to kind of pursue those passions as well.

Ben asks, what was your proudest moment as a parent and why? And as I touched on in the very beginning, it's not about me being proud, it's about that coming internally from them. But that said, I, as their mom, do really, really, really enjoy getting to watch them, and guide them, and seeing all the things that they do. And so there certainly are moments where I feel proud, I just don't want to impart to them that that's something

that they should be seeking from me as approval. A recent one that I can think of off the top of my head, is my youngest, who is six, was talking to her sister who's a little older, and her sister was upset and was in one of those moments of processing her own emotions and feeling angry, and was yelling and saying that, you know, she was mad at mom and all these things. And that mom doesn't love her, and all the things that children of that age can often say. And my six-year-old starts, in a sense, almost like asking the questions to my other daughter, that I would have asked without me being there. So I overhear from outside their bedroom, I hear the little one going, "Well, is that true? What else could be true? What would it look like if that weren't true?"

And she was asking some of these questions that I had asked all of them and supporting her sister, and actually helped her work through it, without any prompting from me. And she's my fun one right now, her age is so cute. And she's losing the front teeth. And it's a really fun age. And I've got a book where I write down her little isms that she says. And one recently, I asked her to do something and she goes, "Mom, are you speaking literally or figuratively?" And so just, I love that age, it's so much fun. Also I mentioned my oldest and his cookbook, that's been really fun to watch how much they learned through that process, and how much he worked really, really hard, and how much fun it was, and that feeling of accomplishment he got to have that was truly his because he did it, he and his friends did it. That wasn't me. And because I didn't step in and help out, they got to really own that accomplishment. And so it was really, really cool to get to watch him experience that.

Also, most of my kids, they're all into athletics in different ways. And a lot of them are into pole-vaulting. And I've gotten to watch them work really, really hard at this. And it's very fun to watch, because it's a fun sport. But especially right now, my oldest daughter who is 13, getting to watch her apply herself and really work hard for a goal, and then getting to see it pay off has been really, really amazing. And we're leaving actually tomorrow to go to the state meet for pole-vaulting, where she very likely will potentially jump a state record. And that part's fun to see not because she's doing so well at it, but because she's getting to really see firsthand how her effort and her consistency is really paying off in her performance. And because it's been her effort, and I'm not pushing it or living vicariously through her, she gets to feel that ownership, and that excitement, and the nervousness, and the adrenaline, and all the things that come with that, and apply the ideas of you were made to do hard things.

And also, she's had many... Pole-vaulting is a great lesson in failure, because very often you don't make it over the bar, and you have to readjust. And so I've loved watching them all get to pursue that and get to learn so many of these lessons in a hands-on way. And they have an amazing coach where we live, who is very aligned in a lot of these things. And he's been an excellent, amazing voice for them that is outside their parents. And so I'm very grateful for them to have that as an outlet. And that actually touches on something else that I think can be really helpful with teenagers, which is, if it's possible to cultivate our friendship, or relationship, or mentorship with other adults outside of just parents who they really trust, who they can go to when they have questions or problems, and whose advice they might listen to a little more, especially in the teenage years when they're less inclined to listen to their parents. I think her having that or all of them having that as an outlet has been, like, invaluable.

And then I would say the real moments that give me the most just gratitude and I guess the feeling of pride as a mom is seeing their culture and when they help each other, or when they anticipate each other's needs, or when the older ones sit down and help little ones with math without being asked, or help the little ones build something. Recently, my second oldest son, he was helping the little one revamp a Power Wheels car so she could drive it around the neighborhood. And it was one that we found basically for free on Facebook

Marketplace, and getting this even work together on that. Those are really the moments that I get to just sit back and smile and be deeply in gratitude.

Ben asks, what do you wish you had known before you first became a parent? And lots of things and also, I am glad I learned them as I did and I didn't know them all. But perhaps this is why I'm writing a book and why Ben's writing a book. And I think we can learn from parents who have been down roads, and I haven't been all the way down the road, so I'm still learning from parents as well. But I would say the things that come to mind for this are, that in many ways, our children are mirrors. And often, having children can bring back inner child stuff from your own childhood. But certainly, when you're feeling any emotion or frustration or negativity related to children, it's almost always a mirror of something inside yourself. Which is beautiful because as my friend Aaron says, never waste a trigger. Those are great opportunities for learning. But I wish someone had told me ahead of time to anticipate that and just the degree to which that's possible. And this is why I say often, my children are my greatest teachers, and not just in the kind of metaphorical way, they truly have actually been my best teachers about myself.

As a funny aside, I will say, I also wish someone had told me just how loud children are. Because I went into parenting not wanting to squash their creativity, or their natural emotions or them being kids and I'm the mom who has the climbing hang board in the kitchen, and the gymnastics rings in the bedroom, and the bouncy track down the hallway. And I will paint the house when they're all grown, because there's going to be footprints from handstands all over the house. And I'm fine with that. But it took some adjusting for me to just how loud children were, especially growing up in a completely silent household myself, with two hearing impaired parents and one brother who's an introvert as well. We often either signed, we watched TV with the closed captioning on, there wasn't music on. It was very, very, very quiet. And that's what I got used to. And then I had six kids in nine years, and my house is never quiet. Occasionally, when the kids are all sleeping and the dogs and the cats are quiet, it's quiet. But it's very rare that it's quiet in my house. And it took me several years, when I started having kids, and when they hit the toddler years, to get used to the level of volume that come with kids. And like I said, that's a wonderful natural part of childhood. And I don't want to, in any way, squash that. I just had to adjust to it. And I don't think I anticipated just how loud kids can be.

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Ben asks, did you ever have impostor syndrome as a parent? And if so, how did you cope with that? And I would say yes, but with some caveats. And I think I found a little bit, the antidote to this as well, because on the one hand, we're all learning as we go. You become a good parent by being a parent. You don't get to start day one like that. And it's very much a learning journey for both us as parents and for our children. And I think that impostor syndrome tends to creep in for me, at least, when I'm... It's always linked to something outcome based. So when I find myself attaching to an outcome, or an accomplishment, or wanting them to do something in particular, that's more of when impostor syndrome kicks in. Or when they're learning these lessons in a very normal, natural childhood way, but in a public setting, and I feel the judgment of other parents.

And that's also a great opportunity for reflection and learning on my behalf. And it recenters me in making sure that they get to learn natural lessons, and make decisions, and experience natural consequences. But it seems like the antidote to this partially is detaching from the outcome and recentering on loving them unconditionally. And also being very real and transparent about the fact that as parents, we're all learning as we go. And making sure that my kids know that I don't, in any way, have everything completely figured out. And I also am learning all these lessons. And I'm also learning from failure. And having candid conversations about that. I think vulnerability is often an antidote to impostor syndrome. I also think some element of impostor syndrome is natural and something that we haven't fully mastered. And I don't think we can ever fully master parenting because it's a lifetime journey.

Ben asks, how did you tackle mentorship and passing on wisdom with not living vicariously through your children? And I think this is another really, really good question. Like I said, I understand the instinct to live vicariously through your children, but I think it's important to remember from day one, that they are their own people, and not to pass my expectations on to them, just to pass my love on to them. And I just try to keep in mind that they aren't me, and they aren't mine. I'm here and I'm entrusted with guiding them for a period of time, but they aren't mine, and that they're their own people. And that I can love them best by helping nurture them in being their own people and helping them become people who are kind and loving. And that as they are not me, and they're not mine, that they are going to make choices, and those choices are not actually a reflection of me. But I do have very much responsibility to help give them the foundation and the tools to make good choices, but to separate my ego from that outcome.

I think another thing that's helpful here is focusing on efforts not results, and focusing on efforts and not innate traits. So rather than telling kids that they're smart, which is, this is an often-used example, to praise the effort they put in or a very specific aspect of something they did, because there have been studies that looked at when kids are told they're smart, it can actually make them less likely to want to apply themselves because it feels like a higher stakes game. And if they feel like love and appreciation are attached to their accomplishment, which was the case for me, that is an even harder thing to unravel. So, praising their effort, praising their creativity, praising when they work hard on something, when they learn a lesson or a specific aspect of something they've done, and not the result. In sports, I think this is an area where you can often see parents living vicariously through kids. I think it's detaching from the outcome and helping them detach from

the outcome. And reminding them that it's about having fun, it's about learning. It's about all the lessons that come with it, and not just the outcome or the winning. And asking the questions related to that, and not they come home from a sporting event to do in, but ask them what it was like. Did you have fun? Who was there? What's something cool that happened? Not tying it to the results.

Ben asks, did you ever have any big parenting decisions that kept you awake at night worrying, or that you were afraid you would mess up on as a parent? And yes and no. I've long been a believer that worry is just a waste of imagination. And so rather than worry about something in the future, I try to go back to that idea of first principles and/or go back to the things that are what are within my control, which are my own actions, and emotions, and responses. And I feel like if I center on those things, very often I can find something tangible that I can do, that can help in whatever the situation is, or I get the chance to let it go. But I think it's also natural because we love our children so much to want to make sure we do it well. And I think that it's also a very human normal thing to worry sometimes that we're not. I think those are great learning opportunities. And that often that comes from an insecurity in me, that's mine to work out, and not actually from something related to parenting. Or it's a teacher that there's something I can improve on, as a parent myself.

Ben asks, what do you regret, if anything, from your experience as a parent? And like I said, I think regret is also a waste of imagination, because it can't be changed. And that phrase, it couldn't have happened any other way because it didn't, is very true. That said, if I could have, I think I would have figured out how to process my own trauma earlier, so that I could have shown up as a better parent earlier. But I also think that there are probably lessons and benefits to my kids seeing me go on that journey and how hard the process was. And that hopefully, by being open about that, they were able to learn some of the lessons that I couldn't at an early age or didn't. And I think that's one goal I have as a parent, is to make sure that my kids have a solid foundation, and hopefully, more tools for that at an earlier age than I did. And I don't think I would have gotten to do that had I not had to go on that journey myself.

Same thing with, I wish I had fixed my own health problems first, even though I was very much on that journey and striving to. They got to see me do that at ages that they're going to remember, and they got to learn the lessons from my failures there. And so, I think it's a waste of imagination, to regret or to wish things that happened differently. And I think that staying in gratitude for the way things happened and learning from that is a great thing to model to our kids. And that hopefully, they'll see it the same way some day.

Ben also asked, what if anything from your parenting experience would you go back and change or improve? And this also kind of touches on the idea of, it couldn't have happened any other way because it didn't. But I think I've learned more now... I'm very grateful I had six kids, because I think I got to speed through some of the lessons by sheer necessity. Things like I couldn't do everything for them because it wasn't humanly possible at certain times. And so it helped me let go and guide them in being more self-sufficient early on. I am very grateful I had six, which is exactly right for our family. And I think some of those lessons would have even taken longer for me personally to learn if I had only had one or two. I think if it were possible, if there were a time machine, I would go back and infuse myself at 20, with my first kid, with the lessons I've now learned in the past 15 years of raising kids. But I also know that that process of learning was really important for me and for them. And so I don't know that I actually would change anything.

Ben asked, related to that, if you had multiple children, what did you think was right at the time with one child, that you then went back and changed with the next child or future children? And like I said in the beginning, I view the parenting of each child as its own individual experience. And so I feel like while you can learn kind of generalities from parenting in general and from your experience with each child, you can't directly apply a system of one to the other. And I think I've grown up and learned with each of my kids as

individuals. And so I don't know that there's much I could have applied for one to the other. I think I probably was more strict with my first than I am now with my younger ones, because I had the bandwidth to be. And because he was only one, and then one or two. And I actually probably would have been less so and done less for him. But as a new mom, I was enjoying the nurturing side very much. And I think that's wonderful, there's nothing wrong with that. But I think I would have probably let him be a little more self-sufficient a little earlier. Though, it's definitely evened out and he's extremely self-sufficient at 15.

Ben asked, did you sense or fear that based on the outside the box approaches you use as a parent, that your children would grow up too different or weird? And how did you deal with that? And I actually love that. I'm the odd parent who hopes my children grow up a little different and weird, and I hope I'm cultivating a tolerance for that in them, and that they don't need approval from the normal world. I know that they'll grow up to be their own people. And I'm perfectly fine with them being different or weird, especially in this type of world. In fact, we kind of encourage weirdness in our family culture. I wanted them to have resilience from needing to fit in in this way. I also know that there are going to be phases, especially in the teenage years, where it is important for them to have a social group and to feel like they fit in with their peers. And I'm totally fine with that. But I didn't want them to cultivate the need for approval from the outside. And that goes back to me modeling that, and their approval not coming from me. But they thankfully have kind of their own culture and tribe because there are so many of them.

And we're very lucky to live in an area...with our neighborhood, there's over 30 kids in a little cul de sac neighborhood. And they have an amazing group of friends who don't probably any of them fit the norm. They all have their own creative pursuits and passions. But since they were born, our family, we've done things different than the norm in lots of ways. So I feel like their tolerance to this is pretty high. And that it may not even be a thing that they're aware of that they should be caring what other people think. But if they are, I feel like they will have hopefully that grounded ability to be true to themselves, even if it's different than what the world wants. And we read lots of biographies and books about people who have done amazing things in the world. And they all had elements that were different or weird. And so that's something we have conversations around and actually admire and respect, and kind of the idea of be weird, but be kind. And so hopefully that's something that they have grown with from a young age.

Ben asks, did you ever differ with your spouse on parenting principles, techniques, or approaches? And if so, how did you manage that? And this is, I think, a really important question. The short answer is, yes, we absolutely differ in a lot of things. And I am the more hands on parent. So I've probably done more of the hands-on parenting, especially when they were a little, but now as well. But I have tried from the very beginning to also respect the fact that their dad is his own person, and he doesn't have to parent just like I do, and I don't have to parent like he does. And if we can agree on core values and the goals for our kids, our methods of getting there might be different. But as long as we have consistency in the focus and in the unconditional love for our kids, they can probably actually benefit from experiencing multiple parenting approaches. And as a little bit of a side note, I made sure to think of him this way, as well, even in the health side, which not entirely related to parenting. But since I'm in the health world, I often got questions along the years of, how do you get your husband to do this too? How do you get your husband to eat like this? How do you make sure he does this too?

And my answer, very much like with my children was, I don't. He's an adult. I'm not his mom. I'm not responsible for telling him what to eat or how to eat. I cook the food and he can eat it or not eat it. And I have zero judgment, if that's not how he wants to eat at home. And to his credit, he actually has researched a lot of these things as well. And we've come to similar conclusions, but I respect the things where we have differed.

This is also not something I've talked publicly about yet. But even now, my kids' dad and I are separated, but we're of course, still co-parents. And I realize that he's going to parent differently than me. And that's okay. And like I said, we're aligned on core values. We're committed to not ever speaking negatively about each other, especially around the kids ever. And yet, we both have our own way of doing things. And that's perfectly fine. I think that's actually another important lesson for kids to see, is that not everybody's going to do things the same way. And you might disagree with someone on something they believe or something that they do, and that's okay. You can still have respectful dialogue and conversation, and work toward a common goal.

All right, from Ben. This says, morning, this question is a long one but as you will see, interesting and important. As a parent, have you ever experienced angst, frustration, or impatience when you discovered a new and important book, teaching resource method, etc., and wanted to share it with your children so they could learn that same wisdom or skill early in life for their future. But at the same time, you knew or sensed it could threaten to overload them with too much, especially at their age? For example, did you ever wrestle with the notion that introducing your child to cryptocurrency, investing, breathwork, or three great philosophy books you've read last month, the new recipe you've discovered, etc., could distract your child from enjoying being a kid than say, building a tree fort in the backyard, throwing snowballs or reading a comic book?

And I love this question. But the short answer is, no, not at all. Because one lesson I've learned as a mom is that kids are infinitely capable of learning and understanding, and that we often don't give them enough credit for this, especially when we don't nurture their curiosity. And so I also am cognizant of not giving advice when I haven't been asked. And this applies to my kids as well, and certainly in other aspects of life.

So we've built a culture around being able to talk about things we're excited or curious about, explaining them, sharing things we found impactful, just like I encourage them to do. When they find something exciting or new, I want them to tell me about it. And I genuinely listen and might also go read that same resource. But I detach from the outcome of them adopting it or not. So I might want to share it with them. And just like with giving a gift, my responsibility is then complete. If I think it's important, and I want to share it, or if they want to share something with me, we share it and that is where the responsibility ends with me. So I might find something out really cool and new about...for my athletes, for instance, a new supplement or something that could help them. And I can explain it to them, and tell them about it, and they can research it if they want. And that's where I detach from it.

And if they want to try that thing, or take that supplement, or learn whatever the new thing is, I 100% support them in doing that. But I don't attach my personal emotions to whether or not they choose to do that or not, because they are their own people. Same thing with their dad, same thing with anyone in life. In fact, this is the thing I've noticed causes frustration in me, is when people give unsolicited advice, or they give advice and then get mad when people don't follow their advice, especially if the advice wasn't asked for. Or similarly, if someone gives a gift. If I give a gift, the gift is then given. It's now entirely not my responsibility or business what happens to the gift. But I've seen examples where people get mad when someone gives a gift away that they gave them, or doesn't follow advice that they were given. And I think a lot of stress can be avoided by just keeping that culture of curiosity and sharing. And that's wonderful, and also detaching from the outcome and respecting their ability to do or not do those things. And realizing that kids are such amazing, infinitely capable learners. And that very often if we show up with genuine excitement about something, and share it, they're going to listen. And also, if they don't, that's okay, too.

Ben also asked as a follow up, if so, how do you feel, or how do you deal with the balance of passing valuable knowledge and wisdom on to your child while at the same time not creating a scenario in which that child is

worried too much about or distracted by a constant stream of information and adulting? How did you decide when to let them just be a kid versus nudging them towards responsible adulthood, and the attainment of valuable wisdom? And I think there's a little bit of a false dichotomy here. Because yes, while play is the work of children, and I absolutely want to create time for them to be bored, to play outside, to get to have creative pursuits that are not structured. I don't think that being exposed to information and new things necessarily is synonymous with adulting. I would actually argue that kids are better at it than adults are. And that part of being a kid is that amazing, natural curiosity. And part of nudging them toward responsible adulthood is letting them have access to that and conversation around it, but also not having an attachment to the outcome of it. So just like my kids have responsibilities around the home, that I don't worry are taking away from their childhood, because we all live in the home and we're working toward a common goal of a family culture as a family. I also think they are living in an increasingly technological world, of which there is so much information available. And so them having exposure to information and developing the tolerance and ability to curate that information themselves is going to be a very important life skill.

So, I think this starts and ends with creating a culture around love of learning and love of challenge, and being inherently curious yourself. So as a parent, when I'm curious, they tend to be more curious. When I sit down and do art, they're more likely to want to sit down and do art. If I model the behavior, they're more likely to follow it without me having to actually explain or enforce it at all. So I think creating that culture is really, really important. Also modeling putting my phone down and having breaks from the constant flow of information, and productivity, and production in today's world. But I don't think it's bad for them to have access to information. And I don't think it takes away from them being a kid. And if anything, I think it makes them potentially more effective as a kid because kids are... The goal of raising children is to raise responsible kind adults. And I think it actually helps them get there more effectively. So I feel like that's a little bit of a dichotomy. And I don't at all worry about my kids being exposed to too much too early. And I try to answer their questions about any topic very fully, and whenever they're ready, and in as much detail as they want. Because I think, like I said, they have an infinite ability to learn. They're naturally curious. And I love to nurture that.

Ben asked, how did you find enough time to balance being a present and engaged parent with time for your own self-care, career, and interests that, frankly, may not have included your children? And I love this question, because I think, especially for moms, that it can be very easy to get lost in motherhood and to lose your identity. And that isn't necessarily something we want to model for our kids. And it's not what we would want for them. We wouldn't want them to lose themselves in their own passions, and curiosities, and things, when they have children. We want them to maintain those things and be able to model and pass them on to their children. One thing that was helpful for me here in understanding that actually came from "Positive Parenting Solutions" that I mentioned earlier, is that, psychologically, each child only needs about 10 to 20 minutes of focused one on one time, each day, to feel connected and grounded, and that they have a good relationship with their parents. And if you front load this, this actually helps a whole lot with behavioral issues. Because many times, those stem from that lack of connection. But I love this because it gave me a tangible target. And it was, even with six kids, very easy to spend 10 to 20 minutes per day, with that child, doing what they love, so that they feel connected. And those are great bonding times. And I love those experiences with my kids.

I also think it's very, very important to model being my own person outside of being a mom, and show them that it's okay to have their own interests and take time for themselves. Because it is no secret that burnout is on the rise for parents. And this is a problem many, many parents struggle with, burnout and overwhelm. And we aren't effective parents when we're in that state. And we have to be aware and proactive in avoiding that

state. And I think, for me, it felt very important to model for them, that while I love them unconditionally and I'm always there for them whenever they need me, and that I will prioritize them every day and make sure we get one on one time together. I also will do that for myself. And that I also will keep commitments to myself. So if I say I'm going to work out every day, or I have a training regimen I'm following right now as I get ready for a goal, I'm going to show up for myself. And it's important that I model that. And that doesn't mean if I have a sick kid, I'm not going to skip going to the gym, of course I would. But I want them to see me actually doing that, not just say that I'm going to do that. Because that's, I hope, the way that they're going to internalize and know how to do that as adults as well.

And as a follow up to that, Ben asks, how did you engage in one on one time, or create space for dedicated present time with your child, especially if you had more than one? And as I mentioned, I make this a point to do every day for 10 to 20 minutes. In that time, I'm doing what they love. So that's not me asking them to do something I need them to do. That's not me having them come with me on an errand. That is time doing what they want to do, talking about their passions. I've had one son teach me Rubik's cube during that time, because that's what he wanted, and it was really fun. And I now know Rubik's cube. Also, I find that active listening whenever it's available, does a whole lot here to make sure that you have present time with them. So whether it's car rides and family meals, anytime that, with one or more than one child, have the ability to be very, very present, not on your phone, and actively listen, those are really, really great bonding times. And then, for me personally, I love the bedtime routine, and time at night with each of them as a way to make sure that we have one on one time and that I'm present. And often, especially with teenagers, when the younger ones go to bed, I find that those are the times they're more likely to open up and talk.

Ben asked several questions about if your kids have grown up and moved out of the house, which of course mine have not yet. But I wanted to just tackle this idea a little bit in how I anticipate handling that. And of course, I might handle it entirely different than I think I will. But if when my kids are gone, if I feel any loneliness or desire for them to still be home or how I'll maintain a relationship with them. Like I said, this is not here yet. This is not a stage I'm in. But the goal from the beginning has been to raise adults. So I have been also psychologically preparing for them to leave home since they were born. So I don't anticipate having the same feelings that some moms might when they're gone. I also have been very careful since they were young, to be aware of the fact that while it's my job to be emotionally present for them, and to support them, and to be an emotional outlet for them, it's not their job to do the same for me. And I'm their mother, they're not my parent.

And so I don't emotionally lean on them. While I'll open up and be vulnerable, if I'm going through something difficult, I don't put any of that emotional weight on them, or expect them to help make me feel better. And so I'm not leaning on them in that way. So I hope we would move into a natural adult relationship and get to have a more friendship type of interaction than a parent child type of interaction. But I don't think I will feel that weight in the same way some parents might. And I just think that's an important thing to say, that it's not my job to emotionally depend on them. It's my job to raise them to actually not need to depend on me.

And then Ben sent some more, as he calls it, boots on the ground, nitty gritty, practical aspects of being a parent. He said, do you have any non-negotiable rules for your children? As I said in the beginning, I have very few rules. More we have kind of experiential based stuff that it's non-negotiable in our family. So that idea that they can't have a phone or a car until they have a profitable business. And also some experiences that we require as a baseline for them to at least try it. So things like martial arts, which they've all done. We live in an area with water, so they're all required to do lifeguard and junior lifeguard, to get CPR training and become

strong swimmers. And then just as a family culture, we all get scuba certified, because that's a fun family thing we do together. But beyond that, there really are no hard and fast rules.

He asked, do you discipline your children? And if so, how? And I've referenced this in some podcasts, including...I went deep on this actually, with Joe Dispenza on my podcast. But I don't discipline in the same way. I don't think that most parents do. We don't do the whole, go to your room, you're grounded, type dynamic. Like I said, I also don't yell at them. I think Ben's talked about this as well. But the root of the word discipline is disciple, which comes from the idea of teaching, not enforcing. And I think often, discipline is confused with punishment in a lot of ways. So in the teaching mentoring method, certainly there's a lot of that that hopefully goes on in our house. But there's not a lot of traditional discipline, as you would think of it that way. And I would say there's actually not much of a need for it. I think when we educate our kids about these things young, respect their autonomy, help give them emotional regulation tools, and give them the ability to pursue the things that are important to them, and have these conversations and that they feel emotionally grounded and rooted, that we avoid a lot of the things that will be needed to discipline for. So maybe it sounds a little crazy to say, but there's really not a need for discipline. So, no.

Ben asks, how did you handle helping your children establish responsible, moderated, or conscientious consumption and use of books, media, entertainment, screen time, and social media? And he says, this seems to be a question many parents ask these days. And I love this question too. I also have an unconventional approach to this. And I don't have super strict rules or limits around it, other than they don't get their own phone until they have a profitable business. But I think modeling is important here. I know I sound like a broken record. But teaching them that technology is a tool, not a weapon. And conceivably, they're going to have an increasing amount of technology available to them throughout their whole lives. It's not something that they can easily avoid, so it's actually important for them to learn how to regulate and use it effectively, at a young age. I also think boundaries come best from the inside out. So if I'm their external governor of use of these things, they're going to depend on me for that. And then when they're adults, they're not going to have the same ability to do it themselves.

And so, like everything in parenting, this goes back to education and modeling. And if I'm not spending all my time on my phone or computer, they're less likely to do that as well. But also recognizing that on a phone, they have access to the entirety of human knowledge at their fingertips. And that's an incredible tool. But what goes along with that, in today's world, with the rapid amount of information we're creating, is learning how to curate that information, and not get swept into too much information and how to find the information you need effectively and quickly, and sift through the information that's not good. So actually encourage, especially learning based technology use whenever they want to. And that's something I of course, often work with them on. I don't just give them unfettered access at a young age to the internet. But I think it's an amazing tool. And it's that conversation from a young age of using it as a tool, not a weapon.

Similarly Ben asked, did you emphasize or encourage any health, fitness or healthy eating principles with your children? And if so, what seemed to work well? And I touched on this a little bit already. But division of responsibility, making sure they understand my role as a parent in providing them healthy food, their role and listen to their bodies and eating when they're hungry, and letting them make decisions around it. Not being their external force for that, letting those come from inside, but making sure that they're educated. I think culture goes a long way. So our family culture being more wellness centered also probably goes a long way in them making good choices here. But not because they're externally forced, just because that is the culture that they're growing up with. And I also have learned over time, over and over, just how important it is for me to model this. Because I think they listen to what we say, but they do what we do a lot more. And I realized I

had had a couple of fall down points on this. One being, a few years ago, I was looking in the mirror, and my daughter was in the bathroom too. And I saw her see how I was looking at myself in the mirror. And I saw it register in her face, perhaps for the first time, that I was having negativity toward my own body.

And I don't think she'd ever considered to look at herself critically like that. And in that moment, I realized, I don't want to pass on this critical self-judgment about myself to her by modeling it. And so that was actually when I resolved that no matter what it took, I would figure out how to address that. And that led to a beautiful trauma journey and actually health recovery for me. But it really drove home the point of, and how what we model is often much more important than what we say, because I had been saying all the words around having a good relationship with her body and with food for years, but I wasn't fully modeling it. And I noticed even through that journey, as I was losing a lot of weight, I was making comments about getting smaller. And I realized she was trying to be really, really small, and even, like, wear shoes that were small. And I for a while was like, why is she doing that? And then I realized that was coming from me as well. And so I shifted my language in a hopefully more positive direction there, about what my body can do, not what it looks like, and then being strong. And she's kind of now following along and wanting to get stronger. And so I think it's just a good reminder that our kids pay attention to what we do, and especially how we look at and talk to ourselves. So that's a very important thing to cultivate.

If your child or children could inscribe anything on your gravestone, what would you wish and hope that they would write? Particularly, what would you want them to most remember about you or remember you for? I don't have a great answer to this actually, because I'm relatively detached from the outcome of what happens when I die. But I guess I would maybe have them put something funny, like my name and what year I was born, and then maybe died 1450, tried time travel and it didn't work out, or something funny. I hope they remember me for humor. And I hope that they remember that I was always there for them, and that I loved them. And also that I challenged them and didn't do things for them. But I don't know, I will be dead, so I guess I won't really care too much what they put.

Ben also asked related to that, what do you most want to be remembered for as a parent? And I guess it would go back to, for me, maybe love, kindness, and adventure. And I think it's even more than that, it's an intangible. I hope that they are able to feel the love that I feel for them every day. And we have a really, really great relationship. And I feel like they do. And I hope they remember that. I hope they remember the small moments, and the time spent together, and the connections, and the adventures. But beyond that, I don't think of anything specifically.

He asked related that as well, what do you think your child or children would say is their fondest memory of being raised by you? And like I said, I think it's the small moments, not the big ones. I hope they remember the bedtime stories and the spontaneous funny jokes that happened or the random dance party at Saturday breakfast, or whatever it is. I hope they remember those things, and that they each have their own little moments of connection that they remember.

And then final question, this one might be the toughest one. What one message for parents would you put on a billboard? And probably something along the lines of, it's not meant to be this hard, it's actually meant to be really fun. And that they're mirrors. And so if it's not fun, and if it is hard, then embrace it, it's a beautiful chance to look inside. Because they're our best teachers and they have a lot to tell us.

So I think I've finally got through all the questions. And I will probably share this on my podcast as well, and also be sharing more detail about all of this in my own writing. But I'm really grateful to Ben for the chance to get to hash this out. I think all of these are very important questions and important conversations to have. And

I think that the most important thing we can show up to if we have kids is being a good parent. And that's a constant journey of improvement, and self-discovery, and taking care of ourselves, and modeling, and education. And it can absolutely be exhausting and frustrating, and it can also be wonderful and fulfilling. And all of those things can exist at once. So thank you, Ben, for the opportunity and to my kids for giving me the opportunity to be a mom and learn these lessons.

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