



Episode 633: How Kids Can Build Better Brain Habits in Five Minutes a Day Using Martial Arts With Homedojo

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Katie: Hello and welcome to the Wellness Mama Podcast. I'm Katie from WellnessMama.com and this episode is all about how to build better brain habits in our kids in just five minutes a day using a form of martial arts that they actually will enjoy and love. And I'll share my personal experience with this in this episode as well. But I'm here with Alex Geniesse, who was certified to teach in these martial arts by a highly ranked multidisciplinary instructor in Jeet Kune Do, Kali, Wing Chun and others. And he spends his time learning ways to fight and also to teach kids some of these things they may have seen in things like Marvel movies, but it's a fun movement-based practice and pattern that activates brain boosting benefits. And this is what we talk about in this episode. There's a lot of really cool science behind this, and this is the first time that I know of that this has been available for kids to do at home and it does not require parental supervision. So that's why I personally am enjoying this. It's based on the method I've been learning as well for the last two years. And I've seen benefits not just physically in my confidence, but also in nervous system and mental patterns as well, which is why I was excited to get to delve into this in this podcast episode.

So in this episode, we talk about how martial arts benefits the brain and especially these particular types of martial arts, why they are especially beneficial. We also talk about ways that martial arts can actually teach self regulation and calm for kids and go into some depth on the rare forms of martial arts that we're talking about and where they came from. And there's only a few instructors in the world that actually teach these forms, so it's not available in most places. And this is now a gamified online way that kids can learn this.

We go into what I've talked about on here before the book. The body keeps the score and how stresses and trauma can be stored in the body and how these forms of martial arts can actually help untangle some of those trauma responses through cross body movements. And how these movements can lead to more oxytocin and less aggression and more parasympathetic at home. So in general, calmer kids.

We talk about specifically the science of cross body movements to benefit the nervous system and the body, and then how learning these forms of martial arts can increase feelings of safety in the body and help the nervous system, which leads to better focus and sleep. There's actually studies looking at this as well, and we talk about the core principles of this form of martial arts and how these are especially beneficial for children. And then from a practical level, we talk about how a kid can learn this without any involvement or driving for the parents, which is a huge plus for me right now. With sort of single parenting six kids and having to drive them all over every day for their other activities. I love that this is one they can learn at home with no driving. So this has benefited me personally and my family. And without any further ado, let's join Alex and learn about homeddojo. Alex, welcome. Thanks for being here.

Alex: Thanks for having me.

Katie: So we're going to go deep on martial arts and the brain, but before we jump into that, I have a note in the show notes that you have a cat that goes on walks with you. And I wanted just to hear that story and tell that story before we jump in.

Alex: Sure, yeah. Actually he just disappeared for ten days and I heard a weird meow outside the door and it was unusual. So I got up and went over to the door and it didn't even sound like him, and he just popped back in. So after ten days of just being disappeared, he mysteriously showed back up, walked in and went straight for his food bowl. And I went over to pet him and he was covered in dust, just totally caked. I mean, it looked like I had melted chocolate on my fingers after petting him for a while. But he's a really cool little black cat. He's smaller than usual. He's about 9 lb. And in the evenings when the sun starts to go down, I can go for a walk and then I'll give two clicks or from if anybody's seen the show See, then you'll know the call sign chet chet, and he'll just follow along with me.

Now the trick to that, because there is a little trick, this is not the first cat that I've had that has chosen to go on walks with me into their own volition. So the way I treat my cat is not as if he's my pet. It's as if he's my

roommate. He's allowed to come and go whenever he wants to. He asks for help to get out the door, and if he doesn't show back up, it's because I assume he moved on. Whether that's to his next life or to the next house, that's okay. So treating him with that kind of openness, he's way more willing to just go on walks with me I've noticed. And so that's pretty cool. Really strange because I don't know other cats who do that, but I've had multiple cats who do that, so it is very funny. You have cats, right?

Katie: I do. I have right now part wild cat in my house that is not that friendly and doesn't like to be touched, but will roar at me if he wants food. So that's about the extent of our interaction in the house.

Alex: Oh, really?

Katie: But what I'm really excited to talk with you about today is martial arts and a lot of the very specific benefits that people may not even associate with it. And for context, this is something I actually started doing a couple of years ago as well. The listeners have probably heard me talk about my yearly challenges to get out of my comfort zone. And martial arts kind of sort of began as a cool way to get out of my comfort zone and face some of my own sort of nervous system trauma from the past. And the physical part has been really fun and I feel like it's helped me gain some confidence. But the part I didn't expect at the beginning was the mental side and the brain benefits that came along with it as well. And also from having learned some of these forms that we're going to talk about today, I know that there are very few instructors in the world that actually teach these forms and that there's now a gamified digital way to learn this online. So I'm really excited to get to go deep on that. But to start broad, maybe just walk us through how you got into martial arts and what the different forms of martial arts that you practice yourself are.

Alex: Sure, absolutely. I'm also going to circle back and ask you questions too because you said some things I'd be interested in hearing about. But how I got into martial arts. Well, of course when I was younger, I wanted to be a ninja. That's what I wanted to grow up and be. I just wanted to grow up, wear a black mask and run around with a sword. So that didn't happen. But I did get into pole vaulting, and pole vaulting was just kind of a spur of the moment decision. My dad had tried pole vaulting. I tried it my last year in college. Wound up going to Liberty University and pole vaulting there. And then after college, I started to explore ways to train that didn't need any kind of collegiate structure or anything like that. So it was a lot of club meets, a lot of traveling around in the summer to street meets and different things like that. And I had an awesome time with it. It incorporated a whole lot of cross body movement and all kinds of unique training styles. So that definitely had my patterns going for weird ways to train.

Along with that, I had some traumatic experiences when I was younger and also alongside that, some addiction in the family. And those were things that I had held onto. I pretended they weren't there and stored them in my body, essentially, but I wasn't super aware of that. When eventually I had some crazy life shifts and everything seemed to just kind of fall apart, I was no longer welcome to train where I was training and couldn't live where I was living. And all of a sudden in 4 hours, everything in my life changed. I had a good

friend, set of friends, who allowed me to move in to the corner of a room that they lived in near a beach. And I spent a couple of months there just basically working online, walking down to the beach and processing everything that had happened. And what were decisions that I made? What were decisions that other people made that led to that and then eventually realized, like, you know what, maybe that doesn't matter.

And synchronously, an instructor came around and moved into town in Florida, because I live in the Panhandle in Florida. And he randomly met us and said, hey, do you guys want to learn how to fight with sticks? And I was like, what? Do you want to learn how to fight with sticks? And he's like, Come on, I'll show you. And he picked up two sticks and he gave us two sticks each. And I was like, Wait a second. No way. You mean I do get to become a ninja? And dual wield swords? This is great. And we went out to the beach and started training. And immediately I noticed whenever I would get flustered or mess up or hit my knuckles, I'd have an immediate reaction, just, whoa, big flare up. Like, man, I didn't know that was there. That kind of anger and all that stuff. It was a little bit alarming. But through training, through those exercises, a lot of that went away.

And I'd love to talk about that more, but I do want to brag on my instructor a little bit before I do. His name is John Dodi. He runs Lotus JKD, which is found on the Gulf Coast of Florida, and he comes from a line of martial arts that is pretty unique. Most people will have heard of it in two ways. Number one would be Marvel Studios. A lot of the techniques and training styles that he uses, and that I use respectively, are shared with the Marvel Studios actors. Not just the actors, but specifically the stuntmen. So all the choreography for the different fight scenes and things, a lot of that comes from the same academy, the same central academy that my instructor learned from for I don't know exactly how long, but he's been doing martial arts for almost 60 years, so it's been a while.

And that academy is the Inosanto Academy, and that's in LA. The Inosanto Academy has a rich history of all kinds of martial arts. Specifically, it started when after Bruce Lee died, and Dan Inosanto, the leader of the Inosanto Academy, was the main friend, student, and sparring partner of Bruce Lee back in the late 60s and early 70s when he was getting into films and such. And so Dan wound up incorporating, he was a karate guy at first, and then he wound up incorporating and exploring Filipino martial arts at the recommendation of Bruce Lee. And so they began because Bruce Lee had a kung fu style called Wing Chun, and he developed that. But then he came to the US. And realized that he needed to develop his own art. And he started looking at the French kicking, which is savat, and started looking at had Dan look at Filipino martial arts.

And they just brought all this stuff together and they made this little kind of philosophy, which is learn from everyone. I'm going to summarize it because I think there's better wording. It's "learn from everyone, integrate what is useful, store what is not useful, because it could be useful later, and then add what is uniquely and creatively your own". And that is the kind of core philosophy for how Bruce Lee's unique style of Jeet Kune Do arose. He passed that on before he passed away. He gave Dan Inosanto the green light to carry that on. And Dan and his partners, they trained my instructor. So it's an awesome, really kind of great system that incorporates lots of different martial arts, and it is how we figured out some certain styles work really well, especially when used together. And one of the other guys from the Inosanto Academy began something called Cognitive Kali.

Now, if you're not familiar with Kali, Kali is an ambidextrous martial art. You use both sides of your body, and so it trains cross body movements in a very cool way. It's really fun. It's really frustrating at first, actually. It's fun later. First, you're like, what in the world is going on? You get really flustered. But then that's awesome, because it turns into some really amazing benefits later. So through Kali, Wing Chun, and Jeet Kune Do, I'm going to say those are the three primary things that I train with John and that I teach.

I wound up having an internal experience that transformed my view and experience of what I thought myself was. So as I learned from John and as I would get punched in the face or poked with a stick, kicked in the leg or whatever, and find all these areas where I wasn't doing what I thought I could, instead of getting mad over time, I noticed a reduction in aggression and an improvement or an increase boost in my natural ability to play, have fun and laugh. So that was something that, in my experience, helped me process, somatically, those traumatic experiences, the addiction and the family and all those things that really kind of I felt like I held onto that were keeping me down because I had an edge to me, because I wanted to prove to myself that I could do something or be something that I wanted to be. When in reality, all of us already are everything we need to be.

For example, a lot of there's a common belief that people want to get smarter. That's a very common thing. Who doesn't want to be smarter, right? But the problem is, that's the wrong approach. That's not a superior first principle. And I learned that through experience and trying really hard, and it not working out and then letting go of that and learning, oh, you already are everything you need to be. Your body is already a perfect temple with all the tools that it needs to tap into that higher function. So in that case, instead of making my brain into a supercomputer, it's realizing the brain already is a supercomputer, whether you like it or not. And it's going to run any program that you feed it.

But before I want to jump into how that works with the brain stuff, I want to hear a little bit about your experience, if that's all right, and how you got into martial arts and maybe some of the confidence that you built.

Katie: Yeah, absolutely. I think probably my martial arts may not be the intuitive first thing people would think of when they think of moms and Wellness Mama, but the reason I was so excited to have this on here today is because it really does pull in a lot of my experiences and things that I think were helpful outside of far beyond just martial arts. And you mentioned the body side, and I've talked a lot about the somatic experiencing side and the book *The Body Keeps the Score*. I've mentioned that quite a few times on this podcast. And from my own experience, I realized also due to trauma in high school, I had sort of had my nervous system on lockdown for years and was very largely out of touch with my body because that felt much safer. And sort of reading *The Body Keeps the Score* was the first mental step to understanding that connection again.

But it was through somatic work that I actually was able to start to untangle some of that nervous system lockdown that I had. And the most extreme part of that was my first experience with somatic therapies and

actually kind of coming back into my body for the first time in almost 20 years and sort of shaking as an animal would after they almost got killed for hours after that experience, which is an actual normal and healthy response. It's the reason animals don't walk around with PTSD and humans do, is they're able to process that and humans are able to lock down and to choose to override that. But what I learned in that was that, yes, the mental and emotional and spiritual sides are of course, very important.

And also sometimes we forget that the body is also a really helpful tool for integrating those things. And that's what I found in martial arts as well, is that those cross body movements that you talked about and the nervous system experience of being in those situations and sort of re-experiencing some of that fear or that flinch response or those getting hit in the knuckles. It helped me to untangle that nervous system response and to actually get more in touch with my body, which made me excited for this to be available for my kids. Because looking back, I can think if I had only had that earlier on or if I had had those foundational tools as a child, how much that would have served me throughout my life. And I'm still, of course, very grateful I have them now. But I'm really excited this is now something available to children from an early age because I talk so much on here about the foundational habits and many of these things we learn the hard way as adults, being able to give those to our kids as foundational habits and practices and tools so that hopefully they have an easier experience of going through those things at a younger age and have that to enter into adulthood.

I also loved what you said about the principle of that and the curiosity because people have probably heard me talk on here before about approaching any person or scenario or experience with that curiosity and willingness to learn. And I love that they take it a step beyond integrating the things that are useful and then adding your own unique thing. I think that's a really cool approach, especially for kids to really integrate at a young age and to approach life with even beyond just martial arts. I think the mindset piece is so valuable and this is a really beneficial way to impart that to kids from a young age.

It also really resonated with me when you said you talked about your edge and I've shared that before as well, where when I started processing the trauma and letting it go, I had this momentary fear of am I going to lose my edge? Am I going to stop being as good at all these things? Because I don't have this compulsive trauma based edge that I've been leaning on my whole life.

And what I learned in that through the experience of it was that we don't lose our edge, we just get to choose when we pick up the sword and we can also choose to put it down. So it becomes a tool versus a compulsion. And I think that's another one of the things that makes it so beneficial for kids. And you touched on this. But people that might think of martial arts and fighting and be worried that it's going to encourage kids to fight more. And what my experience has been, and my kids as well, and I would guess for you also, is that actually the process of this and the integration of the body actually, like you said, leads you to be less aggressive and have more self-control and more integration and more awareness, not less. And I know that's only like the tip of the iceberg of benefits, having experienced these myself firsthand as well. But maybe let's start there to jump into talking about the benefits and how this actually does have a really profound effect on the mind as well.

Alex: Sure, absolutely. There's a lot of things I'd love to comment on that you said and start conversations. But yeah, let's jump into maybe the calmness aspect. So one thing that happens with cross body movements and with martial arts and other activities is you get an increased amount of oxytocin and you also get reduced aggro or aggression. So one of those things, the mechanisms that happens is you've heard of EMDR right? So I'll just keep this pretty brief with the way that we train. We use a lot of cross body movements. And not only that, but you have to use your peripheral in order to track a whole body, not just one piece. You're not just looking at a punch, but you're maybe looking at the chest so that you can see the feet, the hands, the head, and where they're moving. And you're also moving around in a circle, side aside, back and forth. So you wind up tracking or being aware of all things that are going on between you and this other person.

What winds up happening naturally is you get a heightened sense of attention and awareness, but not a constricted sense of focus over time. At first, you feel like you're focusing really hard, but then over time, it becomes more aware. And that has a few benefits. While you're doing that and moving around and tracking all those things, your eyes. When I move to my right, but I look to my left and move to my left and look to my right, I'm getting that eye movement, that's scanning laterally. So when my eyes are moving left and right, it simulates something similar to moving forward or walking through nature, where you're taking in not just looking at the ground, but all these trees and all the birds and everything that's going on. What happens with that lateral eye movement is that it shuts down your threat center. Not all at once, but it begins to help you realize or support the conditions that help you realize within yourself that you are safe. That even in a situation where something exciting is going on, rather than panic, which is often the precursor to aggression, rather than panic, you have a sense of calm because you don't feel like you're in a threat. You feel like, I'm okay. I can process, handle, and even enjoy this present moment.

And all of a sudden, it's a lot easier to find gratitude. And gratitude is the emotion, one of the emotions and practices that can help you transmute difficult experiences toward peace. So that's one little branch of benefits. Another is that at the same time as that calmness is coming into, since your brain is a supercomputer and it does run any program you feed it, you're giving it your body, that imprint of calmness, and you're also giving it the cross body movements.

The cross body movements are really cool because they increase the hemisphere sync, so you have to track from right to left, left to right a lot more, and that helps your brain work as a whole rather than in segments. When that happens, you get an increased sense of neuroplasticity and neurogenesis. So basically what that turns into, instead of jumping into deep neuroscience, I don't really know that much about, other than from talking with, like, Dr. Andrew Hill, and I've done some neurofeedback with Peak Brain and stuff like that. But besides that, you get an increased processing speed, a better sense of problem solving, because you're able to extend your awareness more to the totality of a body. So you're sensing opportunities, it helps you get into flow state more easily, which allows not only for better memory and recall, but more problem solving at higher speeds. So you're improving your learning speed as well as your sleep there afterwards.

So those are some of the things I've actually noticed within myself as well, that when I'm tracking these weird patterns and circular movements in the way that the body moves, I'm broadening my attention, my awareness, rather than circling or constricting into focus, I'm able to sense more. And that has allowed my

mind to stop some chatter. And that chatter is not something that supports me functioning better. It might tell me that, but the chatter is not helping the silence, the present moment, that is actually allowing that edge that we were talking about earlier to be used as an effective tool. But when you have the chatter going on, you start to have this panic. When you have panic, it's extremely easy for some people to identify, most people to identify with an experience. So all of a sudden you identify with the experience and believe that emotion, that feeling of that experience is you. Whereas when you're practicing martial arts, these cross body movements and practicing different styles and doing this with another person, you start to gain awareness that hey, this experience is not me. I witnessed it, I watched it happen, I felt it happened, but it's not me. Actually the real me is totally fine, totally okay and able to have fun. Have you had that experience?

Katie: Yeah, absolutely. And I feel like it compounds over time and also for the parents listening, for kids this is an exceptionally valuable thing because often those self-regulation pieces come with experience and maturity throughout childhood and often, like you said, many adults still struggle with some aspects of that. And I think I would kind of liken this to almost like a moving meditation. And I've talked a lot about meditation on this podcast.

But meditation can be especially difficult for children if it's through a lens of sitting still and trying not to do anything because kids are such, they have natural curiosity and natural drive to move. And so when kids get to do a moving meditation that's taking into account these crossbody things and helping pattern the brain in a way that's toward problem solving and toward calm and toward even that more parasympathetic state versus always being in sympathetic, then that leads to calmer kids at home, which is awesome. But it's also a very applicable way that kids can get, I feel like the benefits of meditation and adults too, by doing these cross body movements instead of trying to just sit still and do nothing.

Alex: Oh yeah, absolutely. And there are studies you could actually watch a TED Talk called Cognitive Kali, and that will be by Paul McCarthy. And he walks through some of the benefits as well, talks about how there are studies showing that martial arts more widespread, improved cognitive benefits than targeted computer training, that there is a study or studies done that by manual coordination, rhythmic motion, crossing midline and hand eye coordination all correlated to increased or supported executive function in the brain.

There was Heaven 6 testimonial. Heaven 6 is a cross body movement with two sticks. Each person has two sticks, and we wind up it's a pattern that I teach. I don't know how to explain it without teaching it with an image. It's very difficult. But basically two sticks are on the same side. Your top hand goes, your bottom hand goes, and your top hand goes again across from the other side, and it makes this cross body pattern where you're both doing that. And there was a testimonial from the Inosanto Academy that this guy, after a serious crash and an injury, had no memory of his family and wound up somehow getting to the Inosanto Academy and practicing Heaven 6. And he swears that that one drill, practicing that over and over is what led to him gaining his memories back. So he now remembers his family. He's now able to be with them presently and share the sentiment that they grew together.

So one thing that your audience could do right now, if they wanted to give it a try, something that could help them access that function, that program in their own supercomputer brain that they have is a snapping drill. So the snapping drill is will do one hand at a time, basically. So I will basically with my right hand, snap in clockwise motion the four corners of a square, and then I'll stop. With my left hand, I will snap in clockwise motion the three corners of a triangle. Then once you've done that, you have to do them at the same time. And so when you do them at the same time, you have to track two different shapes. And it's hard at first, you get that brain scramble feeling, but then all of a sudden, you activated this awesome program that immediately changes your day.

They've done this in studies also at UCLA showing that these simple exercises for just a couple of minutes, just a couple of minutes, that's it, improved scores on test taking, finals. There was also a 2018 study that showed those who practice martial arts had an improved or increased score on creativity and attention tests compared to those who didn't. So there are definitely some really cool stuff, that snapping drill, I guess for those watching, I'll demonstrate it real quick. I'll do it in this little thing.

So when I have to track that, if I focus on one snap, I lose awareness of it, but if I just watch in front of me the shapes being made and you could just poke them. Then I'm able to track that. And already you are tracking things on both sides of your body. You are developing a sense of awareness that is greater than what we typically carry throughout daily life. You silence the chatter that's going on in your mind and you activate some of those brain benefits such as neuroplasticity and neurogenesis, which immediately, even if you don't sense it right away, it already is improving your learning speed, processing speed, problem solving, memory and recall. And as well it helps you to track multiple variables because a lot of the times I think people say that you can only do one thing at a time. That's not actually true. Your brain is doing multiple things always even if you're not aware of it. And this brings awareness to how you can tap into that more cognitively, more consciously.

Katie: Yes, that makes so much sense. And I remember the first time I learned attempted to learn Heaven 6 and it was like my brain was in that scramble mode and I was so frustrated and then after a few times of doing it, it was like my nervous system got it and it clicked and then it became a flow state. But I remember that of like I could not try to concentrate on the movements themselves and isolate them. I had to like sort of pull back and let my awareness handle it and not over concentrate. And I think that alone is such a valuable life skill because we tend to over fixate and sort of compulsively latch onto things and try to pay too much attention or to put so much effort into it. And the ability to step back and learn that is so applicable in other areas as well. It really has ripple effects into other areas of life and I think for all the parents listening, it's also really valuable that like you said, this is something that can be done in just a few minutes a day. This is not like so many things in health we think of and they take a lot of time or they take effort or you have to go somewhere, you have to really like prioritize them and make a ton of time. This is something that can be integrated in a very short amount of time per day and have sort of profound compounding benefits over time as we integrate them more and more.

Alex : Oh, absolutely. So in HomeDojo specifically so far anyway, there has not been a single lesson that's over ten minutes in length. I think the longest one was eight minutes in something and the shortest one was two minutes in something because it's that quick. I teach the movement and then I ask you to practice for five or

ten minutes. And this is not something that needs to be supervised. I know it's martial arts, so people get scared that there's violence, but that's actually not what's going on. You're practicing at a manageable pace and learning fun movements with another person, ideally, but if not, then through intense visualization.

And the body has no idea whether it visualized something or actually did something. So you get the benefits either way. It just is easier when you have the feedback of another person's arm occasionally if you're learning how to perform a skill called trapping, for example. But what's really neat is so I've developed this gamified style of doing martial arts because, I don't know, it seemed like going to the dojo at 5:00 right in the middle of dinner and then being there until whenever I could get picked up, that wasn't my favorite way to I love the group. I love being at the dojo and I would do that. I wish they would do it at a more manageable time. And so I realized I was like, well, if I could develop a system where people like even if they're going to the dojo or not going to the dojo, but they have access to at least the benefits of martial arts from home, where they don't need to be supervised, they'll be awesome.

So I developed this system for making ranks instead of doing belts. And I named them after sort of video game ranks and then also made different units within each rank so that it represented what's called a skill tree. And a skill tree is essentially a systematized way of developing specific skills and related skills. And so you might have something that's instead of calling it the martial arts, I have one segment that's called Seven Seas Pirate. It's learning how to move with a stick, essentially, or with a small spatula in the way that a pirate actually has done. So you're learning the way that pirates moved, but you're using these crossbody movements that were once used for actual fighting on ships, now are used in movies, but now you're using them to activate these brain benefits that's going to last for the rest of your day. Or if you do it at night, then it's going to last into your sleep and help you repattern things without the constraints of logic as you're sleeping.

So you have achievements that you can get awarded. You have ranks that you can up rank. And then you also have we set up a dojo chat room so that we have a moderated chat room so all questions can come to us and we can help them navigate or answer questions that they want. And then also video coaching is available. And we wanted to do that so that way it was as easy for families to get into martial arts as possible because it can feel a little overwhelming when you have to go somewhere and then learn something from scratch. You don't want to bother the teachers or upset other people's progress, but you want to learn, so we try to just totally remove those barriers to entry by making the lessons short, learning one or two skills in those, then practicing together in a way that you can go at your own pace. There's nobody there to watch you, so you don't have to worry about what you look like doing this thing. And no matter what, you are getting those boosted brain benefits.

Katie: Yeah, and I love that on several levels. On the personal level, I love that it can be done at home without anyone watching at first because I'm working on it, but I definitely still have a thing from childhood where I don't like doing something unless I'm already good at it. And so I love that there's an at home approach to this. But from the mom's perspective, I think that's also really valuable. Because I with six kids, I am always running from tennis lessons, pole vaulting, coaching at night with them. Like, there's so many different activities and they all have to be in those after school hours so that the most kids can go to them, which tends to make afternoons and evenings super hectic. And so I love that this is something that can be done any time

of day in a gamified manner that doesn't require car trips anywhere, and that it sounds like ideally could be integrated before school even, or before sleep and or both. They could learn it in the morning and refresh at night before sleep and kind of double up the benefits each day.

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I'd also love for you to talk about some of the core principles of homedojō because we've talked in general about the martial arts side. I think homedojō is its really own unique, cool approach to this. And while it's through the lens of martial arts, I feel like it also is really teaching a lot of things. Like you've touched on gratitude and a lot of these mindset pieces, and you have a really cool approach with this with kids that I feel like for parents, they're going to be really grateful that their kids get to have some of these sort of mental and emotional lessons as well. So maybe talk about some of your philosophy and core principles around how you're teaching this.

Alex: Okay, sure, that sounds great. So mentioned before with Jeet Kune Do, there is that principle of curiosity, learning everything, using what you can, adding what's uniquely your own. Now, the point of that is I want to make a little bit of a distinction here because you'll understand the teaching style a little bit better, hopefully. So curiosity and judgment are different things now, they're different words even, and we know that. But what I mean is when most people have curiosity or when they picture themselves having curiosity and a lot of this is ingrained from public school.

So we have this habit as a collective group. We seek answers, and that is not curiosity. Seeking an answer is not curiosity. Seeking an answer is judgment that is jumping to a conclusion. Curiosity is just asking the question and letting the question lead you to better questions and letting those better questions lead you to more informed questions. And that system of asking questions, that ask questions, that ask questions, brings a sense of joy and curiosity to a level that invades your whole life. It just pervades everywhere.

So with that in mind, we realized that if there's not judgment going on, there's some kind of awesome energy that is shared with a group. Like in these martial arts groups, I literally have people who have been doing this for 37 years. In one case, 23 in another, 25 in another. And I would go up and talk to them and they they just sit there and smile and they let you process out loud. And then not only that, they know you're having struggles, understanding things and they're not sitting there trying to take over and teach you. They're just like, wow, thank you so much for processing with me and having that out loud. I'd love to walk through this with you. And it's just a humble experience where it's really joyful. So in homedojos going into this, I knew, I was like, all right, we need to make sure our core principles are set.

So in martial arts, we have this idea of a center line. A center line, there's two of them and one is vertical and it goes right down your middle and it extends forward. That's your first center line. The other one is your midpoint at your hips. Now at that intersection is your core. This is a place in martial arts philosophy that you hold your core principles for life. As a dojo, curiosity is certainly a principle, but more importantly, the first principle, the core principle we're working from is that the quality of life, everything that makes up what is comes out of divine love. Because of that, we are able to make all our decisions in kindness and gratitude. And so that is a practice and intention and something I mentioned in many videos in small ways.

So while you're learning how to do these crossbody movements, we're also wiring in a sense of gratitude and kindness and love because that's what's most important. It's not important to me whether somebody demonstrates skill and fighting. What's important to me is that this is a tool for them to do self-exploration because that's one of the mistakes people think about or make when they think about martial arts. Martial arts is not about violence. It is about self realization. It is about exploring the inner experience and letting you know that all things, no matter what, even if they're confusing at some time, all things return to that state, that quality of divine love. Because of that, it's okay for me not to feel attacked. It's okay for me to feel safe. It's okay for me to help other people feel gratitude and kindness and for me to make my decisions in kindness and gratitude.

And so how can I do that? One technique is to be curious. Like, okay, this person is having an inflammatory response, right? Okay. Well, I feel safe. I can ask you questions, not to get to the bottom of it, but just ask you questions to let you process however you're feeling. And then, number two, another technique is to then immediately find something to be grateful for in that situation. And as soon as you do that, you know that sense of calm and happiness that just literally punches you in the stomach, okay, yeah, everything's okay. And that is one of those things that when you wire it into your body as a program that's running all the time and it doesn't take long to do that, it starts to transform your life into something way more peaceful.

And I do believe that life's baseline is peace, love, and joy. And that we hold on to things that get in the way. We hold on to experiences, which we then try to identify with, even if it's unconscious that that gets in the way of that peace, that love, that gratitude, that joy. But as soon as you have these skills, these tools to unwind that and realize, oh, that's not me, I'm me, and I'm okay, then I can transmute or transform the emotional experience, even in what situations other people perceive as stressful, into something that's peaceful, synchronous, going to work out perfectly. And you know what? I can even smile during it. I'm sure you've had some experiences like that. Do you have any examples that come to mind or even with your kids? I'd love to hear about how that happens.

Katie: Yeah, it's something I didn't learn probably very well until I was an adult and that I've tried to model for my kids at a younger age than I learned it. But I think especially when we're young, we can get in that idea. And I think our words are very important, especially any words that come after the words "I am." But I know as a kid, I would say things like, I am mad or I am sad. And in those moments, you identify them with that emotion. You become that emotion. And so now I try to look at that more through the lens of like, oh, okay, I'm experiencing this emotion of anger. I'm experiencing this emotion of sadness. I don't have to resist that. I don't have to judge that. I don't have to fight that. I also don't have to sit here in that forever.

And in my own path, I've learned I've had a lot of moments where I was able to take experiences from the past that were connected to pain or sadness or anger and actually thank them for keeping me safe in those moments and let them go. And that was a much more powerful experience than identifying with them. But I think it's easier, especially when we're younger, to sort of identify strongly with those experiences because we feel them so intensely, especially as children. And so this is such a valuable tool for self regulation that kids can learn at younger ages certainly than I did through that process.

Also it made me think of with the cross body movements and the brain patterning, people may remember the guests you mentioned him as well, Dr. Andrew Hill and Peak Brain, which is a system of doing biofeedback or neurofeedback on the brain to help improve the brain. And that's a really effective process. It's also a really time consuming and expensive process that's not available to a lot of people and it's only in a couple of areas of the country. And so I love practices like this that can get a lot of those same benefits through the cross body movements without having to sort of sit your kid down and do neurofeedback with them. And I know that's why we see these studies that look at especially kids that are maybe not neurotypical, that these can be especially beneficial because of those crossbody benefits as well. And then of course, I will never miss an opportunity to talk about curiosity as well because that's one of my personal core principles. I talk about it a lot on here as well about asking better questions.

And so I love that this is a way that kids are getting that from a young age, that encouragement to ask better questions and to think through that in a broader sense, even with my own you asked about my experience. I think kids come out of the box with a beautiful natural curiosity. And one of my things I focused on very early on as a parent was trying to never shut down that curiosity. So I encouraged my kids to ask why, even sometimes at the expense of my own sanity at the end of certain days. I know one day I got through over 500 questions from my kids before I stopped counting. But kids are so naturally curious and it's wonderful. And I've told them even from the youngest when they first started talking, question everything, ask good questions. And my oldest, who can be a little stubborn at times, when he was two, looked back at me and said, "Even you?" And I told him even and especially me, question everything, always asks better questions. So I love that curiosity is sort of built into this as well.

Alex: Yeah, I love that too, because there's something that martial arts has helped me in my interaction with relationships of all kinds. It's just that sense of being curious and knowing that when I misunderstand something or if I'm trying to explain something and somebody questions it, it has nothing to do with if I'm good enough or not. It has nothing to do with being attacked, it has nothing to do with any of that. What it is, is somebody is actually asking you, could you explain this in a different way? Because I'm not sure that I've had the experience that you are explaining in that particular way. And I'd like to find out more, even if it comes across a little bit spiky or thorny, that's really the root of what's going on. And they're just asking you to share yourself with them in a different way. Not because there's anything wrong with you, but just because they want to find more ways to relate and understand whatever is going on.

And so it's in relationships with little kids, especially when we're teaching kids and they have a million questions, we don't just shut them down and say, like, all right, stop. Just listen to what I'm doing. Just practice what you're going on. Whatever we say is what needs to go, that's it doesn't work. You know, you're just teaching kids to shut down. Instead, you want to help them blossom that curiosity and help them find a way that helps them explore the questions that they have. At least that's what we found is the most effective. It's also a pretty good negotiation tactic.

Katie: Yeah, absolutely. Let's talk a little bit more on the practical side about HomeDojo, because we've mentioned it a few times. I want to make sure people understand the format, because to me, as a mom, the valuable part of this is it's something my kids can learn at home without me taking them anywhere. That's imparting a lot of these core principles we talked about, and that's actually fun and gamified and that they can access on their own. So walk us through just what the format of HomeDojo looks like and how kids can experience it.

Alex: Sure. Well, you can find out a little bit more information, even a summary of a couple of the benefits we've talked about at homedojo.io/wellnessmama. So that'll be for your audience to go check out. And when you get there, you can click Log In. Once you're logged in, it's three clicks to begin a lesson. You click on Dojo, you click on Unit, you click Play, and that's it. So it's just a couple of clicks. It's super easy to navigate. We've

made sure that it's very easy to navigate. And if they have questions and are having trouble, they can click on Dojo Chat and ask us directly or send a private message directly to us so that we can handle all the questions that come up.

And so what this looks like is, and there's pictures on that website of a couple of the things that you'll see is when they get to the Dojo portion of HomeDojo, there will be a unit. And I've listed it out to be instead of with cute titles, it's literally Seven Seas Pirate Level One. And then it goes day one, day two, day three, day four, day five, day six, etc. And so you can just go along.

And each of those days is roughly five minutes in length in terms of teaching and then roughly five minutes plus of practice. And I say plus because it's pretty fun. So you might have kids who only want to practice for two minutes. You might have kids and that's okay, they're still getting brain benefits from it. You might have kids who want to practice for an hour and that's okay too, because it's just really fun. And I do recommend that they have a partner of some sort to this because I think it will be easier to learn and more fun to play. But that does not need to be mom at all. It could be sibling, it could be neighbor, it could be dad, it could be making a little PVC dummy so that they can just move around something that looks like a body. I actually have a bunch of recommendations already set up in the HomeDojo chat as a resource page for cheap alternatives to expensive martial arts equipment. As your kids get more excited about jumping into that kind of stuff, like instead of buying a \$40 pair of training sticks, you can get a \$4 piece of PEX and cut it to the right length. And this is, you know, for practice, for example. So there's lots of ways to cut down on the cost and to make sure that everything's taken care of.

So that's what the HomeDojo lessons look like. The system of it is built into the ranks and then the skill trees and we progressively each day have them practice some reps and then learn one new concept. And in that new concept, we are trying to find questions and potential solutions or practices that help us see more opportunities within martial arts. And that's a community that is very common and you'll find in the martial arts community when somebody has a question, people love to just, let's try this, let's try this, let's do all this. And we have that built in to our system as well at HomeDojo, so your kids are not really left alone. As soon as one of our moderators has logged on, they will take care of the questions. They will make sure that everybody's being nice and levy the boundaries, the consequences of boundaries when people are not being kind or acting kindly on the chat. If that happens, it hasn't happened, so I don't expect it to because we have a nice, loving community already set up in place. But if it does, we do have people who moderate that chat and make sure that everybody is treated with kindness and with gratitude and everybody gets the help that they are requesting.

Oh, one thing I did want to mention is that I have two extra small shirts. So in the first 100 people of your audience that sign up, I'm going to ship out a shirt, the first two people. So there's two shirts, they're both extra small. And in that first 100 I'll roll some dice. I have some dice that basically go up to 100 and I use two of them and I'll pick those numbers and they will be eligible to receive a T-shirt, just in case. Your group will also get a 14% discount if they pay yearly rather than monthly. And monthly costs less than actually one lesson at a martial arts dojo. Also less than one night out as a family to dinner. And so we want to make sure that all those barriers to entry are really low, very low, so that you can jump in, receive the benefits of this training

and also just have fun and have fun learning how to be a more loving human. And all that can happen all at the same time and benefit everybody involved.

Katie: That's why I was excited to share it today, because I think for kids, this is fun, because this feels like something they just get to play that might remind them of stuff they've seen in Marvel movies or in other movies when they get to fight like a pirate. And I know as a mom that on the back end of that they're getting brain benefits and that someone else besides just me, is giving them the benefits of learning to be more curious and to be kind and to have gratitude. And they're getting this moving meditation, but it's not something I have to facilitate. So it's actually, for me, a short break during the day from answering the questions myself or from they get to do this on their own. It's their own little adventure and they can do it at home, so I'm not driving them anywhere, which is a huge plus right now with running six of them around all the time.

And I will put links in the show notes to HomeDojo with the discount link that you mentioned, if they pay yearly. That will be at wellnessmama.fm for any of you guys listening, along with show notes I've been taking this whole time. And some additional resources like the TED Talk we mentioned and the books we've mentioned. As I expected, our time flew by because this is a topic I personally love and care about and have benefited from and my kids have as well. And it's exciting to see this now being available to other kids. A couple of questions I love to ask at the end of interviews. The first being if there is a book or a number of books that have profoundly influenced your life personally, and if so, what they are and why.

Alex: Yeah, I have a few that come to mind. One is something that challenged me spiritually. Spiritually, because I went to Liberty University and got a degree in Bible. And so naturally, when you go to theology class, you develop pretty hard line opinions on what things are being said in Scripture, and so you get used to that kind of atmosphere. But there's this course, it's called A Course in Miracles, and it is a ten-minute meditation each day, and it will challenge your sense of spirituality. And I don't mind that challenge because, truth is. Okay, that's a full sentence. I know it sounds weird, but truth is. Therefore, when you go and explore spiritually, you will find eventually you will find truth. Even if you get confused for a little while or you get challenged, if you could just drop it for a day and be curious like we were talking about, then eventually you will come to a sense of truth. And that will happen all on its own, because it is what exists.

I like to liken that to the ground. So we can build all the buildings we want on the ground. And that's not for everybody. One day those buildings disappear, but always the ground is there. Whenever you step, it does not take sight to know where the ground is. You can just walk on the ground, touch the ground, feel the ground. If you lose your sense of where the ground is, you just sit down. The ground is there and you'll find the ground. And that's how I feel about truth. And spiritual exploration.

Number two would be Letting Go, which is by David R. Hawkins. He wrote this book also with a spiritual purpose, and it gives you the emotional tools and techniques needed to help transform your life from anger, apathy, pride, into courage, willingness, joy, peace, and beyond. Because there are layers beyond that as well, and that's mentioned in different texts, such as, like, The Peace That Surpasses Understanding. There's

something beyond that, and he gives you the tools to help you experience that within yourself and your prayer life and your meditation in whatever your spiritual practice is. Because at some point it starts all blend together.

A novel I want to recommend to not kids, this is not for kids, but Red Rising, the Red Rising series. It was so inspiring for me that I wrote multiple manuscripts. I wrote multiple novels that I never published. I loved that story in the realm the world of just exploring creativity so much that I wound up writing probably a million words of fiction.

Katie: I love it. I will put links to all of those in the show notes as well, and I would second all of those recommendations. You can find those at wellnessmama.fm. And I will say my older kids enjoyed Red Rising, but I agree, don't let little ones read it. That's probably a little bit mature for little kids, but my teenagers have enjoyed it as well. And then lastly, any parting advice for the listeners today that could be related to something we've talked about or entirely unrelated?

Alex : Oh, yeah, absolutely. Just at one time during the day, stop, take a breath, and let all, everything come to rest and just look around and notice the present moment. Just notice the present moment. Witness it, experience it. Don't, you don't need to identify with it. Just take a breath, let all the tension melt. Like you could even make a deal with yourself. I'm going to let everything go entirely for the next 30 seconds and just enjoy wherever I am, whatever this is, find humor in it, gratitude, anything you don't, just let it go once per day, just for 30 seconds.

Katie: I love that. It's great advice. And I'll actually link to a children's book as well that my youngest has been enjoying. That's similar to that, learning to be present. And it talks about having a problem and feeling stressed and this problem following you around and getting bigger and bigger. And then when the child turns on and finally looks at the problem, it realizes that inside of the problem is opportunity. And it's this beautiful thing and there's gratitude there. And that's been a fun one for kids, but I love for adults, just that centering practice I think is so valuable. And I think this has been a really fun episode that hopefully will be a tool that many, many families can use for calmer kids who get to really nurture some of these qualities like curiosity and kindness, which we can all benefit from more of in our lives. So thank you so much for your time today and for creating this resource for kids that I will definitely recommend. Make sure you guys check it out in the show notes, but thanks, Alex, for being here today.

Alex: Thank you for having me. It's been lovely talking to you.

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

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