Episode 793: Life Skills for Kids and Independence vs Protection with Katie Kimball
Child: Welcome to my Mommy’s podcast.

This episode is brought to you by ARMRA Colostrum. And I just recently discovered this and have been experimenting and really enjoying this for especially the skin and hair benefits, but the benefits are so much more beyond that. Colostrum is the first nutrition we receive in life, and it is an exclusive source of all of the essential nutrients we need in order to thrive. And ARMRA Colostrum specifically is proprietary concentrate of bovine colostrum that harnesses over 400 functional nutrients to strengthen your immune barriers, which is your body’s inside suit of armor and your first line of defense. Colostrum is well researched to strengthen immunity, ignite metabolism, fortify gut health, promote hair growth and skin radiance, which is what I’ve been seeing, and support fitness performance and recovery, which is what I’ve been testing for myself and for my older kids who are athletes.

A lot of people also turn to this for immune-specific benefits because it supports the gut wall in a very specific way. And when these are comprised, it leads to kind of a break in the critical line of defense against everything in our environment that could make us sick. And I love ARMRA because 3rd party research trials show their immune protective qualities begin working in under two hours. And research studies document that those consuming bovine colostrum have less severe cold and flu symptoms, a faster recovery time, and more. And I’ve been somewhat mega dosing this, taking 3 to 4 or I’ll admit sometimes even up to 8 scoops per day, and I feel good about this because theirs is sustainably sourced and it’s a bioactive whole food. So it’s not actually a supplement, it’s a whole food. And it can be added to cold liquids or foods, or I often just dry scoop into my mouth and drink some water.

We’ve worked out a special offer for my audience, for you guys, to receive 15% off your first order. You can go to tryarmra.com/mama15 and use code MAMA15 to get 15% off your first order. So again that’s tryarmra.com/mama15 to save 15%.

This podcast is brought to you by Jigsaw Health, who you might have heard me talk about before. But today I want to talk about their new collagen. And in my house, we go through a lot of collagen. I consume quite a bit for keeping my joints and tendons healthy as I get older and work out a whole lot. And also for the potential anti-aging benefits as I’m now aware of this as I get older. Theirs is really cool and unique because it uses three clinically tested bioactive collagen peptides that are clinically tested to promote the growth and healing of new cartilage. They’re clinically tested to support mobility in healthy individuals. They're clinically tested to have a positive influence on cartilage tissue regeneration, bone density, and to stimulate healthy skin metabolism and promote firmer and smoother skin, which is one of the benefits I'm after. And they're clinically tested to promote growth and health of fingernails, which I noticed very rapidly when I started increasing my collagen production. I love that theirs is unflavored and dissolves really easily. So it’s easy to put into almost any food or drink or even my morning coffee. And it has 17 grams of protein per serving. It's of course grass fed, and it includes hyaluronic acid, which we're seeing increasing studies talk about from an anti-aging perspective. I keep a canister of it in my kitchen and my kids will add to smoothies or to food. I add it to most drinks that I consume. And you can find out more or get your own by going to wellnessmama.com/go/jigsawcollagen.

Hello, and welcome to The Wellness Mama Podcast. I'm Katie from wellnessmama.com, and I'm here with a dear friend of mine who's also named Katie, Katie Kimball, whose work I love. She's the national voice of Healthy Kids Cooking, and as a former teacher, two-time TEDx speaker, writer, and mom of four who founded the Kids Cook Real Food eCourse. She is an expert at a lot of the things we go into today. She has a blog called Kitchen Stewardship that has a tremendous amount of great resources, and she has something that we talk about today that I absolutely love, which is a summer program for kids called Life Skills Now, and we talk about why these life skills are so important today, and the balance of independence versus protection, and the sliding scale of responsibility, so many aspects of parenting, but I think this resource is so valuable for the
summer when kids don't have school as a focus, and it teaches them things that are both very fun for them and very applicable for the rest of their lives. I absolutely love the work that Katie does. It's always so much fun to get to chat with her, so let's jump in now. Katie Kimball, welcome back.

Katie: Thank you so much, other Katie.

Katie: Well, I'm so excited to get to have another conversation with you. And yeah, I love that we're both Katie's and have been real-life friends for a long time as well. You even have one of my kids staying at your house very graciously for three weeks right now. So our families have known each other for a long time. And I know we share a lot of commonalities in the way we think about raising kids. And I'm excited to have that conversation and record it today, especially because you do such amazing work with helping kids actually integrate real-life skills. And I want to really delve into why this is so important and why it's also so missing in today's society in some ways. So as a broad jumping in point, can we just address and you kind of give us an overview of why life skills are even important and why it's worth putting in the effort to raise independent kids?

Katie: Yeah, I think we've got to think long term, right? Like, I don't want to send my kids out into the world who don't know how to brush their teeth, pack their lunch, figure out how to get from one place to another. My daughter was just asking her friends where they got their hair done because she's trying to price out balayage that she wants to do. She said, Mom, none of them even know. Their parents drive them and their parents pay for it. They don't even know where they go. And I thought, I mean, that's simple, but it's kind of a microcosm of the parents doing for. And I think you mentioned that the life skills are missing. And I think it's becoming a generational thing that the more convenience was infused into society, right, starting in whenever the 50s. I mean, we're not Little House on the Prairie anymore, right? There's been some shifts since Ma Ingalls. And particularly, I think our parents' generation had this feel that if we can make our kids' lives easier, that's what we want to do because that's a gift to them. But unfortunately, I think not knowing much about life as kids made our adulthoods harder. Then we had to learn it all on the fly. But we're still perpetuating that cycle and doing things for our kids, thinking we're helping them when we're actually not.

So why are life skills important? It really comes down to confidence and being protective of kids' mental health. The statistics are so alarming. It just scares me every time I see a new study come out, especially in the last five years, last 10 years. There's anxiety and depression in teens is increasing at a monumental rate right now. About one in three teens will experience an anxiety disorder that doesn't even count depression. And by the way, it's 38% for girls. So we know our girls are a little more tender. They're struggling a lot more with their worries than the guys. So I mean, 40%. That's a lot.

And so how do we raise kids' self-esteem? How do we reduce their anxiety? Well, we reduce their anxiety by giving them confidence because we feel anxious when we don't have control, right? When we don't feel like we have any agency in this situation. And if we don't feel like we can do anything, either because we don't have the skill or we don't have the confidence, that's going to increase our anxiety. So I just feel like this is our gift to our kids is that we can give them skills that they can accomplish, which will then raise their confidence and raise their agency and self-esteem in pretty much any situation. So if we want to raise capable kids, we want them to be capable with life skills. That's what life is all about.

Katie: Yeah, I love that perspective and the idea of giving them opportunities to actually learn and overcome and try things in a low-risk way while they are still living with us to build that confidence and hopefully foster an attitude that when presented with a challenge in adult life, their mentality is, even if I don't know already, I know how to figure it out or I know that I can figure it out. I know there's also the question of we hear so much about AI right now and that AI is going to do everything for us at some point. And so I'm curious your perspective on how this fits into the practical life skills standpoint, because I mean, at the very base level,
certainly I hope AI is not going to be getting us dressed for ourselves or feeding us. There's still going to be some life skills, but I think it's even beyond that, especially when you touch on the mental health side. So I'm curious how you see AI fitting into this going forward.

Katie: Yeah, that's such a good question and such a frightening question for me. We're just coming off Super Bowl weekend as we record this. And I saw this new commercial that felt, it felt aspirational and inspirational. It was all these people of different ages and genders saying, they say I can't do this because X. They say I can't do such and such because of Y. And I thought, oh, this is like so sweet, right? I'm getting emotionally invested. And then it flips to, but with AI, I can do it all. And the only skill that all the people in the commercial had was typing a prompt into AI. And I thought, oh, I don't like that. That like that just made me feel empty and really a lot of tension and friction because I thought, really? AI is the answer to self-confidence and self-determination?

So, I don't know if I'm down with that, but computers, robots, technology, AI, they are here to stay. And so, you know, what do we need to build for our kids? Apparently, we should teach them to write good chat GPT prompts. But aside that, we've got to teach them how to learn, how to take steps forward in the world, right? So, I don't know, I was thinking about some of the skills or accomplishments that I had in the 80s and 90s, right? Like, I knew how to make mixed tape. Like, I knew how to look things up in the library card file. I knew how to use an encyclopedia. And I don't look back and think, gosh I wish I hadn't learned that because now I don't need it, right? Because in the process of learning, I understood how to learn, how to problem solve, how to sort information. And so, our kids have to have an arena. They have to have a sandbox in which to play. And it's the world, right? So, if we can give them the tools called life skills, okay, maybe they won't need to know how to check their oil in 20 years, right? And car engines might change. Maybe they won't even need to know how to sweep the floor because everyone will have a robotic vacuum. But they're still learning how to problem solve, how to follow a process, how to have a hard work ethic. Oh, man, is that missing in our younger generations? I don't want my kids to turn out that way. I don't want my kids to be sitting back and letting others do their work for them. So I just think we are building habits for our kids. And if life skills that allow them to move forward confidently and have good habits now, if that's the answer, and I think it is, we've really got to teach them that.

I think about, so my nine-year-old, he's in third grade, and we bike Gabe to school almost every day, unless there's snow. We live in Michigan. So there's a little span of time where we can't. But I always think about the habits and the personality traits that he's building. Like he knows that he can get himself from place to place. Regardless of what he's sitting on or in as technology changes. That's a good habit, right? I am the agent of my transportation. He really knows how to look around and how to pay attention to other people. We talk all the time about, oh my goodness, these cars with tinted windows, Katie. They're terrible because we can't make eye contact with the driver. We're not sure what they're doing. Like my nine-year-old knows, I think, better than most adults how we ought to communicate as drivers with our blinkers, you know, with not rolling while someone is there. And there's just a caution in a dangerous situation that he's building that, again, he might not bike to work as a 40-year-old. And that's okay. But a lot of these habits of paying attention to the world are indispensable.

Katie: Yeah, I love that perspective. And I'm sure he must have so much confidence, too, from the repetition of having built that habit and navigating the external world in a way a lot of kids don't get to in today's world. And I think that's a great point about tech as well. And the fact that these things are not going away. So it's not that we want to ignore them or live in a cave and avoid them. But it does seem even more important to learn how to use them as an effective tool versus a replacement for innate human qualities that we're losing because of technology. And I know there's that whole conversation with social media as well. But I remember thinking back, I don't remember it well, but the era before the internet when there used to be that argument
of like, oh, it's a lack of access to information. If only people had this information, then they would be healthy or they would do this. And we can now, I think, definitively say it was not just access to information that was the problem. There's the human element, the integration, the using skills in a practical way within our lives. And we do have the internet. We do have access to learn almost anything at any time. But we need those core human skills to have the desire to learn things, the ability to integrate skills, and the mental health side like you talked about.

I know I've mentioned on this podcast before that one principle I have with my kids is that I stop doing things for them once they're capable of doing it themselves. And I always give the caveat that doesn't mean I never do bonding activities with them because they're like, I might braid my daughter's hair, even though she can braid her own hair because it's a chance to spend time with her. But I'm not going to do her laundry for her once she's capable of doing her laundry for her. Or the example we talked about before we started recording is once my kids are capable of driving and have their driver's license, I'm no longer their chauffeur. They can choose not to drive. I will never force them to drive their siblings. But if they want to go do fun activities, they're now capable of transporting themselves. But I know when I talk about those things, I sometimes get the pushback of kind of like, what about the bonding side? What about protecting your kids? And isn't it kind of like slave labor just to make your kids do all these things for themselves in your home? And I'm sure you've gotten that too. So I would love your perspective on the balance of giving kids responsibility and real-life skills versus quote-unquote child labor that we're making them do all these things.

Katie: Yeah, the chore wars are real, so to speak, where there's a whole group of people who say, you know, we shouldn't give our kids any responsibilities because it's our responsibility as the parents to do for them, to make them feel comfortable and loved and bonded. It's just misguided. It's just plain old misguided. There's a great sociology research study where the sociologists traveled to other countries and they were looking at what kids do, what responsibilities kids have. And when they were in Guatemala, they were listening to eight-year-olds talk about, oh, I get home from school and I do the laundry and I help my mama with the dinner. And the sociologists, American, kind of looked at each other and thought, this is very different than our country. This is not what we experience at home because not only were these children doing lots of family responsibilities, but they were so proud of them. The sociologists could tell they really had this deep sense of ownership.

And as they dove in deeper, what they determined was that when children are taught life skills early enough that they still have intrinsic motivation, that intrinsic motivation remains. When you wait to teach life skills, household chores, whatever you call them, until the child has lost some of that intrinsic motivation, then it's a battle. And it becomes something that the kids don't want to do, aren't proud of, and don't feel ownership in. And so that intrinsic motivation, we've all seen it. Anyone who has a child under age five, they're saying, oh, mama, can I help? Daddy, can I dust? Grandma, can I cook with you? Right? They want that. And it is a bonding thing. They want to be with their adult. They want to be near you. They want to be doing what you're doing. And unfortunately, in America, our tendency is to push them away because they will slow us down. Right. And so we've got to fight against that tendency and just tell yourself, man, if you can let that child who's asking to help actually help, sure, you may be slowed down in the moment. But when they're eight and 10 and other kids in their peer group are saying, oh, mom, I don't want to cook. I don't want to do this, they will be much more likely to have that thread of intrinsic motivation that has lasted because you didn't break it. Again, this is never magic pixie dust.

My kids still complain about chores, but it's also research, you know, I can remember my daughter, I have one daughter, she's now 15, but she learned to cook when she was seven. She's using sharp knives and the stove and everything as a seven-year-old second grader. And she was always so excited. She would make these elaborate menus for Mother's Day and for Father's Day and make like, I don't even know, 20 course meals.
We'd have options, you know, for birthdays or just, you know, a day in the summer when she had extra time. It was her play. It was her joy. And quite honestly, she has never lost the joy of it. She still loves at 15, looking up a new recipe she made like restaurant style orange chicken a couple of weeks ago. Super hard work, like so many steps, huge mess, but it was delicious. And she was so proud of it. And so, yes, sweeping, dusting, I'm not really seeing the intrinsic motivation staying. I got to be honest. But at least with cooking and some of the jobs, like I'm seeing the results of that study also in my house.

And I think, I think a phrase that I want parents to remember is require the work, not the results. Right. So rather than requiring a perfectly clean room or rather than requiring that a child eat their meal. Rather than requiring that they learn their multiplication facts by a certain date, which is just not individualized, we can require that they do the work, right? That you at least spend the time dusting. Oh, it's not perfect. Let's do the work to, you know, some finishing touches, I like to call them. You don't want to eat your meal? Okay, but you still need to do the work of sitting at the family dinner table, of allowing that plate to stay in front of you. Right, of maybe serving to other people so they get exposure. Oh, you're struggling with your multiplication tables. Well, I'm not going to say you have to learn them by X date, but you got to do the work 10 minutes a day, right, so that you can get better. So that's kind of my thought that I really want to give parents is require the work, not the results.

And for sure, that connection, I mean, you mentioned the bonding. I think if it ever feels like child labor to you when you're giving your kids chores, you probably aren't connecting with them enough because that's huge. That connection point of being close with your kids, that is the shield against anxiety and depression, right? That is their root or their foundation, that safe place they can come home to when the world is really difficult. And so I can't overemphasize the fact that all of this stems from a really strong relationship with your kids, whether they're toddlers or teens. I think of my own husband. He's kind of bummed out looking back at his childhood. He said, my dad was really handy and he did a lot of stuff, but he, he never invited me to do more than hold his flashlight. He just wasn't that kind of guy. He wouldn't slow down. And so my husband kind of came into adulthood having to rely on YouTube to teach him to do things around the house, which is fine. I mean, we have that YouTube, but I really see it as a missed bonding opportunity for his dad. And I think my husband, even if he didn't use the exact skills because times have changed, he would have had so much more confidence. As an adult with house projects, because both of us, we were just bumbling idiots, Katie. First got married, like replacing one square tile in a bathtub took six months. So we both could have used a lot more confidence that I think our parents could have given us, you know, had they really connected over authentic skills instead of looking for other ways, the kind of artificial ways to connect, like, you know, going out to a game or trampoline park or wherever people connect.

Katie: That's such a good point. And I love that line about requiring the work, not the results. And that probably naturally also puts you in a mindset of bonding versus judging the quality of what happens from it, which is, I think, a really valuable mindset shift. And I know also the parents who do all the things for their kids, that likely or obviously comes from a place of love as well. Like, I don't ever want to talk badly about those parents because I know it comes from a great intention and from love. I just think it's important to have these conversations and kind of question and get back to the first principles of like, we know it comes from love. We know we all want the best for our kids. When we take it all the way back to first principles, what are the actual steps to help them get there in a lifelong way? Not that they have a carefree childhood with no responsibility and then are miserable as adults, but how do we actually build a foundation that is lifelong for their happiness?

You also touched on the ownership and the responsibility side, and you're right. I think often it's easy to ignore the little kids wanting to do that because it is more work, but that joy they get when they get to do it themselves is so exciting. If we can have the patience when they're young, I've seen that same thing with my
kids too. It lasts when they're older because they actually got to feel the ownership of it. To me, that's also where that idea of not doing things for them when they're capable comes from a little bit is that if they're capable, it's in my mind an insult to them for me to take over and do it for them because that's an insult to their agency as a child, to their autonomy, and to their ability to be capable within their own life.

I know this also kind of springboards into the question of where's that balance of protecting our kids and keeping them safe, which I know is a common goal of parents, and making sure that they have a safe place to take risk and learn things and fail sometimes and the freedom to explore their world in that way. And I know you speak to this so beautifully as well. So can you just touch on, you know, the people who want to keep their kids safe and that maybe is their impediment for wanting their kids to get to try some of these things?

Katie: For sure. We really have that helicopter parenting going on in the culture. And I agree with you, it definitely comes from a place of love. But as we bubble wrap our children, we kind of teach them that they need someone else to keep them safe, which is not something they can carry on into their teenage life and into adulthood, right? If I'm a child who knows that I can't keep myself safe, holy cow, how anxiety-inducing is that? You know, when you're at high school or middle school by yourself, or you get behind the wheel of a car. Oh my goodness. Like I need my kids to know that they have that agency.

And I mean, I'm a big fan of knives, knives in the hands of all children, right? Butter knives for our toddlers, paring knives by the time they're four to seven, depending on their maturity and chef's knives from there on up. Kid number three for me, John came to me and asked if he could use a chef's knife, learn a chef's knife when he was seven. And he had been using a paring knife since he was four or five. And so I thought, of course, like it's time to time to graduate up. And a lot of parents would freak out seeing a second grader with a chef's knife in their hands, you know, but I really feel like kids need to know what danger looks like. If they're not in dangerous situations, how will they know whether to run towards something, run away from it, or cautiously approach it? And so I want them to know what danger looks and feels like so that they have that cautious approach. Yes. Let's use knives, but let's respect the fact that it is sharp and it could hurt you. And so you're going to learn the strategies to avoid getting hurt. And if you do get hurt, we're going to learn resilience and we're going to bounce back and, you know, get back on the horse.

I feel that these beneficial risks, climbing a tree, crossing the road, riding your bike by yourself, using a sharp knife, they, they are beneficial risks because they are somewhat of an inoculation against fear. And against anxiety because you know, oh, this was a hard thing. This was dangerous, right? Four-year-old using a paring knife. But I did it. And that's a chip on the side of the scale that says, I can do this. I have agency. I have confidence. As you said, I have autonomy and I'm capable. And the more we can weight down that side of the scale when the world is saying, you can't do this, you're weak. You need the media to tell you what to think. You need your teachers to tell you what to learn. We need to really fight hard, I think, for our side.

And I know with our Life Skills Now summer camp, where we've been running summer camps the last couple of summers, teaching life skills, everything from how to create a budget to learning coping skills for stress management, to literally how to use a cordless drill, like very, very targeted skills. And so many parents talk about the independence and the confidence. And I especially love hearing stories like an eight-year-old girl who's just really shy, really reserved, really sensitive, saying, I want to go to the library and I'm going to ask the librarian the question that I need instead of you, mom. Like, oh, it just makes me want to cheer and jump up and down. And another great story is a little boy who was afraid of the stove. And he did our stove safety class a couple of years ago in Life Skills Now. And then he said, OK, like, I'm confident enough. I just saw this kid on the screen do it. I'm going to boil a pot of water to make mac and cheese. And he loved it. You know, he felt that confidence. And so I do think that that inoculation against fear and anxiety, that's what I want my kids to have and your kids to have and your listeners' kids to have as they enter the very tenuous world of middle and high school.
Katie: Yeah. Oh, I love that. And I agree with you when it comes to the knife skill stuff. It's also remembering. Me as an adult, not long ago, cut off the corner of my finger with a chef's knife because I got distracted in the kitchen. And I've driven a friend to the ER who stabbed her hand with a paring knife while she was opening an avocado. Like these, we're not immune from this as adults either. But like you're saying, we never get to have that experience. So now the knife seems scary to begin with. And we're living on our own. And then now we cut part of our finger off. We don't have any context for how to navigate that situation. And no safety net where we got to learn it. And so I think your perspective on that is so valuable.

And I recently saw a video of a three-year-old and probably this three-year-old had taken your Kids Cook Real Food course because he made pancakes from start to finish, like mashed banana pancakes. And he's doing all the cooking and he's doing everything right. And the comments blew me away because these people were like, this is so dangerous. How could you let a three-year-old use this stove? And of course, the mom's right there. And I'm like, no, this kid is incredible. And he has confidence. And they weren't the prettiest pancakes. But the look of excitement on that kid's face when he had a plate of pancakes he made himself. I feel like we are really doing kids a disservice when we rob them of those opportunities. And I know you have great ways and ways to build these in at various ages. It's not that we're throwing in our two-year-old to cooking with a chef's knife and using an open fire to flambé things. There's age-appropriate steps here. And when it comes to outside skills, like I know my mom was somewhat risk-averse. And so I often got told, like, don't do that. Be careful. And with my kids, I've tried to do that. I've tried to reframe that and say, like, oh, what's your plan with climbing that really tall tree or getting on the roof? Like, what's your plan after that? And let it be, again, their thought process. But to give them the trigger of, have you thought about the next step instead of, like, oh, don't do that because I know better than you. But for the parents wondering what that progression looks like, how do you figure out the age appropriate skills for kids at different ages? And I know they're also all very individual. So not every four-year-old is going to be on the exact same path. But how do you get a good gauge for which ones to start with at which ages?

Katie: Following the child's interest is a great place to start. And I know when we taught our kids basic household cleaning tasks, for whatever reason, I held back the toilet. It just felt like that was too much to ask. They would be too grossed out. So I would always say, okay, you know, you guys clean the rest of the bathroom. Here's how to do it. I'm going to keep the toilet. And what legitimately happened was that my youngest, Gabe, was about eight, and everyone else sort of had their chores. And he didn't really want to clean the floor. And he asked, can you teach me how to clean the toilet? Because nobody else knows how. It was like he saw an opportunity where he could be his own little person. You know, the youngest child always gets left out.

So, you know, I taught him how to clean the toilet like I teach any skill, which is I do it first and talk it out ad nauseum. Every little possible detail you can think of. And then allow him to do it right away the same day. And then the next many times, the next handful of times, he would be doing it while I was in the room. By the way, bathrooms are a great place to do this because you can do all the other cleaning while the child is doing their one area. So it's super efficient. You can easily keep an eye on them and, you know, just kind of redirect and have you thought of this? And, you know, do you remember what's next? All of these things. So now he's the toilet kid. And he's still needing a little bit of redirection. He forgets parts at times. But he's nine. So that's okay. So it's all about that require the work, not the results.

And I've done the same thing with dinner when my kids started making their own dinner. So John is 12 and he just kind of started having a dinner per week assigned to him this year. And what we like to do is choose one recipe. So again, you got to build cooking skills first before you pass over a dinner. Obviously, there's a progression there. But we knew that he could do it because he had all the skills to make tacos. So every Wednesday, John makes tacos. He started out the first probably month with my husband doing all of that side...
by side with him. And then a couple of weeks where my husband would be nearby on the same floor of the house for questions. And then we let him go. And now he’s, I mean, he’s timed down to the minute. He knows exactly when he needs to start. And he’s actually faster at making a meal than I am because he doesn’t get distracted by all the other things that need to get done in the kitchen. So it’s pretty awesome.

So that’s what I would say is with any task, do it with them or do it for them. Show them. Do it with them. Do it while you are near. Have them do it while you’re near. And then leave them alone to do it on their own and have conversations about those results. But we’re going to require the work, not the results. And then as far as the time, raise the bar. They are always ready a little faster than you think, but ultimately kind of follow the child and see what they’re interested in and challenge them a little bit so that we have that gradual release of responsibility from toddler to teen, you know, where they just continue to add bit by bit over the years.

Katie: Oh, and that springboards into another area that I’m excited to talk about because we’ve talked about it in real life before, which is that sort of sliding scale gradual handoff from toddlers needing a lot more involvement to teenagers needing obviously much less so. And I would say even psychologically being wired that way, where I’ve had this conversation before where toddlers need to experience what their boundaries of their physical environment are in order to feel safe. Whereas teenagers, as they move toward independence, actually at times will try to identify their boundaries in order to see if they can surpass them. And at least with my teenagers, I found artificially creating boundaries that don’t need to be there often actually just lead to strife with teenagers. And in our house, I’ve reversed the Spider-Man saying. So instead of with great power comes great responsibility, it’s with great responsibility comes great power. And if you show me that you are responsible and trustworthy, I have no desire to limit your freedom as long as you are being a kind human in the world and doing the things that you committed to doing. I don’t want to limit your freedom. I want you to be able to fly. But I know that, like I said, it’s not an overnight process. It’s a gradual handoff and a bittersweet one as a mom, because I would never tell them that, but they still feel like my babies. But how do you navigate that? Because you have young ones and now a full-grown adult human. And so what did that process look like for you?

Katie: I do. That full grown adult human, 18 year old Paul. It’s absolutely wild to think that he was my baby at one point and smaller than me. His voice was not low. It’s definitely, yeah, let’s think about the phrases, gradual release of responsibility. And whether they’re toddlers or teens, Katie, I actually really like to give boundaries within which the child has agency. Those boundaries just get bigger, you know, when they’re big kids. So for the toddler, it might be, would you like to wear this outfit or this outfit today? So they have some choice. They have some agency, but there are also clear boundaries.

For a teenager, we're going to be having a lot more conversations. And a lot more input from them on where those boundaries should be. Right. So what I was just asking John, who's a seventh grader over the weekend, we were trying to figure out how to help him learn to manage screen time and not fall into YouTube for hours. Basically, that was our goal. And I said, well, what do you think is an appropriate screen boundary for a seventh grader? His first reaction was kind of funny. He said, well, I can tell you there's nobody to compare to because nobody in my grade has any screen boundaries. Okay, well, this is where we’re pushing upstream, right? If we’re going to be parents who are really intentional, we might not have a lot of peers who are doing what we do, which means we have to create it, right? We have to make things up as we go along, which is really, really, really hard. So how do we have these conversations with our kids, you know, if we’re going to require going to require them to attend school. We might require them to attend church. We can’t require A grades and we can't require faith. Require the work, not the results that they show up.

So we have a lot more conversation with our teens and realizing that when they’re 15, like my daughter, that’s three years away from making all her own choices, right? So how can she make those choices? I do think there's a big debate though about how and why teens push those boundaries. Like I've seen Dave Asprey, who
I know is a big researcher. He's a super smart guy, knows a lot of stuff. And he says, teenagers are wired to push away from their parents. So let them do it. And they'll come back in their twenties. Dr. Gordon Neufeld, who is an attachment developmental psychologist, I believe, he says that's exactly the opposite, that teens, that all humans are wired to be close to the person with whom they are most deeply attached. So he would say our problem when teens are pushing away is that they are most deeply attached one level down to their peers. And that which means that they're transmitting all of their values, all of their choices, all of their fashion, movies, music in a peer-oriented way. And he says we've got to work really hard to keep that most strong bond, that deepest bond with the parents so that particularly values and culture can transmit vertically from generation to generation. So I don't know exactly who's right. Think it's probably somewhere in between, but I think about Dr. Neufeld a lot when I think about how am I interacting with my teens? You know, how are the ways in which I might be pushing them away and pushing them to their peers? I want them to have good friends, right? But I also want them to have their friends over to my house, at least sometimes to, you know, so that I know their friends and so I can bond with their friends.

So far, at least with the oldest, that's great. Like he has a girlfriend and she's over every Sunday, the entire day. That's just become their habit. We did not initiate that, but it just happens. Like she comes over, she stays for all Sunday meals and I love it. Like it brings my heart such joy that I can have a relationship with my kids' friends too. So that's teenager, teenager mom life is the hardest thing I've ever done. I'm not going to lie about that to your listeners, but I do think there are some paths that we can follow that have been well-trodden. And one is to keep really strong bonds. Another is to create those boundaries within which the kids can make choices. And I think the third is to have them on board, to have conversations about where those boundaries should be. So they don't feel like they're unfair and artificial.

Katie: I agree. And I've noticed with my oldest, at least, he's kind of shown enough responsibility where there are very few of any external boundaries that I'm setting because I have found his internal boundaries are stricter than I would have set them. But it's shifted into that, I agree with you, I think it's that still belonging and significance piece that kids have that doesn't go away when they're teenagers. The nature of it has shifted, but we still have those conversations. And like you, I love being the house where all children are always welcome. I will feed any children who ever are at my house, and it will be hopefully healthy food. But I wanted that to be that place where it was welcoming and my kids felt comfortable bringing their friends. And I'm really joyful to see that actually playing out.

And also just for, I feel like for sake of being transparent, I've noticed I've had this goal of helping my kids be independent and self-sufficient in so many ways. And I realized recently I had hit a fall down point when it came to certain aspects of health and wellness, because that's so ingrained for me. And that's even online what I do. And so my daughter, is a high school athlete and she pushes herself very, very, very hard, which means she's often sore or needing to recover or has shin splints or whatever it is. And I was the one reminding her to do the red light, putting out her supplements for her. And then she started like really depending on me and coming to me with like, why does this hurt? What can I take? What can I do? So we recently had a conversation where I apologized to her for that and said, you know, you are the one choosing to be an athlete and it does have to be your choice. And I will 100% support you in anything that you need help with. But this is now yours to own. And I will order the supplements you need. And I will make sure you have the tools you need. But I'm not going to emotionally own it for you. If you want to pursue this thing and this is your dream, it's yours to own. And so we've been in that handoff. But I realized as much as I talk about this, I had a huge blind spot with that until recently.

I think with teenagers, there's also the aspect, and I know you did a whole TEDx on this, of critical thinking. And I think that especially is so important in the modern world because like we talked about earlier, there's no shortage of information. So they're going to constantly be bombarded with information and opinions and
everything else. But that critical thinking piece is becoming, I feel like, even more important. So can you just touch on some of the points related to imparting critical thinking skills in our kids? And then I also do want to go deep on life skills and what's in there too.

Katie: So important, critical thinking. And one of the banners that I like to wave is that a lot of people say you can't teach critical thinking to little kids because their brains aren't developed enough. They haven't passed the age of logic. They're still seeing the world as black and white. And what I want to tell parents of little ones is they are wired for the foundations of first principles of critical thinking, particularly curiosity. It is up to us not to parent them out of that, right? If they ask you a question, fire a question back because we shut down their questions if we either immediately answer or if we tell them to stop asking questions because they're annoying us because it's the 27th question of the hour, right? And so that's, oh man, with the little kids, like how do we just let their curiosity happen and teach them that it never, ever hurts to ask a question. Once they hit about fifth grade, they're going to learn the hard way that sometimes they don't get what they want. You know, but I know I can remember even when Leah, who again is a sophomore now, when she was in fifth grade, there were some field trip groups and she was with no friends. And so she said, mom, this is going to be horrible. I don't want to go on the field trip. Like, how can you fix this? And I said, how can you fix this? She ended up emailing her teacher requesting a switch of group, which was already stated this was not happening. No one can switch groups. And the teacher did give her the group she wanted. And she specifically said, many parents have emailed asking this, but you are the only kid who did it. And that is why I'm saying yes to you and no to everyone else. And that was so empowering to Leah. She became an email writing question asking fiend that fifth grade year. She's like, I'm getting really good at writing emails. This is, you know, because it worked and it's not always going to work quotes. But just that idea of it never hurts to ask, even if you get a no.

So curiosity is huge. And I think adaptability and resilience are the other two traits that we really want to foster in our kids. It's so difficult for kids to switch gears or to deal with things that don't happen the way they expect. So like with my littlest, Gabe, he has such trouble pulling out a book or pulling out of a screen. When it's dinner time or just when his time is up, because we do limit his screen time, gradual release of responsibility. He's still in the timer phase. And so sometimes I'll practice with him. I'll say, okay, Gabe, set your timer for 20 minutes. What are you going to do when that screen timer goes off? And make him choose his next activity so he has something to look forward to. And what are you going to say if mom says it's time for dinner and he'll say, okay, mom, I'm going to wash my hands. I'm like, okay, good. That's great. What's something else you might say? I mean, I want him to practice those just polite, positive words coming out of his mouth because the opposite is he melts down completely. And so adaptability, you know, we've got to give our kids practice in changing gears and being disappointed in not having things turn out the way they want.

And in pretty much that's really related to resilience as well. I know I mentioned we bike our little guy to school every day, and it's about a mile. We cross a few big entrances to buildings and schools. And a year ago, he and my husband actually were hit by a car biking and it's, it's still really emotional. He'll still say from time to time that he thinks of that or that that still scares him. But it was a huge, I mean, core memory. Talk about a core memory. It was a huge pinnacle moment for our family. And what are we going to do now? Are we done biking to school, right? Social media for sure thought we should be done biking him to school when they responded to my share, you know, with all the grace of social media trolls. But we weren't. I mean, he got right back on the bike two days later. We were biking to school, you know, the Monday after the Thursday had happened.

I think it's going to be a critical moment in his life that he was able to take that really scary experience, I think he healed a lot by telling his story to other people, to other kids and having them say, whoa, I can't believe you got hit by a car and you're okay. He's like, yeah, yeah, I still ride my bike. And we just taught, you know, we
taught him to continue. How can we add to our safety measures? He has such a spidey sense now for moving cars. It's uncanny. But I don't think it comes only from fear. Obviously, yes, he doesn't want to get hit again. But we have this family culture of we bike, and we do hard things, and we do dangerous things. And so that's the only way to build the muscle of resilience, right? Like when we weightlift, we break down our muscles and they rebuild. So we get strong. And that's the same with the muscle of resilience. We've got to put our kids in situations where they will be broken down. And that breaks our hearts as moms. But if we are their strong foundation with that connection, that attachment we've been talking about, we can help them grow through it, build the muscle of resilience and come out better for it on the other side.

Katie: That's an incredible story and such great tips. I have a similar mindset when it comes to those core traits and often try to remember in any parenting decision, like, does this nurture those core traits that we're trying to help our kids or does it harm that? And you're right. Sometimes it's heart-wrenching as a mom to let them go through those failures and to let them have to experience the hard things. But I think understanding that foundational aspect of it helps and it helps as a reminder of the communication and that this can be a great aspect and a great chance for bonding and communication and learning for me too.

And speaking of learning for me too, I know you have an incredible summer program that teaches a lot of these life skills we're talking about, not even just the household chores, but how to do things with a car and how to, like you said, use a drill, which I had to learn as an adult. I feel like I need remedial life skills. But what I love about this is that for parents who haven't learned all these things yet, there is now a resource where kids can learn it. And if you are like me, and there's some of them you don't have, you can watch along and learn with them. So can you talk about the life skills course? And I'll make sure it's linked in the show notes as well. Just I love this for parents for the summer when kids are already bored. And if they want to be on screen, this is an awesome way for them to learn something really helpful for the like the trajectory of their life on a screen in the summer.

Katie: Yeah, absolutely. This will be our third season of Life Skills Now Summer Camp. And our goal is really to give kids that confidence. We teach very specific skills, both what I would call soft skills, like coping with stress and communicating with others, eye contact, handshakes, all these kind of traditional things, as well as what I call hard skills. You know, the things on paper. How do you make a budget? How do you change a car tire? We're doing this summer, we're getting bike maintenance, which I'm really excited about because I think that'll really empower the little boys. Like, oh, your bike tire's flat? I can show you how to put a new inner tube on, you know? Like, how amazing will that be? Folding laundry. We've got, oh goodness, what else do we have this summer? They're going to build with wood. They're going to learn to grow lavender. They're going to learn how to make food, healthy food, taste good. Even if the tasty good part isn't so healthy, it doesn't hurt the healthy part. So there's so many, so many skills.

We just filmed, in fact, this weekend, how to order in a restaurant with our little ones and then how to think about tipping. We had a whole panel of four teenagers. Your son is one of them. You didn't even know this yet. We pulled them in and talked about like tip culture and how do you know how much to tip and how to figure that out. And if you're in a group with friends. So we really, really dive deep. And that hopefully will be running every summer, God willing, for sure. 2024 Life Skills Now. And that's free for one week in June. Your readers can get a couple of free workshops, a little previews of the last season at kidscookgrowthfood.com slash wellness life skills. And yes, like you said, it's teaching that stuff that maybe we don't know very well, but we can pull in 50 experts to help us do that for our kids.

Katie: Yeah. And I love it. I think it's such a valuable thing. And I highly encourage you guys to check it out. And I love that my son did that. I didn't even know he did that, but he's my one, just to speak to how different kids from the same inputs can come out so different. He's the one that would like not only order in a restaurant, but if he had his choice, have a two hour conversation with the waiter about everything from history to
politics, to food culture, et cetera, and suits. Whereas a couple of my girls might be like, I have to order myself. I'd rather just not eat. And so I think it's like it meets kids where they are and it helps them really integrate those skills in a fun way too. And I love that you bring kids into even the culture of filming it so that it's visually doable for these kids as they're watching other kids do the same thing. So I just think it's awesome. And I'm a huge fan of the work that you're doing in the world and super grateful for the influence you've been in my kids' lives. And I know now like thousands of other kids as well. Thank you so much for the time. I hope we get to have many more of these conversations, both online and offline. And thank you for being here today.

Katie: That makes my day, Katie. You're very welcome.

Katie: And thank you guys as always 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.

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