



Episode 6. Parenting on the Same Page

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SUMMARY KEYWORDS

boundaries, parent, kids, united, important, children, respect, consequence, feel, dave, deana, thought, blended family, stifled, front, watch, household, team, mom, tracy

SPEAKERS

Deana Thayer, Future Focused Parenting, Kira Dorrian

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What happens when two parent coaches, one a Christian and the other an agnostic Jew, sit down to talk about parenting?
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I'm Deana Thayer
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Welcome to Raising Adults, a podcast about Future Focused Parenting.
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This episode of Raising Adults is brought to you by Tracy Barrett Adams at [CornerstoneHypnotherapy.com](https://www.cornerstonehypnotherapy.com). Are anxiety or trouble sleeping stealing some of that playfulness and joy from your life? Hypnosis can actually help you reclaim a more peaceful mind and a lighter heart. During her online sessions, my colleague Tracy helps clients shift

out of wakeful, anxious cycles to create clarity and improve rest and I can tell you from personal experience, Tracy's awesome. I'm a hypnotherapist and when I need hypnotherapy, Tracy is the lady I see. So mention this podcast and she will give you 20% off your first session. That website is [CornerstoneHypnotherapy.com](https://www.cornerstonehypnotherapy.com).

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Deana Thayer 00:54

Today we're going to talk about a really important issue and that is how you parent as a team with your partner. And being a united front, when you engage with your children, whether that's around really positive things like family time, or when you maybe have to mete out some discipline. So as always, we love to start with our whys. So maybe Kira, you can share a little bit about your why on this one.

K

Kira Dorrian 01:17

Sure. Well, my why was really out of a sheer desire to make things simple. Creating a united front just makes it easy. Dad said no, the answer's no. You know, and it doesn't always make it easy, because sometimes you disagree. And then you have to engage with that. But I wanted to make it simple for us and for our children. I also felt it was just really important that we didn't get into the, I'll go ask mom, you go ask dad, creating division in the household. And I just thought it was important that we as the authority figures in the home, we're just that, and that is that we sort of, for lack of a better word... I don't love phrasing it this way, but that we commanded a certain respect. And it's very hard to command that respect when you are divided. So creating that united front was just really important to us in terms of creating a safe and healthy household with boundaries. Boundaries, as I've talked about before, super important in our family. And so being united helps keep those boundaries intact. And so that's really our why. How about you?

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Deana Thayer 02:23

Yeah, that's great. When my people were little, and I was in my first marriage, my why was very similar to yours. I felt it very important to show Cienna and Marc that mommy and daddy are a team, and that we are kind of as one. When we say yes, it's a yes, no matter who you ask. If we have to say no, the other person would say no too, and that really resonated with me. And it also showed the primacy of that relationship. It sent this message that our relationship was here first. And so we are a team. You are a really welcome addition to this household, but this relationship was here first. And so you're going to see it operate as such, as a team. Now I have such a new and important why, and that is my kids have experienced the ultimate in disunity by going through a divorce. And so it's extra critical to me that my kids see Scott and I as a team, so that they know at

mom's house, Mom and Scott are united, and that is what I can count on. Kids who've been through a divorce need things they can count on and they need consistency. So my why shifted, but it doesn't mean it's any less important. In fact, it may be more so now.

K

Kira Dorrian 03:41

I also think I want to add to that, that one of the things that was important was that the children see us work as a team so that even when we maybe aren't on the same page, they were watching us always get to the same page, which I thought sent the message of this is how you compromise. This is how you discuss, and this is how you work together as a team to find that united goal, right? We talked about being Team Dorrian, and how we are a team as a family. And that was really important too, like Dave and I aren't always naturally on the same page in the moment, and I wanted them to see us work together to get there. So not just having the united front but having them witness how we got there.

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Deana Thayer 04:22

That's really great. So what would you say are some of the ways you go about that? If you're maybe not on the same page at the beginning?

K

Kira Dorrian 04:29

Oh, man. Yeah. I mean, I was thinking about this this morning, kind of knowing we were going to be talking about this today. And one of the key things that we, that I do better than Dave, if I'm being totally honest, is I will follow through, even when I disagree, if he's laid something down. I will angrily pull him aside and let him know I was not best pleased. Dave has this habit of saying that's it, no TV today and I'm like at home that day with them, and he's walking out the door. And I'm like, thanks so much.

D

Deana Thayer 05:02

You're left with that. Yeah, like, I'm so glad you have to actually implement that. But I will often follow it through, because you laid it down. And they need to see that even in those moments, where I'm now going to have to figure out how to cook dinner without them watching TV, Daddy said this, and therefore, I have to follow it through. However, saying that, more often than not, when we disagree, as I said, we try and talk about it. And our general rule of thumb is to let the kids watch it until either there's a resolution, or until we get to a point where maybe we aren't coping so well in the conversation. And then we don't want them to see us explode into all sorts of stuff. So then oftentimes, if we reach a point where we don't think they're going to watch us solve the problem, we'll say, we're

going to go and discuss this privately so that we can get on the same page. And we'll use that dialogue. We are going away to work on getting on the same page. When we come back, we'll have an answer for you. And we always do. So that they see that, you know, oftentimes we can get there in the dialog and they watch us figure it out. But when we can't, that the goal is always the same, that we will get on the same page, and you will have a united front. So that's first and foremost. And then I think also, we have spent a lot of time talking about that concept of team, right? So if they do come to one of us and say, Can I do X, Y, or Z? Oftentimes, we'll say, have you asked your mother, have you asked your father? And if they say yes, we'll say, well, what did they say? That's the answer. So that they get that message again; don't try and play us off of each other. You know, we are different and we have different ideas around the parenting experience. But for both of us, it was always important that those things came together. And so those are some of the ways that we've done it, is just really sending that clear message over and over again, if daddy said that, that's the answer. If daddy said you can't have TV, you can't have TV, right, that we are a team. And we use that word a lot. Like we'll say, well, we're a team. So the answer is x, y, or z. Yeah, that's great. And it's nice that they get to watch you sometimes work it out. I don't know that I've ever heard of a family that does that. So that's really interesting. And I think it's a great idea for our listeners, some people may be feeling a little trepidation to try that. But if you can do it calmly, it is great for kids to get to see problem solving and see that modeled really well. And just, things talked about if you might have different viewpoints. I think that's really great. And it's definitely super different at our house because I'm with you, I think it's so important that kids learn that they can't divide and conquer and separate the parents by asking one separately and then oh, I can probably get a different answer over here. They need to know that they can't do that. Now in my house, we rarely get asked things as a team because the kids will generally go to the biological parent because they see that person as having more authority over them, and rightly so. So what we've done is when we are asked something together, and we don't happen to have either a ready answer, or the same answer, we've gotten comfortable and moved away from being scared of saying, we don't know. And we've just allowed ourselves to be comfortable saying, you know, we don't know yet. Let us chat about that, and we'll get back to you. And then of course we do. Okay, the follow through is critical. You can't tell a child we'll get back to you with an answer and not. But it is a-okay to say, I'm not sure. Especially if you're being asked something you haven't before, or if it's about a new privilege that hasn't been granted previously, or things like that. There is a no harm, no foul in saying, I don't know. Let me talk to Scott and get back to you, or for him to say I'm going to talk to Deana and then we'll let you know. So that's one thing. But another thing that is a little bit different in a blended family is if we truly reach an impasse, then we parent down biological lines. And we don't necessarily do that for every little thing. We've been together long enough as a blended family, that it's certainly fine, for instance, for me to ask the boys to take off their shoes when they come

in the house -we're a no shoe house- or to ask someone to unload the dishwasher. But when it comes to maybe giving out a consequence or something more like that, if we truly aren't seeing that eye to eye, then we would parent down biological lines. So I would maybe defer to him to give out consequences to his biological children and vice versa. And it actually has, it's not, it's fraught with struggle. I don't want to gloss over that at all. And I'm sure those of you listening who are in a blended family know it. Step family stuff, it's, it's tricky, but that has actually prevented a lot of battles, and prevented our children from watching us just totally butt heads or anything like that. We don't want them to see that. And so we will go away, we're not, we're not afraid to do that either. Like you said, we're going to go talk about this. And if we can't come to an agreement, they get to defer to their own parent. And they also tend to take that consequence better from their own parent, too. There's a little bit of this resistance, especially in the early years of a step family, and especially when you have teenagers and all of the beauty that comes with that with hormones and everything, where there is this tendency of, you're not my mom, you're not my dad. So they actually often will receive it better anyway. But it's a great way that you can consider, at least consider using if you're in a blend to say, you know, if we're really stuck, then we'll parent our own people, so to speak.

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Kira Dorrian 10:40

Yeah, no, I think that makes a lot of sense. We when it comes to doling out consequences, as well as providing a united front, we, we never really talked about this. It just kind of naturally happened. But oftentimes, the parent who isn't as heated will dole out the consequence. So if I've been in the situation where it happened, and I'm feeling pretty riled up, Dave will be the one to dole out the consequence, because he will do it in a kinder way. But so that they get the message. This isn't just me who's angry about what happened giving you a consequence. This is us as a team having decided that we need to dole out this consequence. And so we've, we've made some decisions around that as well. And then we also have a rule around safety that Dave and I kind of came around to, which is that whichever parent is most uncomfortable wins. So a great example we, I took our daughter on her own to a barbecue at a lake. And Dave wanted her to wear a life vest. And I didn't think that she needed a life vest because I thought she was a strong enough swimmer. And we kind of went back and forth and back and forth. And ultimately, he said, look, I'm going to feel uncomfortable the whole time you're gone if she's not in the life vest. And so we came to this conclusion that in those situations, whoever is most uncomfortable wins, because everyone needs to be comfortable when it comes to safety. And so that's how we've ultimately handled safety issues. It's like it's fine if one of us isn't as worried. But we have to be a united front. And so we err on the side of the parent who's most concerned.

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Deana Thayer 12:16

That is great. And I think it's also fantastic for things that are really big. We've had another kind of similar situation where it's, we never talked about this, it was kind of unspoken, but in big issues, one no is a no. So for instance, a few years ago, we went through the process to become foster parents, and for a while had even talked about going all the way toward adoption. But we decided if it wasn't both of us so excited and all in, especially when it comes to a baby and another little person's life, one no is a no for the couple. And that can help when you're being united with little eyes watching too. They see that on a big thing I know will make this other person say, I love you enough that that's going to be a no for me to. You don't want to pull someone along, dragging their heels for something as big as adoption or something like that. That's just one example I could think of. But we really have that view that on big things, unless we're both really all in then it's a no from us. And that that's okay.

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Kira Dorrian 13:23

We often will consider the kids' opinions and thoughts in a matter as well. And this is definitely where the emotional intelligence piece comes in, in our family. A great example is, so my kids are on the brink of first grade right now. And we... they're twins, and they have been in the same class up until this point. And we were trying to decide, do we split them? Do we not split them? And so my husband who's also a twin really wanted to keep them together until third grade. And I was sort of not quite sure what to do and wanting to almost err on the side of what he thought was best just because he has more experience as a twin. But we wanted to ask the kids their opinions too. And we brought them into the fold. And we do this with consequences sometimes too like, well, what do you think your consequence should be? Like, let's look at what just happened. What do you think? We want your opinion. We value your opinion. And so we asked them, you know, what would you guys like to do next year? Unfortunately, they gave different answers. But we said to them your opinion really matters. But mommy and daddy will have the final say. And so we'll do that a lot with, with all things with regards to a united front, you know, we will often really earnestly listen and hear their opinions. And then they watch us take that information, and discuss, or go away and discuss, and come back with what the decision is. So I think it makes them feel heard and empowered and a part of the discussion, but again, with that, these are the authority figures in the household. And these are the people who ultimately put the boundaries and make me feel safe.

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Deana Thayer 14:56

Yeah, and there's really no reason to shy away from that. I think it's really great. We've had to kind of talk in our family year by year about our school choice because two of our

five children attend private school. So there's a tuition cost. And we have to reevaluate that each year and think about, is that still doable, look at the cost benefit ratio, all of those things. And there's a lot of factors. And we have as the kids have gotten older, really invited them in to that conversation. But we have said, you have a voice in this, but the final decision isn't yours. But we do want to hear from them. And I think that makes them feel really valued. And it contributes actually to the united front because they're seeing both parents value them and know the decision comes from my parents, but both of them together see me as important enough to weigh in on whatever this issue is. So I think that's really critical. I wanted to just mention something else that is specific to a blend if I could, that really has helped us in this area with the whole united front. And especially as it pertains to respect and respecting the twofold parental unit, not all households have that. But right now, in our remarriage, we have two adults in the home. And we want our kids to respect both of us, even though they probably do feel differently about us because there aren't biological ties to both of those parents. And so, we have loved the effectiveness of this approach. If we ever get a question thrown at us, where we maybe don't agree or where a child is being a little bit disrespectful of the non-biological parent, we change the language to our relationship. So for instance, if Scott, one of Scott's children is not handling a decision we've made well, and it's a decision we've made as a united team, and they're maybe being unkind to me about that or getting a little bit sassy or disrespectful. He moves from your step mom, which doesn't hold the same power to saying something like, please don't speak that way to my wife. And that subtle shift has made a huge difference, because then we're asking them to respect this horizontal relationship between their dad and I, even if they maybe don't love the decision, maybe don't have the same respect for me, because I'm not mom. And I recognize that, but then you will at least have this generic respect for what we have as a united couple.

K

Kira Dorrian 17:29

Well, and I would assume it also is then showing respect as in the example you just gave to their father, right? You don't have to adore Deana, you don't have to respect Deana, but you have to adore and love me enough to respect someone who's important to me.

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Deana Thayer 17:45

Right, this person I chose.

K

Kira Dorrian 17:46

Right, exactly. I love that. I really want to talk for a second about boundaries. I actually am sure we will do an episode on this but it's a topic that is near and dear to my heart. And

the united front piece really ties in when it comes to boundaries, because really what you're talking about is how are you a united front around boundaries? How are you setting up boundaries as a united front? So I want to speak a little bit about why boundaries are so important for children, and why that united front is so important to keeping those boundaries up. So it actually, and I love this. I love this concept, but for me, it goes all the way back to a baby in utero. If you think about a baby's experience in utero, they have boundaries. They can literally feel where their boundaries are. And because they can feel their boundaries, they know they're safe. They know mom's got me. When they're born, one of the reasons babies love to be swaddled is because it gives them boundaries. They can literally feel, oh, there I am. Someone's got me. Right. We can feel that around me. I also heard recently and I love this. It was in a, I feel like it was in Aziz Ansari's TV show. His comedy show that someone said, one of the reasons we love to be hugged, is it puts a boundary around our pain. And so I think boundaries show up over and over and over again, in our lives as a way of creating a bubble of safety. And so children when they're born, they're gonna keep looking for those boundaries. That's why they push those boundaries, right is because they're looking for, have you got me? Where's the boundary? Am I safe? And so one of the reasons boundaries are so important, is because if you have parents where the boundaries are always moving, or they're fluid or you get different answers, you're not 100% sure what's going to happen in an emergency, essentially. Have you got me? Whereas if you have parents who are consistent, then you know exactly what will happen in every scenario. And this came up with my little boy, my little sensitive little nugget. When he was five. He was going through a phase where he would say, he would get upset and he would say, leave me. Very dramatically, just leave me. And then you would leave and...come back, come back, right. And it was this little phase. And then there was this one day where it got really bad. Leave me! And I was trying to respect his feelings, right? Like he's expressing himself and emotional intelligence is so important to me. And I would leave, come back, come back. Well, I don't want him to feel abandoned. So I would come back and this went on and finally I said to him, buddy, we need to make a decision. This can't keep going on. Would you like me to stay? Or would you like me to go? And he said, go, and I left, and he cried and cried and cried and cried and cried. And then finally I went back in once he'd calmed down. And he said to me, Mommy, when I tell you to do something, you shouldn't do it. I'm the kid, and you're the grown up. He actually said that to me. And then he said, and I will never forget this. He said, if there was a fire, would you listen to me? No. That doesn't make me feel safe, mom. It doesn't make me feel safe when you listen to me like that. And it was like, first of all, he was like five. So it was super profound. But second of all, it was just this absolute solidifying moment that children need you to be in charge. You have to be the grown up. That's how they feel safe. So bringing this back to the united front, what that means is, if mom says yes, and dad says no, and oh, now we're in this kind of wiggly, wobbly boundary situation that the kid doesn't actually know what's gonna go down if I really need them. I don't actually know

that they're going to be a team. I don't actually know that they're going to work together. Whereas if they're constantly seeing you work as a team, they feel safe. They know you've got me.

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Deana Thayer 21:39

Yes, it's absolutely a security thing for them. It really is. Literally our oldest, who is almost 20, had a conversation at the dinner table recently, where he essentially asked for more boundaries. It was amazing. And it wasn't in so many words, but he really was expressing some confusion over not knowing when he needed to ask to go out, or when he could just tell us he's going out. And it's a tricky kind of melting pot. But he was essentially saying it would be clearer for him if there were more. And it was kind of startling. And I, it even took me aback, because it's amazing how much kids love the boundaries, even though they might not say it in so many words. They really love it. And there was that experiment at the middle school where they took out the fence. Do you know about this one? So there was a school doing an experiment saying the boundaries are not healthy, and they're making kids feel stifled. And so they actually took the fence off of their playground and recess field. And what happened is all the kids huddled in the middle because the edges made them actually feel safe. When they knew where the boundary was, they actually could go further, they felt safer to explore those outer bounds. When you don't know where the edge is, you don't want to go anywhere near it. And I just thought, wow, what a striking example of what happens when we remove that scaffolding that makes them feel safe.

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Kira Dorrian 23:10

And let's not forget, and I think where you and I are very much aligned in our thinking, is the combo pack of strong boundaries, open space in the middle. And that's the difference. A lot of people think boundaries mean, authoritarian, you know, boundaries mean discipline boundaries mean, you know, you will listen and obey. And it's not that. Boundaries mean, I'm the grown up. I've got you. I've got this strong thing around you. And inside, you have room to fall, you have room to make mistakes, you have room to express your feelings. I'm not going to change those boundaries, because I know you need them, but I'm going to give you the room in the middle, and that's where the stifling goes away. They're stifled when there's boundaries and then there's more boundaries inside the boundaries. That's the difference, right? So creating those strong boundaries, but creating all that space in the middle for them to freely flow within it. That's the perfect combo.

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Deana Thayer 24:06

Absolutely. And I think that those those structures are shaped kind of like an inverted triangle, they need to grow as the child gets older, they should have increasing freedom. I see this all the time, if too much freedom is given too early, and the parent has to try to rein it in. Now you've put more boundaries at a time when they should slowly be experiencing less. And that tends to not go well in that order, you're really getting it backwards. So what you want is to be able to have that nice parameter with the freedom in the middle and let the parameter expand over time, not shrink. And it's easy to get that wrong. I'm not saying any of us do it perfectly, but really over time, it should grow. Another really nice way to think about it is that my children are sort of like a broken limb. And I'm helping them align and we're resetting that bone and I'm teaching them all these things. And my boundaries are the cast and eventually it will actually come off. They'll move to the walking cast over time. And then they'll just have the little boot. And then it's going to go away and they will be strong. Unlike an animal with an exoskeleton, something like a lobster say, that is a tight, tight shell, and you remove the shell the lobster dies. So we don't want to stifle kids with too many boundaries. It's about these healthy boundaries that once removed, leave you with a great responsible adult; don't leave you with someone totally unequipped to handle what's coming up. Exactly.

K

Kira Dorrian 25:30

Exactly, and that's the raising adults concept that you and I are so passionate about. I think where sometimes modern parents swing too much the other way, you know, because if you go back to the 50s, it was all boundaries and all...I mean, it wasn't in a way because it was like go play outside, but then you will be seen and not heard. Right. So they were super stifled probably at home. But then given all this freedom outside. We've swung so much in the other way, I think because of emotional intelligence, which I love. But the mistake I think a lot of people make is thinking, oh, well, by setting up any kind of boundary, I'm stifling their feelings. And that is not the case. You're actually creating a safe space for their feelings, you're more likely to get to their feelings, you're more likely to be able to help them process their feelings if those feelings can exist safely within a boundary. So bringing it back to the united front, the reason that united front was so important for us was also around the safety idea, right? That they know mommy and daddy have got them, mommy and daddy are consistent. I can equally rely on, on either parent. And that was also super important for us. You know, one of the beauty of twins is that, you know, there is no like, here's the baby. It's like everyone gets a baby. And so Dave was really, and I think this was his natural tendency anyway, but he was really forced to just jump in and be a proper co-parent. And so for our kids to know that when mom's not home, dad's gonna make the same choices. I am just as safe with dad as I am with mom.



Deana Thayer 27:00

They really do need to know that. Yep, the buck stops here. And in our blend, they need to know this is strong. This marriage is strong, you can come at us with all these crazy questions and you can get feisty, and this isn't going anywhere. And they need to see that, because they've watched that unfortunately happen once before, so that becomes extra critical. So just want to close with a great quote. We talked a lot about our kids watching us be a united front today, and this is not by a known author. It's anonymous, but it's still good nonetheless: Children are great imitators. So give them something great to imitate.



Kira Dorrian 27:32

Thanks for being with us today. And we hope that you are able to figure out your united front, hopefully with some of the things that Deana and I have talked about today. Raising Adults is produced by Kira Dorrian and Deana Thayer and recorded in my laundry room. Music by the Seattle band Hannalee. Please rate our podcast. Positive reviews and ratings really are the key to a successful podcast. So if you like what we're offering, and you want to hear more of it, please give us a five star review. For more information, you can visit FutureFocusedParenting.com or raisingadultspodcast.com.



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