

Episode 23. When Parents Make Mistakes

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SPEAKERS

Deana Thayer, Future Focused Parenting, Kira Dorrian

- K** Kira Dorrian 00:03
What happens when two parent coaches, one a Christian and the other an agnostic Jew sit down to talk about parenting?
- D** Deana Thayer 00:09
I'm Deana Thayer,
- K** Kira Dorrian 00:10
and I'm Kira Dorrian.
- D** Deana Thayer 00:11
Welcome to Raising Adults, a podcast about Future Focused Parenting. Hi everybody Kira, Deana here. Welcome to Raising Adults. We are so excited about our podcast being in season two getting well underway here. And guess what? Kira and I are also parents and sometimes we screw up, so we're going to talk about that today When parents make mistakes. How do you handle that? Not only as an adult realizing you made a mistake, but then how do you approach your kids and and make that right. So as always, it's important for us that we start with our why, why this is an important issue to us and why we would even want to talk about it with you for the next little bit. So Kira, maybe you can

start.

K

Kira Dorrian 00:54

Well, my why is that my mom was not very good at this when I was growing up, she was not very good at owning her mistakes in a gracious way. And I think a lot of that came from her childhood and her stuff. And it was certainly never meant to be scarring to me, I think she had a really hard time making mistakes. And I think she, she felt them very deeply, and felt that it somehow made her a bad person. And I really relate to that, because I actually have that exact same issue. I feel like I make a mistake. And suddenly I'm like, spiraling into I'm the worst person in the world. Which is why it was so important to me that my kids were modeled something different. So even though it actually kills me, and it's so hard, when I make a mistake, I am really careful to handle it in a way that suggests mistakes are normal, everyone makes them and how we handle them is really important and we'll talk more about that later. But that was really my why was I, I wanted them to see something different from me and also feel a feeling and know how human I am. And set reasonable expectations for that too. Because I think my mom, my mom would sometimes say, like, well, I'm sorry, I'm human. And I didn't want it to be like that. I wanted it to be, you know, a genuine I'm sorry, I'm human, right. So that, that became not a bad thing or, or a slap in the face, but a reality,

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Deana Thayer 02:21

What an important distinction to make. So my why is kind of twofold. One is more on the practical level, and one has to do with our faith paradigm. So on the practical level, I want my kids to know I'm really not that different from them. And I think that's important that you don't set up this well, the way we used to do it, or I never did that when I was your age. I don't know... I'm maybe a little more in that because I have teenagers. So I get it that, that might be a season thing that I'm kind of reflecting but I really want my kids to know I'm in the same boat. I make mistakes too and get to see how to deal with that. And how to reconcile with people, especially if you've wronged a person. Sometimes we make a mistake that doesn't involve people. But if you've wronged a person, you need to make that right. And then secondly, of course, for us as Christians, actually confession and repentance and that whole thing is a big part of our lives and just how we live. And so there's an actual process I was interested in teaching my kids around, how do we go about that if you've done something wrong? How do you confess that? How do you make those changes? How do you pray about that? And I always wanted to walk them through that. In fact, when they were little, I would have them repeat after me a prayer about it. So really letting them just practice, practice, practice. So it's kind of two dimensional.

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Kira Dorrian 03:38

And so if you as a parent made a mistake, would you go through that process for them, like as yourself?

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Deana Thayer 03:44

As myself yes, and using the terminology that we would use. Like I would say, I've sinned against you by doing dot, dot, dot. It was always a big deal to me that they name it, not just the I'm sorry. Well, what are you sorry for? So I also did that. I would say I'm sorry for raising my voice in anger when I was disciplining you, or whatever it was, asked forgiveness, they would get to see me, you know, can we pray about it? And do you forgive me? Give a hug and always have that closure. So they got to see that modeled because it was also something I was teaching them when they goofed up.

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Kira Dorrian 04:14

Yeah, I would say that the main thing that we've done is be very conscious about not being afraid to apologize to our kids, not being afraid to own I made a mistake, I did something wrong. And I shouldn't have, I should have handled that differently. And I'll do it even on a small scale. Sometimes I have this habit of assuming I know what they're gonna say. And kind of cutting them off and sometimes I'm wrong, obviously. And I will immediately say, I'm so sorry, I should not have cut you off. That was not okay. And so I'm just really, really careful to do that. But then I also really, really, really model next time I, so that they're seeing me learn from what did I get out of this experience? Because I teach them that all the time. It's okay to make a mistake. Everyone makes mistakes. You know, I love this phrase, you can't get through life without making a mistake. But what you do with the mistake, that's what makes you a good person. How you handle the mistake is what makes you a decent human being. And so having them watch me really seek to learn from the experience and sometimes I don't want to. And sometimes I get in a situation where I feel like I don't really feel it needs all these steps. But it's, it's right for me to model it. Does that make sense?

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Deana Thayer 05:33

Oh, for sure. That makes perfect sense. And I like in Anne of Green Gables somewhere in the book, I'm probably paraphrasing wrong, but she would talk about how I love that tomorrow's a new day with no mistakes in it yet. And we add a little twist on this in our house, we would say we are really going to try not to make that mistake again. I'll probably make a new one. But you're right. They need to hear what will be different. And

that I mean, it's a theology term but you don't have to have the big term around it, but we call that repentance. It's literally turning away from whatever behavior was then you do a different behavior. And so getting to say next time I, here's how I'm going to do that better or different. To this day with teenagers I talk through, all right, what went great about that? What didn't go so great? How would you do it different next time? What do you think could have made that experience better? So that's a really important component. But I also really love that you said you just want to be pretty unabashed about not holding back from apologizing to your kids. They need to hear us say we're sorry when we've done something wrong to them in particular, because I've wronged my kids many times. And the parent who just assumes that the passage of time means it's fine, it, that is not going to be helpful, and it's not going to be very healing and I had a household that was a little bit like that. We were very vocal. I've told you before my mom had a shirt that said I yell because I care. And it was mostly in love. It wasn't like I was in this crazy terrible household but there wasn't really this circling back around afterwards to make amends and restore the relationship to what it was before that rift happened. And I didn't want that.

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Kira Dorrian 07:07

Yeah, my dad was really good about it.

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Deana Thayer 07:10

Oh, interesting. You had one of each.

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Kira Dorrian 07:12

I did and you know, they split when I was 12. And so I had very different experiences in his house. He wasn't always great in the moment, but he was really someone, he's a lot like my husband really, I basically married my dad. And that, you know, if he's given the time and the space to process what's going on, he's more likely to get a better perspective, which I think is probably true for all of us. But for people like me that are really like in the moment thinkers and in the moment processors that can feel really hard, the, the waiting for someone to process. But my dad would always take the time to process it and then he was so good about sitting down even when I was a kid, you know, I didn't handle that very well or you know, you were right. I should have listened to you or you know. So and I think that the biggest thing I would like, like our listeners to take out of this episode is that we all make mistakes as parents, you can, guess what, my favorite line, you can't get through parenthood without making mistakes, you can't. And we make them too. And I have some that I'm like, deeply ashamed of that I look back and I think I can't believe, I can't believe I did that. What was I thinking? But I think the key is that, again, that children are watching

us learn, grow, and own, take responsibility for what we did, because those are the adults we want to raise. And as Deana says, all the time, modeling, modeling, modeling, modeling,

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Deana Thayer 08:38

Yeah, I think that's the key. You're modeling it when you do it, and then they know what to do when it happens to them. And it may be that you walk them through it, especially their first sibling squabbles, or things like that. You might help them and even provide some of the terminology. Oh, it looks like you're feeling this way. How would we handle that? When you give an apology, can you make sure to say what you did wrong? All of that. But I want to as we always do move into the practical. And so what we're really saying is if you bung it up as a parent and guess what, you will, it's not a whether or not. It's not an if, it's a when. You really should go to your child and apologize, we're saying that that is important, we would recommend it. And it speaks volumes to a child when they hear a parent humble themselves in that way, because it is easy for kids. I know I kind of had the view, at least for the first several years, this is a little bit simplistic, but almost like my parents could do no wrong. And I think inherently a lot of kids think that and so getting to see oh, wow, they make a mistake too. So I would say that's one really practical takeaway, even if it's hard to swallow your pride and actually go and make that apology and name what it was that you did that was not okay.

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Kira Dorrian 09:50

And I think you also then have to be prepared as a parent and this is I think, where the emotional intelligence piece comes in for me. You have to be prepared that your child might not let it go after that, and might bring it up again. So a great example. One of my biggest regrets, one of my biggest parenting mistakes. Rhys and I were out in the world somewhere and he had a grief counselor when my mom died. And he said something to the effect of her name was Jill. Jill is the most important person in my life. And I made a face or I did something that implied that I had been gazumped. And he really reacted to that and, and it was this like flutter of very quickly I was like trying to unravel that like, oh my goodness that, no you can love whoever you want however much you want. And you know, but it had left its mark. And so I very quickly apologized. I am so sorry. You are allowed to love whoever you want however much you want. I should never have made that face I should never have made you feel like you have to love a certain amount or a certain way, that's not the truth. And that's not actually how I feel about it. And I'm so sorry. And we had a whole conversation about it, but he still brings it out. And this was years ago, and he's still occasionally. Mommy, do you remember that time when blah, blah, blah, and I have to be grown up enough to let him go through that again, to let him

talk about it again. And to not be afraid to own again, yeah, I shouldn't have done that. You're right. Now, I would never let it get to a point where he's berating me or you know, treating me in some way that was unkind. But the reality is kids process and reprocess their emotions. So you as the grown up, have to be willing to not just take it in the moment, you have to be willing to take it later too because they may get exposed to some other scenario that really triggers that memory of how you've wronged them. And it has to be okay for you to be with them through that and to continue to acknowledge, that wasn't, that wasn't okay.

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Deana Thayer 11:51

Well, and because let's be honest, even adults do that. When we've been hurt, especially if it's in a big way, we might revisit that hurt from time to time and have to unpack it more. And this is something I've talked about with my kids too on their end on the forgiveness end, that's a process too. That's not always a one time event, I might go back through even the pain of my divorce, for instance, and have to kind of forgive again. And they may have to do that with something I've done. I know my daughter...one of my hugest boo boos was after a talent show. She sang in it, and she asked how it went. And I don't even remember exactly what I said, but she did not sing for years. And it was because of what I said. And thankfully, she told me and said, that was pretty scarring for me, and it made her not audition for solos. And it was horrid. I mean, I just, I will say for me, so many of my parenting mistakes involve my big mouth and wishing I could take my foot out of it or just retract, just, I just want to bring the words back in. Oh, can those just come back? Nope, they're already out. So I really hurt her with something I said about that performance. And she talked about it on and off for a long time. But I, what I'm remembering is I do that too. Sometimes I'll remember a hurt. And I need to unpack that again and go through that process. And we had a really healing year because she just had a solo in her senior year Christmas concert. And I actually did ask her, I said, does this mean, things are better? I mean, I was genuinely curious. And she said that comment will probably always sting a little but she said, yes, I've healed from it. And I'm not going to let it make me not sing because I love to sing. So that was really huge. But we have to also remember... I share that because it doesn't always go that way. And we have to know that there might be something that really impacts your child long term and that they don't someday kind of move past and we're going to have to sit with that. There's this, this quote that I came across that says let's not have our children have childhoods they have to recover from. And in a way, I think that we all kind of cause a childhood that our kids have to recover from. None of us are going to do it perfect or without some misstep. That's pretty significant. So what today is really about is about talking about when that happens, though, then how do we get ourselves on the level to say, you know, that really was wrong. And I'm going to do better and differently next time. And I can say with that one,

especially once she made me aware, because she didn't in the moment, I think she was only in third or fourth grade. I didn't find out until later. But I really purposed in my own heart to not comment on things if it wasn't positive, or if my feedback wasn't invited, because that was the other thing I remembered is that comment was kind of unsolicited, whatever it was, and I was really careful about that from then on. So let your mistake make you better in the future. Use it to grow.

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Kira Dorrian 14:52

Yeah, I mean, I think this is it. It's like, I think everyone wants to be the best parent. They can be like, end of story. Any sort of healthy, normal human being wants that, wants that. That's why you're listening to this podcast, right, is to think about parenthood and what we can do to be the best parents we can be. The reality is we're all going to fall down. And so if I think that when we fall down, sometimes that can be and this is certainly what it was for my mom, when she fell down, it brought up all her junk, right? All her feelings, all her stuff, and I'm the same when I fall down as a parent. All that comes up all my personal stuff and the issues that I grapple with because everyone grapples with something, it comes to the foreground. Like I remember someone saying, it's like, you have children, and they take all your stuff, and they put it like right in front of your face like as if you held your hand right up to your nose, you'd be like, here's all my junk, right? And I think parenthood really does that. And, and one of the times it's the largest is when we make a mistake. And so the, the successful solution once you make the mistake, the best thing we can do is to recognize, oh, all my stuff's coming up, right. And this is what I would say to clients when I'm working with them is, it's okay to have the self awareness to go, oh, man, this situation is bringing up all my demons. I gotta put my demons over here, so that I'm not creating demons for my kid, and I'm going to process this with them, then I'm going to go take some mommy time and pick up my demons and process those privately. But I think what happens is in the flurry of the moment, sometimes our demons gazump the desire we have to parent well, and so we get so flustered by our own demons that we're diminishing what they experienced. Oh, it's no big deal. Oh, don't give me a hard time I'm only human, you know, or my mom's, I'm sorry, I'm only human, which did not, was not an apology. So does that make sense? Like in those moments, we have to, we have to kind of recognize all of our stuff that might be inhibiting us from responding in the best possible way. Put it to the side and then allow ourselves an opportunity to pick that up at another time. But the key is you have to pick that up. And that's what you did is you then went away and went, okay, how do I need to be purposeful moving forward? You know, I have this big mouth, which is funny, because I don't think of you that way at all. But my big mouth gets me in trouble. What what are the parameters I'm going to set in those situations so that it doesn't? But that's not for you to do in that moment, that in the moment is, I'm so sorry, acknowledging how they feel, and really leaning into their feelings

and letting them process it. And then you take that and go away and figure out where's my growth opportunity here?

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Deana Thayer 17:33

And I do think it's okay, like you'd said earlier, that you say next time, I will, whatever, fill in the blank, and I do think it's okay to let them know how you hope to improve. But you're right. If it brings up your own junk, you have to deal with that separately. And it does mean that someone's going to be uncomfortable, and I've had to work hard to make sure that the someone is me. So a great example of this and just honestly I have OCD, like, I actually have it. But a lot of people joke oh, I'm so OCD about whatever it is I actually have it diagnosed full on. And I noticed that a lot of the times that I'll wrong my children, it's around that I'm trying to calm my anxiety because I'm cleaning or whatever and I'm snipping at them. Well, it means that in order to make that okay, I'm going to be uncomfortable because I'm gonna have my anxiety that the kitchen doesn't look the way I want or whatever, but it's worth it so that they're not all uncomfortable. If my OCD is leaking out onto my family, I'm the only one who feels better and they don't. So that's not okay. So just recognize that as a parent, sometimes you might have to just take the blow and be the one who's uncomfortable so that you can make things right with your people. Can I say a note about preventative maintenance? Okay, so we've talked about what to do diagnostically. So it's already happened. You've made a mistake. We've talked about I think some really key components there. A -you've got to recognize it first, even know. B- go ahead and go in with the apology making sure to actually articulate what it is that you did wrong. Make sure you're making that right. You know, will you forgive me, all of that. And then that final step is how will you be different and some of that like Kira just said might have to happen privately. But you might even be able to move to a level... and I have with older kids. So this might be something you can look forward to with older kids, you can move to a level of preventing some of your own mistakes by inviting constructive feedback periodically. So I will sometimes just ask my kids, how are things going with our relationship? What do you feel like I'm doing well as a mom? What do you wish was different? What are some areas I could grow? Let me tell you, it might be a little ouchy. Sometimes it is painful to hear, but then I'm not apologizing for it later. I got a chance to know and maybe make a course correction. So just an encouragement.

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Kira Dorrian 19:40

I love that because and there may be stuff going on that they're not verbalizing, and you have no idea that you're in this pattern of whatever it is until you invite that. It's true criticism right, right. Because I had no idea I was doing that. Now, now that I know, knowledge is power. Now that I know I can do something about it.

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Deana Thayer 19:58

Yeah, because the situation that might involve it might not have come up recently or organically, unless I had asked. So that's a really great thing. It's not always, of course, it's not universally applicable and is probably better with older ones. But I've found it to be really helpful. And even though there might be a sting, and there is often, but wow, then I can go, oh, that's something I can work on rather than having to apologize for it later, because I didn't even know what was happening. It's really hard to correct a problem you don't know about. And so this invites your kids even to weigh in and say, -and I always have them do both- I think that's important even in the way I speak to them. I always want to be positive as well. Here's what's going great. Here's an area where I think we could work on growing a little bit. They do the same. So I also get to hear things that are going well. And I think that softens it, but it, it's couched in love, okay, they love me. They love that I'm wanting a good relationship with them. And I think secretly they love that they can say hey, Mom, this isn't so great.

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Kira Dorrian 20:55

I think it's great that you're setting up a situation where you're saying I really care about our relationship and I want to check in and see how it's going. I think that's so, so cool.

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Deana Thayer 21:04

It's been super helpful.

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Kira Dorrian 21:05

So I have a quote today, whoo. Let's hear it. This is from my parents. This is what my parents used to say. My parents used to say, I did the best I could, and the rest is between her and her therapist. So we'll leave you with that. You're gonna make mistakes. We've certainly been honest about some of ours today. We're not perfect, you're not perfect. Your kids aren't going to be perfect and the adults you raise are not going to be perfect. So the question really becomes, what are the issues that we want to give them? And what are we okay with them walking into adulthood with and how do we mend and repair the issues we may have created, unintentionally and accidentally.

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Deana Thayer 21:42

Exactly. those mistakes are going to be there. It's how do we mitigate those, keep them to a minimum and then address them when they do happen. So we're so thankful to all of

you for listening. If you haven't yet signed up for our attribute of the month, we definitely encourage you to do that. It's super easy on our website, futurefocusedparenting.com/shop, it's going to be the first thing there. And it's free. And it's going to give you a character trait that you can focus on for the month, learn a little bit more about, give you some resources and ways to model that. And we look forward to sharing those with you each month. So if you haven't done that yet, feel free to jump on; it's totally free.



Kira Dorrian 22:18

And as always, if you have any questions, you can email us info@futurefocusedparenting.com. Raising Adults is produced by Kira Dorrian and Deana Thayer and recorded in my laundry room. Music by Seattle band Hannalee. Thanks for listening.



Future Focused Parenting 22:31

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