

# Episode 92. Kids and Positive Reinforcement

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impacted, parenting, important, deana, catch, positive reinforcement, love, parents, talking, piece, positive, behavior, kids, children, amazing, kira, ticket, find, big, opportunities

## SPEAKERS

Deana Thayer, Future Focused Parenting, Kira Dorrian



Kira Dorrian 00:00

The second thing that I try to do is also comment on things that aren't outside of my expectations, and that aren't extremely noticeable. So for example, if we are doing chores on a Sunday, and at the end, I think to myself, wow, they just did that they're so great about that. I will say, you know, I just really appreciate that you guys just do your chores without being asked. There's never a big fight and that is so meaningful to me. So, I try to make sure that aside from just acknowledging the big, obvious stuff, that they're also seeing how much I appreciate the day to day ways that they just move through the world and how they, you know, contribute to our household.



Future Focused Parenting 00:41

Welcome to Raising Adults, the groundbreaking parenting podcast that starts with the end in mind. Were your co hosts, Deana, Thayer, and Kira Dorrian, we created Future Focused Parenting to take families from surviving to thriving. So join us as we help you stop raising kids and start Raising Adults.



Deana Thayer 01:04

Well, hello FFPs, Future Focused Parents and listeners out there, welcome to the laundry

room/office...we are still recording in our bifurcated system. And we are so glad to be with you again today for another episode of Raising Adults podcast. Kira and Deana here and excited to share with you hopefully a really nice bookend to last week where we were talking about that parental authority piece and being in charge and not being afraid to be the boss and be the parent. But what can we do also to really maintain that environment of love and positivity and that emotional intelligence that we talk so much about? And so today, we're going to be diving into the topic of positive reinforcement. And how can you be proactively thinking about the ways when you can catch your children when things are going great, and find authentic and real, genuine opportunities to praise them not just for what they're doing, but for who they are. And so I'm really looking forward to talking about this today because it is an important element to being a parent that's in charge and that your children will want to work with.

K

Kira Dorrian 02:09

Okay, so before we do anything else, Deana, can you please tell us what bifurcated means?

D

Deana Thayer 02:16

Oh, my goodness. Did I just accidentally have a vocab moment?

K

Kira Dorrian 02:19

Oh, I love it, though. I was like, only Deana like in a just jaunty intro would use the word bifurcated!

D

Deana Thayer 02:26

Jaunty?! Well, when you bifurcate something you basically divide it into two branches. So I was thinking that we are now in two separate locations when we record.

K

Kira Dorrian 02:37

I love it. I love you! See, you always talk about being a word nerd. And now our listeners are like really hearing that?

D

Deana Thayer 02:43

Yeah it's coming through. The word nerd is strong today with

K

Kira Dorrian 02:47

I love it so much. Um, okay. So yes, I love that. We're talking about positive reinforcement today, especially because I feel like with so much of parenting and parenting podcasts, we spend a lot of time talking about like, how do we correct behavior we don't like and how do we, how do we fix them? There's such a cool opportunity today to be able to really talk about how much our kids do so beautifully and so well. And how do we really honor that and let them see us? You know, support both sides. Let us be bifurcated so that they not only experience us redirecting them, but they also experience us noticing all the stuff that they're doing that we love.

D

Deana Thayer 03:26

Yes, I was chuckling silently when you found a way to use that word as well.

K

Kira Dorrian 03:31

You have to use it in a sentence Deana, it's important.

D

Deana Thayer 03:35

So why don't we start with our why on this important topic?

K

Kira Dorrian 03:40

Yes. What's your why?

D

Deana Thayer 03:42

You know, I think it's gonna sound a little bit like, well, of course, but it was really important to me that my children felt great about who they are. And for me, I've talked about this on the show before, but one of the things that's very important to me is separation of the action from the person. And so I would consider myself the disciplinarian in our home, there's no question, I think I am on the strict side. But with that being said, I wanted to make sure that they knew when I'm correcting behavior, it doesn't mean I'm indicting who you are, or your personality, or how you're wired or the amazing way that God made you. A really great example of this is with my son. We really worked to help him understand that him being kind of this class clown, for lack of a better word, he's he's kind of goofy, he enjoys getting some positive and funny attention from other people. And that's not a negative thing. But it does sometimes need to be honed in terms of where is

the right context for that? What is the time and place for that kind of silliness? And so, the why for me is really around like, you're amazing. You're amazing! And catching that and separating out for those times when I need to maybe say this behavior isn't amazing. It doesn't mean you aren't. And so what I love about positive reinforcement is it's this chance to be saying maybe even sometimes when the stakes are low, this chance to be reinforcing. You're amazing. And that was really important to me. So that separation of person from behavior became really critical in my why around around this issue.

K

Kira Dorrian 05:20

Yeah, I love that. I think that's, that's so beautiful. And I think, I think most parents want that, right? We want our kids to know that we think they're amazing. And sometimes parenting is hard. And there's a lot of pieces to raising an adult. And sometimes we can get caught up in that and forget to send the message oh, by the way, I think you're amazing. So I love that.

D

Deana Thayer 05:40

Absolutely. What about you?

K

Kira Dorrian 05:42

Yeah, I mean, my why...I would say I have a big why and a sub why. I have a sub why today! My big why is exactly what you said, I want my kids to know that I think they're amazing, because I do, and I want them to see themselves in my eyes when their own vision of themselves is not clear. And that was really important to me, that the voice in their head, that is our parent because we all have that, needed to be a positive one. But I think the sub why for me is, and I touched on this in the last episode, is the awareness that if all I'm ever doing is criticizing them, they're at some point going to stop listening. They're either going to completely internalize it, and the voice of their mom is going to be a critical one. Or they're just gonna stop caring, they're gonna be like, well, my mom doesn't think much of me so why bother? Why try? And I didn't want that for them predominantly, but also for our home, you know, I want I want our house to be a loving home. And I knew that that wasn't going to make them feel loved and seen. And so I really embrace the opportunity to catch them, when I see them do something amazing to let them know not only how much I value the thing that they did, but how it impacted me how it impacted our home, what a contributor they are to our family, so that they can understand that they're a part of a bigger puzzle, and that they belong to something meaningful. And I think that oftentimes the way that we praise them, and the way that we catch those things can send that message.

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Deana Thayer 07:02

Yeah, you've just hit on a really powerful quote that's out there, and how you talked about if all they're hearing is criticism, criticism, they're eventually going to either just tune you out, or actually become more resistant to changing for the positive, and I want to give her credit. So I'll look it up while we're talking. But it's basically this idea that positive reinforcement is what actually helps change behavior a lot more than than the criticism piece. I found it here. Virginia Pierce. Okay. So this is a this is a great quote. And you've just said it in a colloquial way that people can really capture in a personal way. But this is what she says, I love it. "Positive reinforcement changes behavior for the better, while criticism stabilizes negative behaviors and blocks change." So I think there is some real truth to that. If we criticize, criticize, criticize, eventually, we're just kind of almost more staunch in our stance, right? And even kids can get like that. Well, like, what's the point? Forget it. I can never get it right.

K

Kira Dorrian 07:54

Yeah, exactly. That's exactly it. I love that you said that. And I love that quote, too. It's so true. What's the point? And I never wanted my kids to ever feel in their lives in any way "what's the point?" And certainly not about me as their parent. So yeah, the letting them know that I see them holistically. And that includes all their beautiful parts as well. And I see the parts that I need to help them grow in, but that I also see the parts where their growth is profound and beautiful. And you know, exceptional and special. And, and all of that. I think that's been a key part of my parenting the whole way through.

D

Deana Thayer 08:31

Incredible.

K

Kira Dorrian 08:32

So tell us some hows? How have you gone about this? What do you do? How do you catch them? How do you positively reinforce your kids? Do you still do it now as teens as well? I'm curious what that trajectory looks like because obviously when they're little the carrots dangled are a little more, they're a little easier to find and navigate,

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Deana Thayer 08:53

There's low hanging fruit! That's really true. And I and I would say maybe it was easier when they were smaller. But what I will say is, to me, it's more gratifying now that they're

older. And so let me explain what I mean by that. The opportunities for a lot of really genuine praise were pretty readily available when there were small: thank you for loading the dishwasher without being asked or I really love the way you made your bed today, your neatness is just fastidious, it's so tidy. And, you know, just finding those little things along the way, whether it's chores or whether it's the way they behave. I love those kind words you gave your sister, I think those things might present themselves a little more readily. So I would say that when my kids were younger, it was really a lot of verbal cues in terms of tying it to something I witnessed about who they are as a person, their character. I really liked to do verbal affirmation around relationships. So if I saw a positive interaction, because so much of our life is interaction with people, right, so I think that was a lot of it when they were small and it was pretty readily available. I think sometimes when children get older, and I'll let you share more about the small because you're also still in that, but I would say for me, it was a lot of twofold: it was verbal, so a lot of positive...having them hear me say positive things. And I also was big on notes, once they could read, like I put a note in their lunchbox. So I think that can be really fun. But I also think it was tied to, you know, sometimes it was behaviors and things they did. But the second piece was also really paying attention to interpersonal relationships. Now, as the road has been winding, and things are different, first of all, the opportunities don't present themselves as readily. And the reason for that, as I'm not with my kids as much anymore, they have jobs, or the back before we couldn't, they would go and see friends and be out and about and doing things. And I wasn't even always able to see how they were behaving in order to catch it and make some positive comment. So it's not as easy. But here's what that means. And it's a challenge to you parents is, and I hope you're up for the challenge, it means you really have to be choosing to look for it. Because when you are with them, when they are maybe home for that rare family dinner, or they're off work, and you're just hanging out really watching their interactions, or maybe they walk by with their air pods in, but they're on the phone with a friend and you'll hear them say something kind, and you can circle back around later. So I think while the opportunities maybe aren't as ubiquitous, they're not just all right in front of you every which where, if you look for them, you can find them. So I'd give that encouragement to our listeners to look for them. And the second thing that's really fun, is I think when kids are younger, it's important that the praise happens in proximity to the event, because they might not even remember that last Thursday they loaded the dishwasher. So catching it in that moment you want to catch it. What's cool is when they're older, you can do these awesome, impromptu hey, I just wanted to tell you something I noticed last week that made me really proud of you. And it doesn't have to be in proximity to the event for it to be super meaningful to them. And I think there's even something more powerful about I popped in your room just to tell you, I think you're great. And here's why: I'm not just coming to give you an instruction or hey, don't forget to do this before you go to work. So I've really loved this element of it. I will even, because I am a talker, I sometimes have to catch myself to

not say it in the moment. And I say you know what, I'm going to tuck that away, and bring that out when my child might be having a hard day or they just need an encouraging word from mom. So that has been one of the most special parts for me. And it's been a great how. So I encourage parents to think about that. Like maybe don't say it in the moment, maybe save that and be just the pick me up they need maybe a few days later or a week later.

K

Kira Dorrian 12:36

Oh, will you be my mom. I mean, I shouldn't say that. My mom was lovely about stuff like that. But like who wouldn't want a mom like you? That's amazing.

D

Deana Thayer 12:46

It's fun.

K

Kira Dorrian 12:48

That's so special. So cool. Well, I have like three hows that come to mind. And I won't go on and on about them, I'll just kind of plunk them out there. But the first one is that I have this ticketing system. I think I've mentioned this before, but for anybody who's new, I'll reiterate. So my dad came up with this, I take no credit whatsoever. But whenever I catch my kids doing something exceptional, and really like not just meeting my expectations, but exceeding them. So an example is the other day, my son, there was a basket of laundry on the bed that I hadn't folded yet. And he saw it and just decided I have the time, I'll go ahead and fold that for her and folded all the laundry, which was phenomenal. So that kind of thing would earn a ticket. I was like, oh my gosh, Dude, that was so loving, I can't believe you did that, thank you so much, I'm going to give you a ticket. And when they get 20 tickets, we get to go do something, I don't know what I'm going to do when they hit 20 in the midst of a pandemic, but whatever. Um, you know, we get to go do something really special, something really big and special. And it takes them a year to a year and a half to save up 20 tickets. So that tells you how often I'm handing them out. It's not very often. And so that's a system that's really worked to just let them feel really seen and heard when they do something special. But I do have the rule that you can't ask me for a ticket, you can't do something to get a ticket. It's when I see something just exceptional. And sometimes it's something like that. And sometimes it's something that they wouldn't even realize I thought was exceptional that they just did. And then I catch it. And I'm like that was amazing. Here's a ticket. But off the back of that. The second thing that I try to do is also comment on things that aren't outside of my expectations. And that aren't extremely noticeable. So for example, if we are doing chores on a Sunday, and at

the end, I think to myself, wow, they just did that they're so great about that. I will say you know, I just really appreciate that you guys just do your chores without being asked. There's never a big fight and that is so meaningful to me. So I try to make sure that aside from just acknowledging the big obvious stuff, that they're also seeing how much I appreciate the day to day ways that they just move through the world and how they you know, contribute to our household. And then I would say the final thing that I do that ties in with this is I also really try to help them recognize how they've impacted me with their choices. So, you know, wow, when you folded that laundry, that was amazing. You just saved me, like 20 minutes of my day. Thank you so much. Can we sit down and spend some time together? Because I have that time now. You know, letting them know how they impacted me with those decisions or how they impacted their sister or their brother like, wow, that was really kind, I bet that made her feel so special. Thank you for doing that. And then I guess I said three, but I lied. It's four. And then the fourth one is, I like to use positive labels for them. And I've talked about this before, like in the pregnancy episode, how important it is that we're very careful how our children hear us label them. And so I love opportunities to say like, wow, Rhiannon, that was so helpful. You are such a helper, thank you for being a helper. So that they start to internalize these positive labels, right? Or you're a great sister. Wow, I wish I had had a sister like you growing up, right? So they internalize helper, great sister. And that vocabulary piece that you and I talk about all the time, becomes a part of how they how they identify, Okay, I'm gonna shut up now, because I just talked for ages.

D

Deana Thayer 16:13

Well, actually, I was like, can we take a moment for you remembering all four of those so beautifully

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Kira Dorrian 16:17

and lying and saying I only have three, but then like, crowbarring in a fourth?

D

Deana Thayer 16:21

But I mean, just to be able to articulate four in a row, boom, boom, boom, boom, I love it. And they're all super practical, which I love. And actually, I only wanted to say one more kind of big thing about this, and you touched on it. So thank you, you provided me the beautiful segue. And that was when you talked about impact. Because another thing I think can be a real takeaway for parents is remember to when you're giving a compliment like this, whether it's about who they are something you witnessed in their character, something they did, to not leave it there. Make sure they hear impact, whether it's what

Kira just shared, it gave her extra time, or whether it's something about how you feel, I think that can be really powerful. Because what are some of the things that happen most often, think of those big questions that we grapple with, like, who am I? What's my purpose? Even little kids are asking those in a version, you know, they're asking a version of those questions. And so I love when I can also let my children get like a little peek a little window into what that made me think of you. And so I often will say, I love that I get a front row seat to the person you are becoming. I let them know I love watching this, this is so fun for me. Or when I, say, if I see a really great responsibility. I love saying, you know, this has given me so much confidence about the adult you're going to be. And think about it for a day when they're not feeling confident to be able to remember that my mom's confident in me, she believes in me, she's believes I'm going to be a great adult. I love giving them that sneak peek. Like here's what I think about that. Not just that was cool behavior. Like here's what I think about it. And here's another way that you can do that that's beautifully helpful to a child. And that is, we are often, I think adults, too, I mean, for sure, I can speak for myself, I'm guilty of this, where it's really easy for me to spot the areas in my character development or in my growth as a person where there's still some shortfalls, you know, I still see this shortcoming over here, or I could do better at this. And we don't often look at what's going great, or where we've grown in a hard area. And so another thing I think we can hand our children is this vocabulary around growth. And so I love even maybe pointing out an area that I've seen growth in. So maybe it's not perfect yet, but being able to say, you know what, if you had had that same conversation with that friend six months ago, I don't think it would have gone like that. Look at how much you've grown in receiving constructive feedback. Or look how much you've grown and being able to give hard information to a friend in a kind way. Wow, that is really impressive. What a difference from a year ago. I don't think we always have that window to look in the rearview mirror and go, yeah, that's still a hard area for me, but look how much better it is than where I used to be. That is important to kids. And so I think one area where positive reinforcement can be such a blessing to our kids, is we might be able to highlight for them some growth areas, some areas of progress, when maybe it's really easy for them to only see where there's still a shortfall.

K

Kira Dorrian 19:19

Thank you for saying that. That's so so true and so profound, and just a beautiful way for us to kind of wrap up today. I think that's fab. The one thing I will say about something I said earlier is, I don't know that the impact piece should be done in reverse. Like when something that wasn't so great happens. Because we never want our kids to think they're responsible for our feelings. And so that's the one like cautionary piece I would say is that it's really great to say like, you know, wow, that made me feel so loved and you know, taken care of and supported or whatever, but when we're looking at the you know, the

redirection piece and the areas of growth for our kids, it's it's really important that we're not saying like, hey, you made me mad, and now I'm mad at you. And you know, like not having them be responsible for our feelings. But I think when it comes to the positive side, we can do that in a way that that really makes them feel good. And like you said, that allows us to let them know what we think about what we're seeing, which is just so cool. I love how you said that.

D

Deana Thayer 20:20

Yeah, that's a great point. Thanks for the little red flag on that one. That's important. Important footnote. Yeah, thank you for saying that, Kira. Because I think it's easy for us to think, if a little is good, then more is better, which means I should be doing this in all cases. And sometimes, there's things we want to do in our parenting that are maybe great in one area, and maybe we should avoid in another. So that's an important thing to talk through. And I do have a quote today, I think it really ties to what we're talking about, because so much of what we're saying about positive reinforcement is that it impacts how children feel. But really, the great side benefit for us as parents is then that also really does impact behavior. And so I just love this quote, it's by Pam Leo. And here's what she says, "You can't teach children to behave better by making them feel worse. When children feel better. They behave better."

K

Kira Dorrian 21:14

Hmm. I love that. That's so true.

D

Deana Thayer 21:17

Some true stuff. Thanks, Pam. Well, we hope today has been helpful for you in looking at talking to your children in ways that are positive, in ways that are encouraging uplifting, and we'll build them up because that is so important for who they're becoming. And for the adults that you're trying to raise, we really want people moving through the world feeling confident, feeling capable, and we have an important and unique position in their lives to be able to do that. And I think you've got a responsibility to do so. So we hope it's been helpful. We do want to invite you once again to join the FFP family if you're enjoying the content, if you enjoy listening to the podcast episodes, if you find the quotes that you read on social media helpful, if this is benefiting you in some way, and you'd like to join our family, we would love to have you. We do have membership available now and want to let you know that that top tier of membership is limited. So we aren't just taking as many people into the world, we want to keep that small and helpful. And that's because at that top level, you get something really amazing, which is monthly group coaching, where you

can just pop on with Kira and I and ask parenting questions about maybe scenarios you've faced in the past month, or maybe a sticky situation you've had crop up. And we would love to have you do that. But we want it to be able to benefit everyone. So we want to make sure that you know that space in that top level is limited. But you can go to our website, and you'll be able to see there where you can click on membership and learn all about it. And we'd love to have you join us We so appreciate all of you listeners and all of you Future Focused Parents joining with us on the journey. And we'd love to just have you be part of it in that meaningful way. And it's just one other connection point for us too. We love getting to know our listeners and we'd love to connect with you. On that note, you can connect with us on social media too. You can find us on Facebook and Instagram @futurefocusedparenting. And if you follow us on those channels, you'll be able to always see when new episodes drop. So if you're a new listener and you want to make sure you don't miss an episode, you can find them there. We always let you know when a new episode drops so you don't miss any of the upcoming topics. And we also have quotes and just parenting tips and things there. So we encourage you to check us out on social. Thanks so much for being with us today. And we look forward to being with you again next time. Raising Adults is produced by Kira Dorrian and Deana Thayer and recorded partially in my office partially in Kira's laundry room Editing by Allison Preisinger. Music by Seattle band Hannalee. Thanks for listening.



### Future Focused Parenting 23:43

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