

Episode 123. Future Focused Foster-Adoptive Parenting with A...

📅 Thu, 5/6 7:06AM ⌚ 27:56

SUMMARY KEYWORDS

adopting, kids, parenting, child, fostering, biological, family, raising, struggling, kira, older, home, teaching, listeners, bio, trauma, realized, swooping, podcast, focused

SPEAKERS

Deana Thayer, Amy Carney, Future Focused Parenting, Kira Dorrian

-
- A** Amy Carney 00:00

Support groups for foster care and adoptive parents are really important. It's important because we can laugh, laugh about things we're going through to, you know, and other people are going through similar things. And we can encourage each other in ways that you know that other families necessarily can't because they don't know because just simply because they're not doing it. But I also will pull friends in and say, Hey, can you could you help me? Could you take him? Because I want him? You know, my son's learning from other people as well. Other families that are like-minded, you know, so it's not just coming from our home that he can learn from other people in other families because that's really how you grow. It's not just our one home. It's a community of people pouring into our children and teaching them.
 - F** Future Focused Parenting 00:46

Welcome to Raising Adults, the groundbreaking parenting podcast that starts with the end in mind we're 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.

D

Deana Thayer 01:11

Hello, Future Focused Parents. Welcome to another episode of Raising Adults. Kira over in the laundry room with you, I'm in the coat closet with you, and we also have a guest today. We recognize there are many ways to become a parent and also many ways to parent. And we're looking forward to speaking with Amy Carney today about fostering and adopting and how to be a Future Focused foster parent or a Future Focused adoptive parent. That isn't something we've covered yet. And we know that many of you may be in this situation or may have a combo pack of biological kids and kids you're fostering or adopting or looking toward that situation. So we're going to dive into that in a moment. But as we're still recording separately, I can't see Kira, so how are you in the laundry room today, Kira?

K

Kira Dorrian 01:57

I'm toasty today in the laundry room.

D

Deana Thayer 01:59

Oh, is it a warm one in there? Have you run the dryer recently?

K

Kira Dorrian 02:02

Yes, I have. It actually finished like literally seconds before we came online. I was like, is it gonna be done in time? It's always like on days where there are big laundry days, where we record, it's always stressful. Is the is the washing machine gonna be done? But yes, the dryer ran. So I'm nice and toasty. How are you?

D

Deana Thayer 02:22

Well, I'm glad you're warm, even though I'm not there. And I'm glad we do not hear clanging and banging.

K

Kira Dorrian 02:28

Yeah, that would be taking the joke one step too far. Right?

D

Deana Thayer 02:32

Yeah, we would definitely be picking that up with the mic that you have.

K Kira Dorrian 02:36
I think so. I think so. How are you?

D Deana Thayer 02:39
I'm really doing well. And I'm looking forward to this conversation. Because I don't know if our audience know, but actually, Scott and I got well into the fostering journey at one point.

K Kira Dorrian 02:49
That's right; I remember that.

D Deana Thayer 02:51
And almost finished, but we're not able to, so I'm looking forward to speaking with Amy.

K Kira Dorrian 02:56
Yes, me too. Well, let's, let's read her amazing bio, shall we?

D Deana Thayer 03:00
Yes, I'm going to introduce her a little bit more to you all, all you Future Focused Parents, and then we're gonna jump in and have a chat with her. Amy Carney is the author of Parent on Purpose, a courageous approach to raising children in a complicated world. She's also written, 100 questions for mom, a journal for reflection and connection. She's a public speaker, content creator, and product maker helping parents raise their children with more joy and purpose. She lives with her husband and five children in Paradise Valley, Arizona. And I see here that they're currently fostering a sixth looking to adopt this summer. So Amy, welcome to Raising Adults. Thanks for being with us today.

A Amy Carney 03:41
Oh, thank you so much for having me. I'm excited.

D Deana Thayer 03:43
Yeah, we're looking forward to talking with you. And as you may know, Kira and I always

start with our why about the parenting topic that we're chatting about on that episode. And we like to ask our guests to do the same. So please feel free to introduce yourself more fully. Tell us any details I might have missed in the bio, things you'd like us to know. And then share your why. Why did you get into fostering? What drives you in this area of your parenting?

A

Amy Carney 04:10

Oh my gosh, I think you've covered it all. Yes, we are adopting again this summer, another nine-year-old son. And so that's exciting and crazy starting over with a nine-year-old. But um, yeah, my heart is for raising kids biological, or these kids from hard places. And because our goals are the same no matter you know, we've had our children from birth or from nine years old. It's that we can launch capable, confident human beings into the world to make a difference and to contribute. And so our approach to that might be different depending on, you know, the start to our child's life, but the end goal is the same.

D

Deana Thayer 04:50

I really love that, and it's so in alignment with what Kira and I talk about, and I think there could be a little bit of a myth maybe that if you don't have your child from the time they're a newborn, you don't get the opportunity to be future focused. And it's really not true, you can still be future focused and intentional and proactive in your parenting, even if you get someone a little older. But you're right, the approach to that, and all the what's and the how's might look different. But like you said, Your why is the same for all of them; you have that same end goal. So I love that.

A

Amy Carney 05:18

I think it's crucial that we keep the same end goal. It's just, like you said, their approach that you might have to tweak getting there.

K

Kira Dorrian 05:24

Right. So I'd love to start even before you started fostering and adopting because my understanding is you had bio kids first, right?

A

Amy Carney 05:33

Right.

K

Kira Dorrian 05:33

Okay. So how did you get into it? Tell me a little bit about how you had set up your home to be able to bring a foster child into the home. You mentioned that when we talked that you had done some work, even in how you were parenting on purpose or being future focused with your own kids, your bio kids. Tell us a little bit about that setup.

A

Amy Carney 05:55

Well, I hadn't even realized that foster adoption was going to be a part of our family story. I mean, I was busy raising my firstborn or triplets sons, who are now 19. They were, I think, 12 at the time, we started fostering, and our daughter is one year behind, so she's 18 now. As I said, we had no idea that this was going to be a part of our future, a part of our family story. I just happen to be reading the newspaper. Every Wednesday here in Arizona, there's a section called Wednesday's child. And I would read it, that's when we were all getting newspapers at the house, which no longer happens, but I would read it. And every Wednesday, I was reading it, and I would feel terrible. And I would be drawn to the stories of these kids looking for families. Yet, I didn't think I would be the one to step in until one day; God put it on my heart that like, yeah, I'm talking to you. I'm talking to you, you know, I've blessed you with this great family and everything you need to provide someone else. And it caught me off guard and really caught my husband off guard. We went through all the classes to be licensed foster parents, and we've been on a journey for a decade now fostering to adopt.

D

Deana Thayer 07:01

Hmm, wow.

K

Kira Dorrian 07:02

Wow.

A

Amy Carney 07:03

So I wouldn't say that we are set up at all.

K

Kira Dorrian 07:08

I'm still recovering from the triplet son's; I pretty much my jaw dropped. And that was me done because I have twins and that was really hard. So I can't even.

A

Amy Carney 07:19

It is really hard

K

Kira Dorrian 07:20

Triplets and another and then fostering to adopt. So I guess I'd love to know a little bit about when you were, you know, initially before you're fostering to adopt. You have the same approach as we do, right? This idea of being intentional in your parenting, of raising those adults into the world. So what were you doing with your kids? And how were they participating in your home in a way that actually enabled you to be able to do this?

A

Amy Carney 07:47

I found myself scrambling and being a stressed mom, early on, you know, trying to do everything for everyone and being the best mom that I could be. And then I realized when they were complaining about, you know, that I had packed them the wrong lunch or hadn't filled up their water bottle. Okay, this, things have to shift here. And so we totally shifted, and I started looking at the end and like, what do we need them to know when they leave our home? What do I want them to be equipped with? And we just started putting everything on them, not everything at once, right? Little by little, you just start handing over the morning routine. And then, you know, we just started giving them autonomy and everything in their life. And I just this huge weight was lifted off me and our family and they felt more confident, they felt more secure. And so I realized that really, this is such a helpful way to approach our parenting because it's good for everyone. And I had no idea, honestly, that it was really going to open up space to bring in, as I said, another child and now an additional child, because I wasn't stressed and trying to, you know, have to devote all my time to doing things for my older kids, they were able to do most of the things on their own. And then they were also the beautiful pieces. They're great role models for the younger boys coming in teaching them this is you know how we operate. This is how we do things on our own. And they can watch my older boys and my daughter, you know, do things for themselves and contribute to the family.

D

Deana Thayer 09:14

That's so true. I love that you're saying this because Kira and I say it all the time. But I think sometimes it's powerful coming from a different voice to say you know what, when you teach children to be responsible and to be independent, delegation frees you as a parent. And it makes space for all kinds of things, in your case, bringing in more kiddos. So imagine it can be pretty hard to bring in an older foster child; you've got a nine-year-old

with you right now that you're working toward that adoption. And that older child needs a lot of love and attention. But you still have to balance that with these goals you were talking about earlier, expecting them to be a contributing member of the family as they're integrated in and working toward those goals of a responsible adult. So how do you do that? How do you strike that balance?

A

Amy Carney 09:58

Oh boy, that's the big question there. And I really I wrote about this in my book and my chapter about developing life skills. Because we adopted our son, who's now 14, he was nine when he moved in. And I was really thrown off because I wasn't used to a nine-year-old coming that really couldn't do much for himself. He could not tie his shoes, he couldn't open a water bottle, and there were a lot of things he had not been taught to do or wasn't willing to do. And so I realized, okay, I've got to remember, the end goal is the same for him. Even though his abilities are different from my biological kids, I need him to get to a place right, where he can do all of these daily life tasks independently. And what I realized is I had to really take the time, and this is what's hard. And this is it, whether it's our biological or adopted, right when they are struggling, it's so hard not to step in and just do it for them. Because we're busy, we've got things going on, and we don't like to see our kids struggling. And I had to realize, and I had to keep thinking about the end goal, the end goal, the end goal, and every day, I would push them a little bit more, right, and let him sit there struggling to tie that shoe a little bit longer. Each day, until one day, he didn't realize he's just tying his shoes, right. And then, I mean, we're talking this probably was two years, he couldn't open a water bottle. And I think it's more there's a lot of power struggles too when you're adopting an older child, because they want you to do everything for them, for obvious reasons, right, they haven't had a mother doing things for them. So I had to kind of pick and choose different tasks I could see him struggling with and allow him to struggle in that, and me not just swoop in to the rescue. But yet, on another note, lovingly serve him in another way, you know, maybe making his nice breakfast and putting out on a cute placemat and having a special cup for him until we could get to now, where he's now 14. And he does everything and more that may be better than my biological kids. There was a point four and a half years ago, where I wasn't sure if he was going to be able to do these things. And I realized that it's so important that no matter how they appear, their abilities or disabilities, if we believe in them, and we expect them to contribute and give them the space to learn and fail and to you know, be upset to struggle. And every day, we just push them a little bit while loving them hard in other ways. I've really seen it pay off. And now, as I said, we've got him to this place that I'm free again, I feel free, and he's confident, happy, and now we can take in this other nine-year-old and kind of start teaching him.

K

Kira Dorrian 12:36

Wow. So I'm curious. You know, I'm the mental health professional of the two of us. And I'm curious from a mental health perspective. So and you touched on this beautifully, you know, this balance of, you have to have that same end goal, but also be sensitive to that piece of them that has been through trauma and just wants to be loved and have their cup filled and differently than kids that have been in your home the whole time. So what were you doing from that mental health perspective? Besides some of the examples you gave to, you know to really nurture him and the trauma that he's been through? And also, how did you then help your bio kids understand what they were seeing? And how to participate in that as well?

A

Amy Carney 13:19

Yes, that's a huge topic there. But um, you know, I never left him alone in his struggles necessarily, like, when he's struggling to open the water bottle, I'm right there telling him he can do it, you know, you can do it. And you know, what, just keep working at it, and I would try and verbalize ways for him to try. And then eventually, I would have to do it for him in the beginning, right. And then, I was always there kind of coaching him through these things because I was still there for him, right. I'm still alongside him; I'm just not taking over and swooping in. I knew that I had to do that now because if I didn't do it now and in the beginning, and those first two years come alongside him instead of stepping in and solving everything for him that I knew I'd be doing, I could be doing this throughout, you know, his teenage years, too. And so I knew that I had to put in the effort I had to put in the work; I had to put in more time and effort. So that we would be at this place that we are today where it's no longer, I don't have to really do much for him at 14 years old anymore. I think that's the difference with my biological kids; I didn't have to necessarily stand beside them or be alongside them for the journey; I could just tell them what to do and move on.

F

Future Focused Parenting 14:37

Hey, Raising Adults listeners and Future Focused Parents our valuable FFPs. We just wanted to talk to you for a moment about our membership program. We love having our listeners join membership and just really join the FFP family. We love having you be a part of this in a more involved way. And so we just want to highlight the three levels of membership. The first is only \$5 a month literally the cost of a nice cup of coffee. And it's really just your way of kind of giving us a tip like you would tip your barista or your server if the podcast content has been helpful to you. And you would like to just say a thank you. It's just \$5 a month super accessible. And it does get you some things, don't worry, you're not just giving us a tip and not getting anything. It makes you eligible for on air coaching

calls, you get that calendar of character traits that we've talked so much about and can really help you build your family's value list. You also get half off all digital resources, and we'll, of course, shout you out on the podcast. If you'd like to go up a level at the \$10 a month level, you get all the things I just described. But you also have access to Future Focused and Five, which is an amazing video and audio library of quick, short, accessible parenting topics. We cover a topic and give you some strategic tips in five minutes or less. And you can access those by video, but we know your podcast listeners. So if you prefer to listen, there's an audio version as well. And in that final tier, which is \$20 a month, you get access to us. Get a monthly q&a call with Deana and I to ask any parenting questions that have come up that month, you get to connect with other FFPs in a private Facebook group, you get access to all of our online content and all of our digital resources totally for free. So if you've been interested in any of those, this is a great way to get in. So do check out all the different membership tiers that are available to you. We'd love to have you be a part of the FFP family. You can join us by going to FutureFocusedParenting.com and click on the membership tab. We really hope you'll join us soon.

K

Kira Dorrian 16:41

In terms of beyond raising him to be just as capable and responsible and the differences they have. As a foster parent, I'm curious, about the responsibilities from that mental health perspective for caring for this little person who's been through trauma? And again, how are you helping the kids that are already in your home? Understand what he needs, how it's different, what he's been through? And how they get to participate in filling up that love cup? You know what I mean?

A

Amy Carney 17:13

Yes, yes. Well, it's really, I don't wanna say it's difficult, it's not difficult, but for our biological kids to understand, it's almost near impossible, right what they've been through because they're children themselves. Still, they've been able to see the growth in him and understand. I've had to explain to them why I'm doing things the way I'm doing, and you know why I'm letting him struggle, because they don't like that, right. They don't want to watch him struggle; they would rather just do it for him. And then to be able to have those conversations with them like this is for purpose, right? This is for a purpose that we want him to get to a place where he is confident, he's responsible. And so we had to talk to them about not swooping in and helping, or they would just get frustrated, right, because sometimes you'd be sitting there for an hour waiting on him to do something, or you know, to learn and they would just want it done and over. So it didn't disrupt our home anymore. But we were able to just talk to them about that, say this is for a purpose. You're going to see a payoff, and they do see a payoff. I had to keep telling them, you keep modeling, you

be you, and you model how you're doing your laundry, and you model how to put the dishes away, and you show him. More is caught than taught, right. I'm just watching them be responsible in their daily tasks, helped him, probably more than what I was speaking. And so there's a lot of conversations in your home with your older biological kids. You know, and reminders of, you know, the trauma that he's been through, and obviously not speaking in front of him about this. But on the side, you've got to remember he has a totally different upbringing and trauma than than you guys have. And so it's, yeah, he's not going to be able to do everything maybe the way that you were able to do it. But the best thing is, I could never do this without my kids, my husband; this is a team effort. And I feel the same with the mental health because I'm able to get counseling for them. Teachers, I feel like this. I mean, I've got a village, and I pull people in to help and to help them be good role models and to teach him in all these ways that are gonna help build him into this successful, competent, capable adult.

D

Deana Thayer 19:16

Yeah, I think the community piece is really important. Have you also used or found resources in your community, whether it's geographically or virtually, for other people going through this? Do you find that to be an important piece for other foster parents and adoptive parents?

A

Amy Carney 19:35

I think it's huge because we're the only ones that understand it. You know, really, if you're living it, right, it goes with anything in our lives. I mean, yes, I think the support groups for foster care, and adoptive parents are really important. It's important to because we can laugh, we can laugh about things we're going through. Other people are going through similar things and we can encourage each other in ways that you know that other families necessarily can't. They don't know, just simply because they're not doing it. But I also will pull friends in and say, Hey, can you could you help me? Could you take him? Because I want him, you know, my son's learning from other people as well, other families that are like-minded and help, you know. So it's not just coming from our home that he can they can learn from other people and other families. Because that's, that's really how you grow. It's not just our one home; it's a community of people pouring into our children and teaching them.

D

Deana Thayer 20:29

Yeah, and it can't be equal for all of them, as you mentioned earlier. I'm also kind of curious about how you spoke to your biological kids so that there wasn't resentment. I'm

imagining there must have been times when you needed to take more time to show your new foster child something. Where they came into your home, didn't have that skill, you're spending time and attention on, that now isn't going to your biological kids like you were talking about earlier. They have a different background; they're going to need different things. Were there ways that you presented that so that your bio kids weren't feeling resentful? Like, whoa, there's been this huge shift. And now there's not, we're not getting the focus? Or did you find that they were pretty on board from the start? Since they were old enough? I'm just curious how you dealt with that. Because I know my kids are all about when things aren't fair, you know? Or at least they were when they were younger?

A

Amy Carney 21:24

Yeah, well, here's the good thing. When you have triplets right out the gate, nothing's fair. I mean, so.

D

Deana Thayer 21:30

Great point.

K

Kira Dorrian 21:32

True that, true that.

D

Deana Thayer 21:32

Kira, do you relate?

K

Kira Dorrian 21:35

I do, absolutely.

A

Amy Carney 21:37

You know, that's never been a thing in our house. But absolutely, my daughter, she was the baby. I mean, she was the baby of the family for how long, you know. I have to be very mindful of that. I'm very mindful of all my kids and that they're getting filled up by mom and dad. Like, my daughter, I just took her to, she needed a prom dress, right, she's a senior in high school, she needs a prom dress doesn't have one prom is, coming right up. So I texted her because that's what you do with the older kids, right? I said, hey, let's jump in the car, let's drive to LA, it's six hours from here, and there's a fun place called the

garment district; let's find a prom dress for you. And we'll just drive back and we'll make it a crazy adventure. And she was so excited about it. And so we did it. And I'm in a total season right now teaching this new nine-year-old, and so a lot of attention, as you said, is going to him. But I'm very mindful to know that you know what I've, I'm going to pour into this one child, you know, important or hard, and have a great special time she and I, and that's kind of what I do. Three of my boys, the triplets, are in college, and they're in three different states right now. So which opens up more space, kind of, but then again, we're having to get on a plane to visit them. And so it's a juggle, it's an absolute juggle, and everyone understands that I'm trying to pour into them individually in different ways. But it's really important, be mindful that you are taking time away to teach this little child, and your kids will resent that here now. And that's just okay. You just communicate about it, have the conversation. And then you just always say, you know what, life isn't fair. Being in a family, large family isn't fair. And you know, sorry about that.

K

Kira Dorrian 23:17

So if we have listeners who are, you know, considering fostering or adopting, I'm curious, like, what's the most important takeaway that you'd want them to know?

A

Amy Carney 23:25

Well, I heard my husband say something really beautiful the other day, and it's caught me off guard, because he was really not into it. In the beginning, or the adoption, he was really nervous about it. And I heard him say to another man the other day, you know, it's, it's really not a big deal. Like if people just knew, it's really not that big of a deal. Bringing in, you know, an older kid sounds scary, maybe. But it's so beautiful to know that your investment is making a huge difference. And it is a big deal. I don't want to say this wrong, but it isn't as well. It's, you know, you're pouring into life, into a child that needs a family, needs a secure home, and we have that. So you know, so we're, we want to give that and it doesn't mean that it's easy. My husband and I are on the verge of being empty nesters; right now, my daughter is going off to college in the fall. I'm grieving that a little bit too, you know, which is okay; it changes the dynamics of your family. You do have to know that, you have to grieve that a little, and then you also know that it's also strengthening and enhancing. I mean, our family is so much richer because of these boys entering into our family.

D

Deana Thayer 24:35

That's really beautiful, Amy; thanks for sharing that. So if we have listeners who maybe want to pick your brain some more because they're considering going on this journey, or

maybe they would just like to learn more about you and your work or check out your book. Can you tell our audience how to find you, tell us about your book, how to find you on social media, you know, all that stuff?

A

Amy Carney 24:55

Yes, I would love to support; that's my heart, as you know, is getting more and more families to do this along alongside me. So my website is just my name AmyCarney.com, and actually, I have a video on there. USA Today had me on stage a few times to talk about our foster to adoption story, so that's a great place if someone's interested. You could go and watch that 10-minute video to learn more about our story. On social on all the channel I'm just Amy L. Carney.

D

Deana Thayer 25:26

Great, and tell us about Parent on Purpose.

A

Amy Carney 25:30

My my book?

D

Deana Thayer 25:31

Yes!

A

Amy Carney 25:32

Well, we pulled out of life, in 2014, we bought an RV. And we traveled the entire US for seven months with the four kids. And that book stems from that experience. It's not really about the trip, but it's about why we ended up in that RV and how we changed things when we got back and had a more future focused approach to our parenting.

D

Deana Thayer 25:58

Yeah, that would be quite an amazing reset. I mean, talk about a change of scenery.

A

Amy Carney 26:03

Yeah, we needed it.

D

Deana Thayer 26:05

Thank you, Amy. Thanks for sharing with our listeners today just about your journey, but also some of these timeless principles that we can apply whether we have bio kids, foster kids, adopted kids, nieces, nephews, whatever it might be. It's important to remember that the why underneath all these what's and how's is really pretty universal. So thanks for that important reminder. And listeners, don't worry if you didn't catch all of that; we'll link to where to find Amy and her resources in the show notes today. And as always, if you have questions for Kira and I or a topic idea for the show or want to connect with us, please feel free to reach out. You can even email us, and you'll get in touch with us info@futurefocusedparenting.com. As always, please, please, please, we encourage you to rate and review the podcast. We love five-star ratings and your kind reviews. When we get those, we always pop those up on our social media and give you a shout-out and a thank you. So thanks to those of you who've done that already. It really does help us out; this is literally a listener-supported endeavor. So we thank you and to those of you who've been maybe holding off or waiting for an episode that really touched you. Please send us your reviews. We love seeing those. We will be back next week with more, and we look forward to sharing with you in the coming weeks as we get into spring and summer and hopefully emerging from our cocoons which will feel really nice. So thanks for being with us today, and we look forward to being back with you next time.

F

Future Focused Parenting 26:10

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