

Episode 16. Kids and Critical Thinking

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SUMMARY KEYWORDS

decision, amoral, people, decision making, children, parenting, teaching, critical thinking skills, friends, immoral, friendship, age, important, birthday party, play, critical thinking, talk, feel, priority, family

SPEAKERS

Deana Thayer, Future Focused Parenting, Kira Dorrian

- K** Kira Dorrian 00:04
What happens when two parent coaches, one a Christian and the other an agnostic Jew, sit down to talk about parenting?
- D** Deana Thayer 00:10
I'm Deana Thayer,
- K** Kira Dorrian 00:11
and I'm Kira Dorrian.
- D** Deana Thayer 00:13
Welcome to Raising Adults, a podcast about Future Focused Parenting. Hi, everyone. Welcome to Raising Adults podcast. We are excited to be with you once again today, where we get to tackle some issues about how do we raise children with an eye toward the future, and not do what's easy, or what's expedient, but what is best. And today we're going to tackle decision making and prioritization. How do you teach your children which things are important? And when they maybe come up against something that feels, hey, I have two things that are equally important. How do they choose between those? How do

you start to foster good decision making and even just decision making in general, when there may be isn't a priority conflict? So as always, we like to start with our why. Kira, what is your why around this?

K

Kira Dorrian 01:09

Well, I think my why is really around the Raising Adults concept. One day these little people are going to be all grown up. And they're going to be in a world where they're constantly having to make decisions, financial decisions, career decisions, relationship decisions. And so to me, I think it's really just about fostering critical thinking. And, and helping kids from a very young age learn to look at things critically, and examine them from different angles so that they can make what they feel is the best decision. But I also think there's something about children learning from a young age that sometimes there isn't a right decision. Sometimes we just have to like, cross our fingers and hope that that was the right decision, and that can be really uncomfortable for someone like me, who's a black and white thinker. Like there must be a right or a wrong. When I get in a gray situation I get so uncomfortable. And so I think I really wanted them to be able to examine, decide and then feel like I made the best decision I could. And that's all I need to know moving forward.

D

Deana Thayer 02:15

So good. And I'm glad you brought up the gray. I'm pretty uncomfortable with gray myself. I'm not great at it at all. So my why with this was twofold. First, honestly, I, as a Christian, have a big pet peeve when people are always asking, well, how will I know which one is God's will?



02:39

Oh, that's such a good question.

D

Deana Thayer 02:40

And that's something I've had to teach my children because they've asked, well, I'm trying to make this big decision. How will I know? And so one of my whys for this was helping them navigate if you are trying to follow God, how do you make a decision that you can rest on and feel comfortable about? When you maybe don't know which one is quote, right. But the second one is on a more practical level, I feel like one of my hugest jobs as a parent is to teach decision making and critical thinking because once they're out of my

home, they've got to be able to navigate that without maybe me or any other infrastructure, or any adult weighing in so to speak, they've got to look at it and be able to say, okay, what am I going to pick here when I have conflicting, even conflicting appointments? I mean, that's one I know we'll get to talk about today. So I really wanted that practical skill, it's a big, big deal to me in our home. I might have mentioned this before, but we actually parent with the goal that by age 16, our children don't have any rules, at least my biological children. So that way, they have still, maybe a year or more left under my roof, where they're navigating all their decision making. A safety net, right? Because you're still home. So if you do make an epic fail decision, we can talk that through and we can say, what do you feel didn't go great about that? What would we do different next time? So that their first time doing independent decision making isn't when they're across the country and away from me. Right? And possibly like in college up against who knows what, right?

K

Kira Dorrian 03:17

We've all been to college.

D

Deana Thayer 04:28

Possibly facing some very different scenarios.

K

Kira Dorrian 04:31

I also think and so I haven't actually told you this yet, because we just sat down. But I also think that like the dynamic we have, as a great example, one of the reasons that you and I get along so well is that we're critical thinkers with each other. So we don't just hear what comes out of someone's mouth and squish it and shut it down. Like we're genuinely curious about what the other person thinks. I mean, my favorite line is, I have a question. Um, and so this past weekend, we actually got together with some friends of ours who are also called conservatives, and I don't know, the timing was just right. And they're relatively new friends. But we're very, we got very close very quickly. And we had a four hour discussion, just about all of it, all of the things and it was so it was so wonderful. It was so wonderful because it was just like you and I was, there was so much love there and so much genuine thought and consideration and true listening, like really opening up the ears not just like pretending to listen, but like really listening to each other. And I think it's that same thing. Part of what we're teaching our children to be critical thinkers for is so that as they go out into the world, they can examine their opinion, other people's opinions, they can allow it to shape and reshape as they grow and change in their beliefs, in their views and all these different things. And that actually starts at age four, you know,

whatever it is when you're like, so how are we going to decide whatever the situation may be? We're teaching those early critical thinking skills.

D

Deana Thayer 05:56

I completely agree, and it's such a great example to model for your children your family values, because sometimes you're going to help them through a decision making process and say, here's what needs to win. And here's why. Because here's what we believe as a family. So this activity or appointment needs to win. And you actually had this happen.

K

Kira Dorrian 06:15

I did, I did have this happen. So last year, my kids had a kiddo in their class that wasn't very nice to them. And, and I think they had one of those friendships where sometimes they all got along, and sometimes they didn't. And you know, if kids at that age, they were in kindergarten, like, we're all just trying to, we're still figuring it out as adults, right. But this, this little person was still trying to figure that out. And so we had this situation where the the child's birthday party fell on the same day as their aunt's birthday party. And so we had to sit down and go, okay, well, what are we going to do about this? And it was a little boy at school. And so, but both kids were sort of struggling with this little boy. And so I knew in my head that we weren't going to this little boy's birthday party, like I knew because their aunt was going to take priority because that's in line with our family values. But I also felt like they were old enough that I didn't need to tell them that, that I wanted them to kind of get there on their own. So we sat down, and we had a family meeting. We have family meetings a lot whenever something big comes up. And so I said, guys, we need to have a family meeting. We all got on the couch. And I said, okay, here's the deal. So and so's birthday party is on the same day as your aunt's birthday party. And we have to make a decision as a family about what we're going to do because we can't do both. And so they spent a little bit of time trying to figure out like, well, could we, could we go to part of one and part of the other and I was like, well, let's, let's look at it. So ultimately, I said let's talk about this person at school, this little boy at school. When you're with him, how does he make you feel? Not, not great. Okay, when you're with your aunt, how does she make you feel? Oh, she makes us feel so great. Okay, this little boy, does he do kind things for you? Does he include you in play? You know, what are some of the nice things that he does for you? Well, sometimes he does this, but most of the time, he's not so nice. Okay. What about your aunt? What does she do that makes you feel good? What kind of nice things does she do? Oh, well, she takes us out for ice cream. And she comes over and plays games with us. And they, you know, and so we went back and forth like this about a bunch of different things. And pretty quickly, they realized, you know, where the priority needed to be. But I said, so what do you guys think? Who should we prioritize spending

time with on their birthday? And they both said, aunt Sandra, and I was like, yeah, that's that makes sense to me. That, that is really in line with our family values too, because we value our family and she's our family. And so it's just not the same and, even though it's super disappointing that we can't go to the birthday party, we need to prioritize the person who makes us feel really good about ourselves. And so that's kind of how we came to that. And we've done that with friendships as well like trying to decide do we stay in a friendship? Is it time to walk away from a friendship, you know, really looking at how does that other person make me feel? Compared to the friends in my life that always made me feel great. Hmm, where do I want to put my time and my energy?

D

Deana Thayer 09:26

Well, and you got to give the first - certainly not the last - but maybe one of the first examples of family is going to sometimes trump friends and that's the way we do it with Team Dorrian. You know, so, I think that is such a great example because there literally were two clashing things and you got to talk through not only just the logistics of how's that going to work, but weave the values in. So I love that. Because prioritizing can be a little bit tricky, I think, even for older children.

K

Kira Dorrian 10:00

Yeah, well, and I think we also spoke a little bit about why do we celebrate someone on their birthday? It's because we care about them, they mean something to us. And is it actually authentic to go to a birthday party for someone that you're not fond of? Right? Who doesn't make you feel good? Is that actually celebrating that person? Is that appropriate? Because they kept trying to figure out well, could we, could we go for the first couple hours? And then spend the rest of the time with Aunt Sandra and it was like, well, how's that going to make Sandra feel? And is it authentic to even go at all, you know, those kinds of critical thinking conversations.

D

Deana Thayer 10:32

Yeah, because then you also get to look at, well, why would you be going at all? So is there an element where you just want to go to the party because of the fun that's in it for you? It's really not about the birthday child, then it's like, well, can I stay long enough to get the goodie bag or go to the bouncy house or whatever? And that's very different than the real root of why we would go and do that. And there again, I mean, we're just saying this right now. Why becomes important in everything you do in parenting and so imparting the why to the children is a big deal too so they understand the why behind the what. This isn't just, we're handing down a decision, have a nice day, right? We want you

to understand why and how to think it through. And the way that you guided them through with questions is really great. I think that can be a helpful tool too, even sometimes after the fact like I just briefly mentioned before, if there was maybe a not great decision with my older children, we can talk through what went well. What did you not like about how that went? What would you do differently? Why? And come at it, it doesn't mean... I really prefer to be preventative. That's just, I'm big on that. I prefer to be proactive and not reactive. But sometimes there is value in coming in even after a situation and saying, let's talk about the decision making around that. Do you feel good about the decision you made? And if not, why not? What would we want to tweak about that and, and change to make it better. But another just practical thing I'll say is we do have a couple just hard and fast kind of policies that we've taught. Or I guess I should say I, because I really want to take ownership for the fact that I'm in charge of my two biological children. It doesn't mean this is how all five children in our household are handled. But with them, we did have a rule that you could not bail on a previously agreed upon engagement just because something more fun came along. So that was a big one for us. And that was a hard line on, this is one way we prioritize, we honor our commitments, we don't bail because something that looked more attractive came up. Now if we truly inadvertently double booked ourselves, then we have conversations around that and that's where we might bring in okay, what are our values around this? What do we as a family see is more important, but if it was just I actually scheduled this first, but now this opportunity is here. I'm sorry, that's, that's not kind. That's not loving your neighbor. I've been teaching my kids since they were tiny about caring for other people. And one of the very first little Bible verses they learned was about, each of you should look not only to your own interests, but also to the interests of others. And so that's one way we honor the interests of others, you don't cancel on them, because something that looked more fun came along.

K

Kira Dorrian 10:35

Mm hmm. Right. And that also helps them build friendships like real, true, meaningful friendships. Because as we move into adulthood, I mean, in my experience, my most meaningful friendships are the people I really trust, the people I know that are really going to show up when I need them. And that's a great example. Like if someone's committed to coming to, I don't know, my birthday party, for example. And I find out that they decided to go somewhere else because they got a better offer, that's going to break trust, right? I'm not going to feel very safe in that friendship. So I love, I love that.

D

Deana Thayer 13:56

And it makes, it helps them value things like dependability and loyalty. And we often talk

in our family about really, it's yes, I want to help them make good choices in friends but so much about that is about being a good friend. You are more likely to attract a positive circle of friends if you're being the kind of friend you'd like to have. And one way we do that is not flaking, not failing, being dependable, being loyal, honoring our commitments, knowing that if you said you'd show up, you'll show up.

K

Kira Dorrian 14:30

Yeah, absolutely. So what else? What other techniques have you used as a means of teaching? Even just critical thinking? Because I think, you know, the topic today is prioritization and decision making. But really, really underneath that what we're talking about is critical thinking skills.

D

Deana Thayer 14:46

Right, because critical thinking is required for both of those - to make good decisions and to be able to create a relevant and usable hierarchy of priorities. So one of the ways we do this in our house is... I don't even think they would view it as a system. But I've been pretty intentional with decision making, about scheduling, about anything, where we come at it from a perspective of others, that others focus and looking at it through that lens, but also, and it stinks that we have to think about this, but how will others perceive your decision? Because that is a fair thing to think about. How are you representing yourself? I often talked to my children when we were out and about after school. This is just a simple example, that when you're in your school uniform, you are still somewhat representing your school. And so your behavior really matters. Because if they're looking at what it says on your sweater vest and you're being wild and unruly, they might actually get an unfortunate view of your school and that's too bad. And the other thing is our name. So your family, you're representing your family also when you're out and about. And of course for us this all levels up to ultimately you're representing God. How are you ever going to look different enough that someone's curious, which we talked about before, if you're not representing that well? So when that, when you take that and break it down into decision making, what that means is, if I choose A, how does that look? Really? What are people going to think? And I'm not talking about caring about what other people think about you in the negative sense. But really, what does that look like? What does it say about me as a person? How am I coming off with this decision? Now, if I go over here and choose option B, what does that look like? This happened quite recently with my daughter. She was really very seriously considering missing a good chunk of a school day, because her college application deadline was approaching and she wanted to finish that up and do it well. Really just tie all those loose ends and get things sent off and because she's over 16, I didn't tell her what to do. She doesn't have rules in my house. So I said,

alright, I'll be interested to hear what you decide about that. And I, I have to just say I did a stellar job of keeping my mouth shut. I had A LOT of I thoughts on this.

K

Kira Dorrian 17:10

I bet you did!

D

Deana Thayer 17:12

And I can say to our listeners privately, I was not a fan of the idea of skipping school to do this other thing. But she was gonna have to get there. What was so great, is she ended up asking me before she decided, so the night before. She said, I'm leaning toward actually going in to school tomorrow. And inside, I'm celebrating already, but I said, oh, tell me about that, I'm interested to hear more. I'm curious, to use a Kira phrase. And she said that what it came down to for her was the rest of her evening that day, an activity she's already in and committed to had been canceled. So she said, I now know I could work on this in the evening. I don't have to do it during the school day. But also I know a few other people who are going to not be there that day too for the same reason, and I'm not sure I want to be associated with a group who will just skip school to do this other thing. I want to show that my priorities are still I need to be at school. And then the best part ever for a mom, she asked me what I thought about that. So now I could finally weigh in. And of course, I said, this is fantastic. I love the way you've thought this through, you are thinking about not only how this looks to the administration, to the faculty, lumping yourself in with other people who will just skip class. But you've also realized, oh, there is another time I could do it. Yeah, I can fit it somewhere else. So that's just one example where we got to think about how will that look? And is that how I want to appear?

K

Kira Dorrian 18:35

Wow. That is so cool. Oh, my gosh, I love everything about that. What a cool story.

D

Deana Thayer 18:39

It was so great. And I was really proud of the decision she made. But I was thankful that I had zipped my lips early on because she actually did get there on her own, and then I was able to just come around and affirm that decision rather than telling her what decision to make.

K

Kira Dorrian 18:52

She made such a multifaceted decision, right. She was really like... there were multiple angles for her in that decision making which is the point. Because oftentimes there are multiple angles to consider.

D

Deana Thayer 18:55

Right? There are and there's some complexity to that. And so, training a child from an early age, how do we think about this? You're not just telling them what to think. Right? Just like you did, because you guided it through with questions. So even for younger children, I think you can do that. You can start walking them through what a decision making process looks like, and how to pick what's important and all of that. So that by the time they're that age, you start to get to see some of the fruit of that, which is awesome.

K

Kira Dorrian 19:31

I can't wait. I can't wait to see what my, what mine do it that in that same like, situation.

D

Deana Thayer 19:35

Because the beginning is just so much a lot of hard work, you don't always see the results because ultimately at those ages, we still kind of get to make that final decision. We'd love you to weigh in. But we know in our mind like you knew in your mind, it's going to be the aunt's birthday, right? So it's really great when you get to sit back and start to get a front row seat at some great decision making by a young adult.

K

Kira Dorrian 19:55

Yeah, it's interesting because I haven't gotten here with my kids yet, but it's something that I intend to do with them that my dad did with me. So when I was about, I want to say it must have been eight, seven or eight. I mean, we were still living in Florida at that time. So I couldn't have been nine yet. So I was definitely younger than nine. Okay. My dad started, you know, he was driving me as parents do. I'm learning like, everywhere, right? All you know, in your car, right? So he's driving me everywhere. And so we were in the car alone a lot. And he decided to start debating. And he would pick topics like big topics, like I remember debating abortion at age eight. And most of the time, he'd let me pick the side that I wanted to represent, like, whatever I believed, and I had to articulate myself, I had to give reasons. I had to, you know, give critical thinking skills and I had to show them, but a lot of the time, not all the time, but often he would force me to flip sides and say today,

you know what side you want to be on and I'd be like, oh, I want to be pro choice. And he'd be like, great, today you're pro life. And it, but it was so amazing, because, because it really forced me to think through someone else's perspective, through someone else's point of view, which, especially as an only child was so important. I never had to consider anyone else's needs. And Dave would tell you that, that's still the case. So I still struggle with this. So I think that he just really did an amazing thing for me of just forcing me to think critically about my own opinion. And then he'd debate back. So he bless him would take whatever side even if he disagreed, he'd debate me right back. And when I had to come back with a counter argument, and we just kind of go back and forth, and it was just, it was huge for my critical thinking skills. I really believe that. So that's something I'm intending to do with mine when they're just a smidge older.

D

Deana Thayer 21:44

Yes, it's so helpful. We used to play a game that was similar to this and it kind of led to decision making - moral, immoral or amoral. So I would present a scenario. Someone fell down on the playground. You go over and you check on them and you help them out. And if they need to, even maybe take them to the office for a bandaid, moral, immoral, or amoral? Well, moral, moral, that's a good idea. And we could make other scenarios. But sometimes I would add complexity. So I would say, all right, you're sitting on the bus - amoral. Now you're standing on the bus. Could be amoral. You're standing on the bus, and there's a sign that says you must be seated.

K

Kira Dorrian 22:26

Immoral?

D

Deana Thayer 22:26

Immoral. Now, there's a sign on the bus that says you must be seated. But an elderly person gets on the bus and doesn't have a seat. So we would just add on, now what do you do? How do you still honor age? Do you stand up and offer that person your seat? But now you're breaking the rule. I mean, it was so fun. We got to talk about hey, but then what if you add this little element now? How do you make the decision? How do you still do what's right, but how do you honor our values that we respect and honor older people? Or a pregnant woman who gets on the bus? So getting them thinking about...oh, that situation's easy....oh, until you did that.

K

Kira Dorrian 22:59

But all the gray! Yeah, gray. Right, life is so incredibly gray. And so allowing them to just experience the complexity of all that grayness. It gives them those skills for when they're out in the world and life is gray.

D Deana Thayer 23:12

The other element of decision making that's important to teach, I would say, and this is a practical tip you can use is add context when you talk about it. So riding your bike around after church on the patio, okay, I don't know why you'd have your bike at church, but here we go. We're going to just use it. Okay, fine. Amoral, riding your bike. Now, there's a bunch of people standing outside. It's fellowship hour and they're holding coffee. Now, it might be immoral because you could knock into someone, they could get bumped. So thinking about context, there's a time and a place where it's great. Riding your bike is okay, but there might be a time and place where we shouldn't do that. So that's another thing you can start very young. Where hey, that might be okay. But would it be okay over here, right? Would it be okay at this time? Would it be okay in this location? Maybe not. Right? Is playing hide and seek fine? Yes. Would you want to play it in grandma's house where she has all those breakable lamps? Maybe we should take that outside. Right? Yeah, context is another one.

K Kira Dorrian 24:09

What a cool game. I love that.

D Deana Thayer 24:11

And they actually really enjoyed it. They would request it, like, can we play moral, immoral or amoral, mommy?

K Kira Dorrian 24:15

I kind of want to play it with you, too, I love how I was like, that's immoral, right? I'm just curious.

D Deana Thayer 24:22

I'm curious. And then you can just do the fun amoral ones, like, you don't like pizza. Amoral, it doesn't matter. You're allowed to have preferences, so you can kind of have fun with those. And then they would want to take a turn and present a scenario for me to figure out, right. So it's good. It was, it was a helpful way to get them thinking but in a way

that still felt fun. It was framed in, we're playing a game.

K

Kira Dorrian 24:42

Yeah, that's fantastic. I have to tell you a funny story, and then we'll wrap up but so the other day, Dave and I were talking about being Jewish in a Christian country and what that's like, and I had some opinions on that. Dave had some opinions on that. And, and so I think we were even, I can't remember if we were talking, I don't think we were talking about the Bible specifically, but we were talking about something where his theology background was meaningful. That he had a certain level of education around this that actually, I, I don't. And so I, the kids were kind of trying to support me, you know, and they were like, well, you know, don't be mean to mommy, you know, and he wasn't being mean. But anyway, so I said, but you know, guys, you need to remember that Daddy has an education in theology in a way that I don't. So there's some stuff that he really knows that I don't know. And Rhiannon said, yes, Mommy, but he's never experienced being Jewish. And I was like, oh, that's so true. And it's that same concept of like, like that angle, the ability to look at something that seems really clear cut and see it from other angles that inform the context, the feelings, the decision making, all of that

D

Deana Thayer 24:57

And that was a pretty profound statement from a seven year old I think.

K

Kira Dorrian 25:09

Oh yeah, every now and then those two knock me off my feet.

D

Deana Thayer 25:27

Isn't it great when they do that just to give you a zinger like that. Wow. Okay, where'd that come from? Yeah. But that's really true. And that's what enables, I mean, I think it's part of why our friendship is a success is we can recognize our own shortfalls in terms of experience, and things I haven't lived that you have. And it, I think that's an important thing to be able to admit. Because then you're more open to saying I want to hear you. I love this idea. I want my kids to be there you are people, not here I am people. I want them to notice other people and care about them and not be well, here I am with all my views and opinions and all my glory. I want them to be there you are people. I notice you, I see you, I care about you, and that even should influence their decision making. How do we love people well in our decision making, because a lot of times the decisions were making - birthday party is a great example - they have people involved who may be hurt

by a decision we make or don't. Or the absence of a decision. I mean, there's, there's often people involved and so can we be there you are people, not here I am people. I love that.



Kira Dorrian 27:14

What's our quote today?



Deana Thayer 27:15

The quote today is perfect because we're talking about teaching children how to think about decision making, and it's a Margaret Mea, quote, and its, children should be taught how to think not what to think.



Kira Dorrian 27:27

Well, for more information on us, you can go to futurefocusedparenting.com if you have any questions or thoughts or you want to write in, we'd love to hear from you info@futurefocusedparenting.com. Please don't forget to follow us on Facebook or Instagram. Our handles are @raisingadultspodcast. Hope you found our conversation today interesting on decision making and prioritization. I know I did. I got a lot out of this one. I always love when I walk away from one of our recordings and I feel like I got tools.



Future Focused Parenting 27:56

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Kira Dorrian 27:58

Fabulous. So thank you for listening and we are beginning to wrap up season one. So our final episode is going to air next week, and then we will be back in the new year, probably late January, and so we are looking forward to having you with us next week for the season one finale. Raising Adults is produced by Kira Dorrian and Deana Thayer and recorded in my laundry room. Music by Seattle band Hannalee. Thanks for listening.

