

Episode 49. Kids and Advocacy

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SPEAKERS

Deana Thayer, Kira Dorrian, Future Focused Parenting



Future Focused Parenting 00:03

What happens when two parent coaches, one a Christian and the other an agnostic Jew, sit down to talk about parenting? They take their listeners from surviving to thriving. I'm Deana Thayer, and I'm Kira Dorrian. Welcome to Raising Adults, a podcast brought to you by Future Focused Parenting.



Kira Dorrian 00:23

Well, hi, everyone, welcome to Raising Adults podcast, Kira and Deana here. Thanks for joining us this week, we are talking this week about advocacy and how do you as a parent advocate for your child? And more importantly, how do you know when to advocate, when not to advocate? And what does that look like when maybe people are doing that differently than you? So how do you figure out your own comfort with this particular topic?



Deana Thayer 00:49

It's a big one.



Kira Dorrian 00:50

Huge, I feel like we've said that every episode this season. I know it's a big one.

D

Deana Thayer 00:54

But sometimes, I don't know, there's just so many layers, I think with this one, because it also involves other people a lot of times. And so this kind of leads into my why anyway, but it's a balance of I'm protecting and sticking up for my children by advocating for them. But are there times when the way that might lead to potentially steamrolling someone else isn't okay, and I just don't think that's always easy to navigate. And so this why for me comes back to what I've talked about before, with working to grow a backbone as I became an adult, because I didn't even have a very strong one for myself, it was a whole new world to get a strong backbone on behalf of my children. Interestingly, that one was a lot easier to grow, because mama bear is a real thing. And it was so interesting for me to look at this dynamic where, wow, I was stronger on behalf of Cienna and Marc than I may have been for myself in the same situation. And so that developed a strong why in not only reinforcing my own growth in assertiveness, but in helping me with knowing when to step in on their behalf, too. So it just, it was a really unique kind of dichotomy, because I got to watch them side by side. And it was quite a juxtaposition sometime like, oh, I probably wouldn't have said anything were that just about me. So I, this one's really interesting for me as someone who's only been a recent member of the vertebrate community.

K

Kira Dorrian 02:23

Well, and what's so good about it, though, you know, this is one of those spots where our differences have nothing to do with faith, not faith, but like just our own personality differences, kind of like with the assertiveness episode. And it's great, because our listeners are not going to just align with one or the other. Right, there's gonna there's a mix of people out there. So it's really good to have two perspectives on this, I think.

D

Deana Thayer 02:44

I think so. I think it'll be a great combo pack. Tell me about your why.

K

Kira Dorrian 02:48

Well, I have a strong vertebra. It's been around for a while. No, my why was twofold. Well, maybe threefold, two and a half fold. So one part was modeling, I really felt like when they watched me advocate, they were learning it's okay to advocate for themselves, that someone who loves them felt they were worth standing up for. And maybe that means I'm worth standing up for myself. So that was number one. Number two, was that no one else was going to do it for them. And I think that's really important. I actually want to say that

again, no one else is going to advocate for your kid but you. So if you don't, they're not getting advocated for. And that's really important. And I think that's what makes mama bear mama bear, right, is like that feeling of someone has to do it. And I love them. So I guess I better put my own ish to the side and go for it, which is great. I love that that's built in for us. But I think this applies to dads too. You know, I have a British husband who is much like you. I think coming to America helped him learn to be more assertive and advocate for himself, and learning to advocate for the kids, you know that he, he's a Papa Bear, but not in the same way. I feel like you know, that instinct is different for women in, in a crazy way. So anyway, so that was number two, nobody was going to do it for them. But this half was I think my profession was a really big part of this too. Because I work with so many adults who are coming in with issues that were created in their childhood, like the most common age is between the age of two and seven, sometimes two and nine, kind of depending on the issue. I was really aware that between the ages of two and seven and two and nine, they were really vulnerable. And this was going to form their issues. And so me advocating for them in that time was essential, so that we could minimize. Now that's not to say that I did everything for them and I swooped in and solved all the problems, but I was really, I had a heightened awareness during those years. And this is one of the reasons that I'm being, I'm feeling comfortable making this pivot into independence because I know we're out of time. That window, they're formed, their issues are formed, we did not get out without some issues. Of course, that's to be expected. So I think it was the, the sort of triangle of those things.

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Deana Thayer 05:12

It's interesting. I like what you said, because about Dave in particular, and how being here has helped. And I think that it is true that male parents have a strong protective mechanism too, but I would agree that it isn't quite the same and not as visceral. And what's so interesting is that a person can be very strong in terms of opinions, because I've said before, I'm a spicy meatball, I have some beliefs about things and they are strong. But what, where this diverges for me, when it's about advocating for my children is I have a hard time personally, if my opinion might cause a rift relationally, I don't enjoy that. I don't enjoy conflict. And I don't want to purposely cause a problem. So I'm strong, but it will be in the context of if somebody asks, I'm happy to tell you, I don't usually come like a bull in the china shop. I will, however, go full buffalo in a china shop, if I have to, where my kids are concerned. So that's so fascinating to me. And I would love to just talk a little bit about how this looked for me starting when my kids were small and how it's changed over time. Because I do think it's so wonderful and special that here at Raising Adults, we have someone on the front end, and in the front lines, in a lot of ways of younger children, and someone who can say, okay, when you look down the path a little bit, here's how it might shift or where I can look in the rearview and also tell our listeners, don't make that same

mistake. But one thing is I was thinking about this episode that I just want to make sure to address on the front end that I think impacts or at least informs advocacy is that our culture is different now than even a generation ago in terms of how other adults stepped in. And so a few of the examples that came to mind for me when I was thinking through this topic had to do with when I felt that my kids were trying to be parented by someone else, and how maddening that was for me. I couldn't even think of the word right then because it just brings it all right back. I have big feelings about it to this day. And culturally, even 50 years ago that was totally accepted. Another adult could school the child, correct a child, the neighbor could tell them to get out of their yard and bring them by the scruff of their neck back home or whatever. And I think our response to that, while mostly has moved in a positive direction, our response to that now is very different. And it can really get your hackles up. And so for me some of my first experiences with advocacy were telling somebody else, you know what, I've got it. And it wasn't even so much sticking up for Cienna and Marc, it was sticking up for my own parenting. And that I don't want someone correcting my child when I'm here and available to do it. And I do think that's an important distinction to make. If I were nowhere around and they were in danger or something, I hope someone would help and even say something to them if they needed to about, you know, get off of that, you're gonna fall or whatever. But when I'm right there? That? No, thank you. And so I just want to say that I, I acknowledge that the world is very different and that I maybe got overly offended a few times, but some of my first mamabear advocacy moments where you know what, I'm right here, and I've got this and I'm happy to correct them. So just an interesting facet of this that came up for me as I was thinking about the topic. And so when my kids were small, I did that more. I mean, there were times where just due to childishness or naivete, they may have gotten themselves into a situation that they didn't even know wasn't okay. And if someone stepped in and said something about that when I was right there and available, I would often correct that person really gently. I was never a stinker. But it really kind of, I feel so strongly about parenting that I think it almost offended me to have been perceived as someone not doing my job. I am not asleep on the job. I am right here. So things like that were an example where I would stick up for them and myself if they were corrected by someone else. But other areas where this came up for me was a lot in their early schooling. So as our listeners know, I started out homeschooling and then my life circumstances necessitated a switcheroo to that. And they were finally involved in a more formal school setting, although initially it was very beautiful and chill because it was Montessori, which was really lovely. But I did have to sometimes stick up not only for my parenting choices, but for them in the school setting. To say if I felt that something wasn't handled fairly or that I was confused about the assessment process. And especially as we moved into a classical school, I had a lot of questions. This might sound terrible, but my advocacy was also not maybe in their favor. I don't know how to say this. But let me, let me tell the story and this will be the example. So the very first trimester that we were at the classical school, my

daughter got straight A's. And I marched in to the teacher and said, I want to know whether this is an accurate reflection of how she's doing, or does everybody get straight A's in first grade? It was, and part of that for me was I feel like I'm sticking up for her understanding a standard. And where is the standard? And did I actually meet it? Or is it, I'm six years old, so everybody, yay! And so I think what, what we have to remember is that sometimes sticking up for your child isn't, I want it to end up turning out their way.

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Kira Dorrian 10:35

Yeah.

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Deana Thayer 10:35

It's helping them understand things and learn about how the world works. And sometimes we need to do that for them. Because she wouldn't have looked at that report card with any skepticism. She was seven. So I think...

K

Kira Dorrian 10:46

Right. I love that you just talked about that. That's so great. Like, I mean, you're totally right. But what what a wonderful point to make in the midst of talking about the bigger idea of advocacy that, sometimes it's not to your child's, quote, unquote, seeming benefit, right. But it is to their benefit.

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Deana Thayer 11:03

Right? Because I did care about teaching them about work ethic and working hard. And are you really earning this or not? And so interesting story, and maybe not what we would think of as traditional advocacy. But I think it's okay to expand your mind to realize anytime you intervene as a parent, if it helps your child learn about how the world works, you're helping to raise an adult.

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Kira Dorrian 11:26

Yeah, I love that. I love that. So what does it look like now?

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Deana Thayer 11:30

So a lot different. Now we have, we have a policy in place in our home, that when you shift into secondary school, and our school is divided in grammar and secondary, so

secondary starts in seventh grade, and it's a pre K through 12 school. So it's the whole, the whole thing is all together, but you start secondary in seventh grade. And our policy was if you're uncomfortable about a grade, or you feel that something was unfair at school, or even, of course, any inner relational squabbles, I help in grammar school, if you've done the process first that we have in place in our family. And in our family, since we have a faith paradigm, we operate on a biblical principle that is you go to the person first. If you can't solve it, then you can get a second person to come and help. So my kids were always told still, you try to go to the person first and do some problem solving before you rope in a teacher or anyone else at school. If it gets to the level and you get to the end of your school day, or even a few days, and this is festering it's fine for mom and dad to step in. So that was our policy in grammar school. In secondary school, we really step away unless there's something big, so they not only would go directly to the person, but we also encourage them to advocate for themselves academically and relationally with faculty. So if they're concerned about a grade they got or they don't feel that the scoring was fair, or there was a concept they didn't understand, the onus is on them to go ask for the help, get some clarity on the grading, ask for an extension if they feel that can't complete something by the deadline. I am not going to swoop in and go, can you help so and so out with whatever? He wasn't done on time. You know, you have to own those things, good or bad. So that's one little divider mark we've given. However, this is a really important thing. And I, I think because of how much we talk about parenting with emotional intelligence, and making sure there's empathy in our parenting, I also made sure my kids knew if they really couldn't make progress with that on their own, that I was available. It isn't, I'll never chat with the administration or a staff member. That wasn't the message I wanted to send. It was, you are the first line of defense. But still, guess what? The buck stops with mom. So if they really need me, and there have been a few times even in later high school where it necessitated parental involvement or to have a sit down and get a clear idea of what was going on. But what I knew, and what gave me such satisfaction in terms of the purpose with which I parent is that I knew they had tried first. So those are just a couple thoughts.

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Kira Dorrian 14:10

Well, and I think what's great about that whole trajectory that I hope our listeners have heard is that you had, you had to get there and how you got to that point of going, now you self advocate as best you can, is in those younger years you advocated and modeled advocacy. And that's, that's the key, right, is, it's kinda like what I said earlier. Kids need to know that they're worth advocating for. And they're not going to learn that by you just telling them it's okay to advocate for yourself. If you aren't modeling that, they're going to get a really mixed message. And this to me, this might not be a favorable thing to say. But here we go. This to me also comes down to issues of self worth and self esteem. If kids

don't see parents sticking up for them, now let me be clear, that doesn't mean every issue on the playground, I'm not suggesting that you become that mom or that parent. But if they know something's gone really wrong, and they see that a parent is too afraid to advocate for them, it's going to speak to their own sense of self worth. Am I not worth sticking up for? Mom knows I've been wronged. Maybe mom or dad has even said it. Like, that wasn't okay. But we're not going to do anything.

D

Deana Thayer 15:24

Yes. And so I just really encourage parents with younger kids to just really give some thought to that. And that's what I mean by nobody else is going to do it. If you aren't the one who steps in and says, hey, that wasn't okay, we need to sort this out, no one else is going to give your child the self worth in that situation, that's up to you. Yes. And as they come to grow in their identity, and who they are, I think another thing that becomes important is respecting. And we've just talked about this just recently, and kind of emerged into this topic in a recent episode, but understanding that there are different people from us. So let me also say, there may be a few times if you have older children, where to you, it has gotten to the point where it needs a parent. And they're still gonna say no. And that is hard. But they are their own people. And as they figure out which issue is worth, possible tension, or will this come back on me? Because let's face it, there's politics everywhere, public school, private school, everywhere. So sometimes they're even weighing, will this impact me socially at school, academically at school, if I have a tough time navigating a situation with a faculty member or an administration member, and school's just an easy example, I'm not saying this is what has happened to us. But school is a tangible example that I think we can grab on to where they may be more aware, frankly, of the dynamics of that even than we are, because we're not there seven hours every day. So advocacy looks different as we take that intentional copilot seat, they've got to start driving the bus. And it does mean that sometimes when we go, I'm ready to take the wheel, they're gonna say, not on this one. And we need to be okay with that. Now, in issues of true safety, there's probably more that I'm not thinking of right now, I do hold a trump card where I'll say I have to talk to someone about this. And my kids understand that. But if it's just a hey, I disagree with this policy, or I didn't like how this went. And I say, hey, I really think I need to speak with so and so, I respect them if they tell me no thanks.

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Kira Dorrian 17:31

Yeah, I mean, the bus analogy is great like that, you know, they need to start driving the bus. But I would say that it's important that they see that you're driving the bus first. Right? Like someone has to be driving the bus. Yeah, please, please always drive the bus.

D

Deana Thayer 17:44

Well, and this is exactly how it works. Even in actual driving, we drive, then they drive with us in the passenger seat before they're allowed to drive alone. So your point about modeling can't really be overstated. They have to see it first. So I'm actually really jealous of your kids, because I'm sure you modeled this better than I did, because I was kind of spineless. So I don't know that they got to see me doing it so much. But they at least got to see me doing it on their behalf.

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Kira Dorrian 18:06

Yeah, I mean, I think it's, I think it's, it must be very challenging for people that aren't naturally assertive. And it's a, I'm aware that to throw that out there and put that amount of pressure on parents is as hard. And I think parents need to hear it. It's important. It's really important. I mean, being an advocate for your child is basically saying to yourself to the person you're advocating with, and to your children, you're worth it. A great example this year, for reasons I won't explain, I had to call a conference with the kids' new teacher to talk through something. And they don't do conferences before school starts once you're through kindergarten. So I had to ask the teacher to take time out of her prep before school started to meet with me about something that wasn't in a record. So there was no, there was no leg for me to stand on that I needed this conference. And even something like that, like I have such respect for teachers, and they work so hard, and they have no time. And I felt bad asking, but I asked anyway, because that was how I was going to set my kids up for success in the year. And I know last year, a few of my friends were having some issues with one of the teachers. And a lot of them didn't want to say anything. They didn't want to ruffle feathers, and you have to ruffle feathers. And that's hard and it stinks and it's okay to be like, I don't like it, and I don't want to, but you have to say, my kids are worth ruffling some feathers, and they're gonna feel worth it. My mom went to bat for me, my parents stood up for me. You know, I just I can't say it enough. I think it's just the root of the advocacy is so far beyond getting the need met in the situation.

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Deana Thayer 19:52

Well and what you said there is such a key point because advocacy is just one of these, but I think there are many areas of parenting where all personality types are going to have to go out of their comfort zone and do something as a parent that they would never normally do as just a person. And we've got to do that if it's in the best interest of our children. So this certainly is one example where if you're more introverted, or if you're less assertive, it might be challenging. But it could be any number of things the other way. You might be a really strong and social and extroverted person and need to honor that you have a shier child who maybe doesn't want to invite 12 people over for a birthday party,

but just wants to go to lunch with one. I mean, there's so many areas of parenting where we've got to set our own, the things we gravitate toward, aside to do what's best for our children. So I am so glad you said that. That's a wonderful point.

K

Kira Dorrian 20:42

Yeah, I mean, some of us have to do Legos. It's very uncomfortable. Some of us are very bad at Legos. But we do them because it's important. No, it's a, it's an excellent point. And here's the other thing. I talk all the time this season about selfish parenting, like it's okay to have your own experience and want to get something out of it for yourself as well. From a selfish perspective, what an amazing growth opportunity parenting is for all of us. I mean, whatever, whatever the thing is, Legos are, I mean, there's a million for me that aren't so silly. But whatever the thing is that pushes you out of your comfort zone in parenting. I mean, if you aren't afraid to embrace that, and lean into that and go, okay, this scares the heck out of me, but I'm gonna do it anyway, you are gonna grow as a person. So not only are you gonna show up for your kids in a way that they need, but you're gonna get better as a human and like, what a cool, that's the coolest part of parenting. Not the coolest, but it's up there, that we get to be better humans for having raised them.

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Deana Thayer 21:44

So true. What a win. That's really great. That's so funny that you struggle with Legos. I was just laughing in my mind because that's so opposite for me. I'm more of the like, the freeform playing is what would stress me out. I'm like, we're pretending? For, for how long? About, about what? Because it had no boundaries. I was like, can we color in the coloring book in the lines, or I'd like to build a Lego because when it's done, I know when it's done. And there's instructions to follow. Just such a super like, type a nerd, but it was more like the, will you just play with me? It's like the scariest sentence I could ever hear from my children. Well, tell me what you want to play, and I'll tell you if I'm terrified or not.

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Kira Dorrian 22:24

This is why again, we've talked about this before, it's so great to have people in your lives that are different than you, right? Because you can be like, go play at Kira's house. Right? And then everybody over to my house for Legos. You know, I think the whole concept of knowing thyself. And this is true with this. It's okay to know yourself. It's okay to say I am working on my backbone. It's okay to say this is an area that's so scary for me. But do it anyway. Not just for your kids, but for you. But especially for them. This is just one that is like, oh, I don't know, I'm a bit on my high horse about this one today. I think, I just think it's so, so important on a zillion levels, especially when we think about raising an adult. You

know, I would imagine that for you, that struggle of developing a backbone was hard and scary and overwhelming, and, and the opportunity to save your kids from that to go, I want better than that for them. I don't want them to do that. And you can. You did, because you were able to really realize that because you're so self aware. So just encourage our more introverted listeners or those listeners that find that confrontation really hard and scary. And let me say for the record as an assertive extroverted individual, I don't like confrontation. The difference is I do it anyway. But I really don't like it. It makes me super uncomfortable. But I do it anyway.

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Deana Thayer 23:45

Yes. And I think that's the key right, the parenting is the, this part's hard for me, and I do it anyway, or I don't like this over here, but I do it anyway. It's really about the doing it anyway. So and we're coming up on our October attribute, which we've chosen courage for this one. And let's be clear, this gets fleshed out more in the attribute of the month. And you need to sign up for it if you haven't already. But really, it's not the absence of fear. It's the doing it anyway, part. And so I appreciate that you said that. And that advocacy is one topic where we can start to peel back the layers of, how many other areas are there where it's going to take a little bit of courage? And you get the chance to model courage to your kids when you do something and even maybe admit, you know, this is a little out of my comfort zone. But I'm going to do it because our family values courage. And it's important to sometimes do things even in the face of some nerves or in the face of downright terror. I mean, all kinds of things. It might be really scary for you to confront someone whether it's for yourself or on behalf of your child. But when they see that you rise up and do it anyway I think that also models courage. So more about that to come in the amazing, robust newsletter in October.

K

Kira Dorrian 24:54

I think, I think you're spot on and I think that it's a real misconception when we see somebody do something brave, we assume they're not scared. And it's the same with assertiveness and advocacy. I think there's a real misconception there that people who are assertive and are good at advocating for themselves, it doesn't faze them. That's not true. It phases us, believe me, for most of us, it phases us, but we do it anyway. And that's the difference. So I think, yeah, the do it scared as you like to say. And the, the concept of courage is just so important with this topic. Because whether you, it's kind of like changing diapers, like, some people don't mind it. Some people really don't like it. But every parent does it anyway. And it's kind of like that.

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Deana Thayer 25:36

Yeah, because it just has to be done. And I and I think, you know, when we talk about courage or doing something when you're scared, there's two extremes that we can fall into as parents. And one is, well, if I'm feeling fear, that's a sign I shouldn't do it. And we can't go there as parents, we can't let it paralyze us. But we also can't wait until whatever scenario doesn't produce fear. So there has to be a middle where I'm feeling those feelings and taking action in spite of it. That's the crux, that's the intersection. And that's what's so important. And this really is different for every family in terms of where you'll need to step in, what arenas you'll need to step in, how to know where not to. So it's not a one size fits all. But hopefully, we've at least given some examples of kind of what it looks like, in, in a few different ways, because it's not going to be cookie cutter.

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Kira Dorrian 26:24

No, not at all. And I think we even talked about this before we hit record, there's an instinctual thing here, right? Trusting those instincts. And if you instinctually feel like your kid has been wronged, or your kid needs something, that is your cue to step in. And especially, I loved what you said about, you know, going to the person first. Like, I want to be clear, I advocate for my kids really well. But I don't jump in for everything all the time. I really encourage them to try and learn those self advocacy skills. But when I can tell that it's not working, or that they haven't yet developed a particular one, that's when I'll swoop in and model it, right? So I think trusting those instincts, because I, I would venture to guess that families out there that maybe aren't as good at advocating are still getting the instinct that they should be. So listen to that, listen to it, and be courageous. And know that every single time you stick up for your kid, they are getting a message of self worth from you.

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Deana Thayer 27:18

And that's so important. It's really important. And that's actually, interestingly what our quote is about today, because this is about listening, because, as we've said, it's not going to look the same for everyone. And so it becomes about trusting in which areas do you need to step in. And so this is from Baby Loving Mama, and it says, trust your instincts. And here's what, here's what they say, my favorite piece of advice for parents is there's no one right way to do something. And I think we could agree in advocacy, not one right way how that looks. Trust your instincts. If we all spent a little less time judging others and ourselves, like me judge myself for no backbone. Imagine how much more time we'd have to simply enjoy what is really important - our families. And I do think advocating well leaves time for enjoyment because you get this hard part out of the way, this confrontation, and can move back to enjoying your relationships. And hopefully with

having the issue solved as well - added bonus!



Kira Dorrian 28:12

Added bonus. I love it. So listeners, I'm going to ask for some reviews. If you haven't yet written us a nice five star review, please do because we welcome and love those and they do help with our relevancy in the podcasting world. And don't forget that you can follow us on Facebook and Instagram @raisingadultspodcast and @futurefocusedparenting. For more information on us go to futurefocusedparenting.com. And if you have something you want to work through with us, questions, or you want to talk through an issue, we always love being available to our listeners for coaching info@futurefocusedparenting.com.



Deana Thayer 28:49

And if you feel like that might resonate with you, you might like some parent coaching, whether it's over just a tricky discipline issue or a larger parenting topic, but coming directly to us, for you with less backbones is still feeling a little nerve wracking, I really would encourage you to go to our website, futurefocusedparenting.com, click on work with us, and just look at the different packages we offer. Maybe for you, it's going to be better to start by just reading and learning about it. And that might feel less intimidating than an email. So for those of you where that's an issue, come check it out, at least learn about it, and then see if there might be something there that's of interest to you.



Kira Dorrian 29:26

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 29:33

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