

# Episode 84. Growing WITH Our Children with Dr. Kara Powell

📅 Wed, 8/12 2:07PM ⏱ 29:44

## SUMMARY KEYWORDS

parents, kids, growing, questions, listeners, faith, focuser, parenting, kara, thinking, child, adulting, age, deana, verb, learner, explorer, feel, plan, stages

## SPEAKERS

Deana Thayer, Kara Powell, Future Focused Parenting, Kira Dorrian



Kara Powell 00:00

So we define growing with parenting as a mutual journey of intentional growth for both ourselves and our children. So some of the big words there are it's a mutual journey, where we're learning from each other and parents from how kids are growing and kids from how parents are growing. And yet we as parents, we're still very intentional about how we're building relationships with our kids, and helping them think about their relationships and their future.



Future Focused Parenting 00:31

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. Today's episode of Raising Adults is brought to you by the Homeschool Buyers Co-Op, which is the largest Buyers Club for homeschoolers in the country. It's run by homeschoolers who have a love for family and a deep commitment to homeschooling. And what the Homeschool Buyers Co-Op does is give families the purchasing power of school districts, which means that you get 10 to 90% off of curriculum. Plus registration is free, and they have a ton of free resources available as well. They also have a smart points reward system. So the more you buy, the more you've

earned. And if you register for your free account with our referral code, which is ADULTS, you will get 5000 Smart points right away, which basically gives you \$5 to spend on the site immediately. So register for your free account today and use our referral code ADULTS by going to <https://homeschoolbuyersco-op.org>.

D

Deana Thayer 01:53

Well, hello, everyone and welcome to another episode of Raising Adults podcast. We're glad you could join us today because we're talking about an important issue, and that is helping teens and young adults really move into thriving as they grow. And while I know a lot of our listeners have younger children, laying the foundation for this is really important. And Kira and I recognize that we're not necessarily experts at this either. So we're excited to have Dr. Kara Powell with us today to talk a little bit more about this. I've recently read her book "Growing With" which really talks about a lot of the elements of helping teens and young adults do well and be successful as they embark on their adulting journey. So we're glad to have her and I'm going to introduce her and then we'll dive right in. I think you'll really enjoy what she has to say. I've also been blessed enough to hear her at a blended family conference. And so I really know she has a heart not just for youth, but for the parents doing their best to raise them. So I'll introduce her and we'll dive right in. Kara Powell PhD is the executive director of the Fuller Youth Institute and a faculty member at Fuller Theological Seminary. Kara also serves as a youth and family strategist for Orange and speaks regularly at parenting and leadership conferences. Kara is the author or co-author of a number of books, including "Faith in an Anxious World," "Growing With," "18 Plus," "Growing Young," "The Sticky Faith Guide For Your Family," "Can I Ask That?" "Deep Justice Journeys," "Essential Leadership," "Deep Justice in a Broken World," and "Deep Ministry in a Shallow World." So welcome, Kara, thank you so much for being with us today.

K

Kara Powell 03:34

Oh, my pleasure. I'm looking forward to a great conversation.

D

Deana Thayer 03:37

Well, I've given the professional introduction, but maybe you could start by just telling us a little bit more about yourself personally and how you came into this important work with youth.

K

Kara Powell 03:46

Yeah, well, my husband and I have been married for 21 years. We have three kids, a 19 year old who just finished his college freshman year, a 17 year old who just finished her 11th grade year and a 14 year old who just finished her eighth grade year. And you know, my whole professional life, I felt a special burden for young people. I served for quite a number of years as a youth pastor at a few different churches in Southern California. And now I'm a faculty member at Fuller Seminary. But really my main job, as you mentioned, is directing the Fuller Youth Institute where we work hard to answer leaders and parents toughest questions about young people through research based answers.

K

Kira Dorrian 04:32

Fantastic. So Deana told me a little bit about this concept of growing with and I love it. I would love for you to tell our listeners... what does that mean, and how does that differ from this traditional idea that we have of kids simply growing up and then they grow apart from us as their parents?

K

Kara Powell 04:52

Well, the book is called Growing With and co-authored by my good friend and colleague Steve Argue because Steve's kids are a little bit older than mine. But what we see in ourselves and what we certainly hear from parents across the country of teenagers and young adults is that we fear that as our kids grow up, they're going to grow apart from us. And so what we wanted to say to parents is there's a different parenting posture that we can take. And just because our kids are growing up, doesn't mean we have to give up or grow apart. But we can grow with our kids. And we define growing with parenting as a mutual journey of intentional growth for both ourselves and our children. So some of the big words there are it's a mutual journey, where we're learning from each other and parents from how kids are growing and kids from how parents are growing. And yet we as parents, we're still very intentional about how we're building relationships with our kids, and helping them think about their relationships and their future. So that's really the heart of the book. And let me just say, I feel like every day I learn how to do it better, largely from my mistakes, being that kind of parent. So, so it's an ongoing journey for me, that's for sure.

D

Deana Thayer 06:19

That's so true. We often learn by where we fall down a little bit, right, we can learn the most from that. I was really interested in the book to see that the data is showing that it's not what we've always thought: you're just a kid and then you're an adult, like it used to be, or there was some kind of right of passage, and now you're a grown up and not even

so defined as child, teenager, adult. So can you talk a little bit about what we're seeing in the research about what are the stages of growth toward adulthood as defined in the book and what are the approximate age ranges for those so that we can form our conversation?

K

Kara Powell 06:51

Yeah, and that's really an important paradigm, but that shapes the book, and so I'm glad you're introducing it early in this conversation that you know, we tend to think of 13 to 29 year olds in two buckets that there's teenagers from age 13 to 18. And then kind of young adults beyond that. And you know, for today's young people, that journey is more nuanced. If you look at census data and other studies, you know, the typical young adult is getting married five years later, having babies five years later, becoming financially independent five years later, finishing school a lot later, etc. And so Steven and I felt like we need a more nuanced understanding of the age and life stage between 13 and 29. So we suggest not two buckets, but three. And the first is from age 13 to 18. And that's a Learner. And that's that kind of high school age young person. They're experiencing rapid, physical, emotional, relational, intellectual and spiritual growth. They have all sorts of new questions, friendships and interests. Then somewhere around 18, I say somewhere around because it's kind of 18 plus or minus a year that the Learner transitions to being an Explorer. That's the name that Steve and I gave that 18 to 23 year old. That Explorer is often venturing out for the first time away from home or home oriented routines. They're excited about the future yet still unsure about themselves. And then right around age 23, that Explorer transitions to being a Focuser. And that from age 23 to 28, again, plus or minus a year on the 23 transition, that Focusers gaining a clear sense of who they are. Some of their educational, relational spiritual vocational choices have opened up new opportunities. And as well as closed other doors, some feel on track with their life goals, while others feel a little bit behind. But each of those three stages of course, it's different now. Not only for our young people, but also for us as parents as we try to respond to our kid and be the parent that they need us to be.

K

Kira Dorrian 09:09

Wow, I love that. It's funny, I was quiet because I was reflecting on my own journey through those stages. And I was like, Oh, yeah, that's really, really true. So I know that there are three components to growing with our kids, and that each of them is sort of necessary to raising fully functioning adult. So can you talk about those three components? And I'm curious, do they correlate with those three phases? Or are they different?

K

Kara Powell 09:38

Well, they yes, they weed through all three phases, but the manifestation of them looks a little different. But yes, Steve and I think that there are really kind of three primary primary threads that weave their way through that Learner, Explorer and Focuser, a continuum, and so the first is actually a verb we made up, all three are verbs. The first is one we made up and we call that Withing. And by Withing we mean a family's growth and supporting each other as children grow more independent. And you know, as our kids develop mentally and appropriately, individually gain some autonomy, that is exciting for us. But it's also scary for us and they sometimes push away from us in a way that leaves us a little dented and cracked and bruised. And so, you know, Steve and I love thinking about how do we continue to love our kids unconditionally and support them with this goal of still helping our young person become more independent. So that's the first key verb is this idea of continuing to build family and intimacy, and showing unconditional love even while your young person is individuating from you. The second key verb is one that we hear quite a bit these days. And that's Adulting. Of course, we even see the hashtag adulting. We have a perhaps a slightly different definition of Adulting. We believe that Adulting is our kids growth and agency as they embrace opportunities to shape the world around them. So we love seeing that young person feel like they have more control more influence. They are agents in their own life and in particular in their relationships and their vocations. And then the third verb that we think is important at all three stages, is not one we made up but it's not as well known and that is Faithing. We define Faithing as having our family members own and embody our own journeys with God as we encounter new experiences and information. And so we love thinking with parents and young people alike about how their faith is changing what new relationships they're having that causes them to have new questions and perhaps arrive at new answers when it comes to their faith of whatever faith that might be. So those are the three threads that weave their way through all three stages.

D

Deana Thayer 12:27

Fantastic. So I'm wondering if, and you can completely pick if you want to do a Learner Explorer or Focuser or one of each, could you maybe give an example of each of those verbs and what they might look like a situation that might come up in a family where you could use those? What that might look like?

K

Kara Powell 12:44

Yeah, absolutely. I think in order to answer that question, I think what I should do is probably also give the parent counterpart for each of those three stages. So just like we came up with terms for the young person - Learner, Explorer, Focuser - we also thought

about, you know, within kind of the Growing With umbrella, what's the exact posture that we hope that parents and step parents, guardians and grandparents can take? And so when it comes to Learners, what we encourage parents to be is teachers. And that somewhat makes sense, right? If a young person's on a steep learning curve, and they really need us to teach them, and teach them particularly in three areas, self-reflection, self-discipline, and collaboration. So those are the three areas that we'd encourage parents of 13 to 18 year olds to focus on and again that's self-reflection, self-discipline and collaboration. That Explorer, again 18 to 23 year old, we hope parents transition from being teachers to being guides. And I'm in the middle of this transition myself having a 19 and a 17 year old. Guides, just like a guide on a trail or in a neighborhood, guides try to be sensitive to when they're young people need a lot of help versus when they can kind of handle it on their own. And, you know, I chuckle to myself and with my husband, a lot of times I get overly involved with my kids. And it's funny how I do the same thing that my brother and I would say our own mom does. And that is I become, "overly helpful," and that's part of what parenting means around that 17, 18, 19 year old age is to really step back and let your kid kind of take the trail as much as they can on their own with you stepping in as needed. And then that third kid stage or that third young person stage, when they're focusing, what they need from us is to be resourcers where we are kind of waiting for them to access us. We had one parent say I feel like a library card catalog just waiting for my young person to ask me a question. And I know some of your listeners won't know what a library card catalog is. They're too young. So let's just say, Google, where you can go and you can ask questions. And so, what we heard from so many parents of 23 to 28 year olds is their best conversations were when the young person asked them a question. Sure, at times they feel like they need to step in and offer perspective or even counsel concerns. But by and large, whenever possible, they waited until their young person asked them for advice. So you know, those are the three key parenting postures that correlate with that developmental continuum, from Learner to Explorer, to Focuser or that we see in our kids.

K

Kira Dorrian 15:51

So it sounds like within that, actually sometimes Withing is really about not being with right? Like you're moving with them by saying, Okay, it looks like you've got this. And actually going against the desire to do it with them or be with them or, you know, be a part of it with them, but actually be with where they are. Is that right?

K

Kara Powell 16:16

Yeah, absolutely. And, you know, one of the images that we write about in the book that's been so helpful for me actually comes from the wonderful research of Lisa Damour, who

studies adolescent girls, but I think I'm pretty convinced most if not all of her findings are just as relevant for boys and especially this one. And it was so handy for me at a family vacation a year or two ago. And my now 17 year old has given me permission to tell the story, but we went on an extended family vacation and right before we left though, I was diagnosed with bronchitis and so I was on antibiotics for the first 48 hours. I needed to stay on my own. Well finally after two days, I'm feeling better. I'm no longer contagious. And I'm thinking, you know, I want to go to the beach with everybody else. And so our kids have been riding with their aunts and uncles those first few days, but since I was now healthy, my husband Dave and I, we said to our kids, okay, guys, let's jump in our car. We want to get some time as we drive to the beach together, and two of our three kids grab their backpacks and hop in our backseat. And one of our kids our middle child, Krista, she stood there and you know, she crossed her arms and she looked at us with those hazel eyes of hers, and she said, I don't want to ride with you. I want to ride with Uncle Matt and Aunt Shannon, and, oh, it hurt my feelings. And, you know, she was doing something developmentally normal. She was, you know, building relationships with other adults, being a little hesitant to do what her parents wanted her to do. And so to Dave and I looked at each other and we kind of shrugged and we said, okay, Krista, you know, you can ride with Uncle Matt and Aunt Shannon, and the whole 45 minute ride to the beach, you know, I'm mostly hurt feelings. Here, after 48 hours, my daughter doesn't want to ride with me. But then those hurt feelings turned into anger. And, you know, I had all these mental plans for how I was going to punish her. You know, one of which is, well, she can't be kind to me, she doesn't get to be kind to other people. And I'm going to take her cell phone from her for a day or two, you know, or I thought to myself, well, you know, I'm going to be extra kind and extra friendly to my nieces and nephews that'll really show her. And I, you know, I had all these schemes that I was coming up with, again, out of my own pain out of my own hurt feelings out of my own feelings of rejection. And this is where the wording of Lisa Damour was so helpful because she talks about this advice for parents and maybe this is the most important thing I've said so far in this discussion. She says what parents need to be is to be a wall for their kids. Be a wall for their kids. And so you know, as we got closer to the beach that phrase came to my mind I just thought be a wall, be a wall. How do I be a wall? Because what Christa was doing...I grew up swimming so I when I think of a wall, I think about a swimming pool. Well, what Christa was doing, if you think of a swimming pool, she was kicking off from me as the wall. And she, you know, had headed three, four feet away, she was treading water. Again, she was doing what's developmentally normal. I felt cracked and bruised and broken though. What our kids need us to do, even when they distance themselves from us is they need us to remain constant. They need us to remain stable to not withdraw in anger or pain, but to be there for them so that when they swim back to us, and reach out for us, we're still there for them and we haven't done damage to our relationship such that they don't feel like they can swim back. So let me just say, and you know, eventually Krista, a day or two later in the

family vacation did want to spend time with me, and I'm so glad I hadn't done anything out of anger or pain that would have caused her to not feel like she could. So probably once a week I'm telling myself be a wall so my kids can swim back to me. Because I want to have a long term relationship with them. And I think a wall sets me up for doing that.

K

Kira Dorrian 20:33

I love that metaphor, but I love the swimming part of it too, because that's just really powerful. I love that.

D

Deana Thayer 20:42

Yeah. And it kind of captures the safety of what consistency represents to them. You're safe. You've got me, I can count on you.

K

Kira Dorrian 20:50

It's like those boundaries we talk about all the time Deana right? Like how those boundaries set that and that's what a wall is right is it's a strong and safe boundary and we need to keep that intact. I think that's fantastic.

K

Kara Powell 21:02

Which also means we need to apologize a lot as parents.

D

Deana Thayer 21:05

For sure.

K

Kara Powell 21:06

I'm being totally honest. Two days ago, I got into conflict with one of our teenagers. And this teenager, what the kid was being - as they said a little bit later when they eventually apologized to me - bratty that was the word they used. And in response to that brattiness I, again, I felt rejected. I felt like my kid didn't want to be with me and I totally overreacted. And so you know, I went to my bedroom and the child went to their bedroom. I'm not saying the gender because I haven't asked permission for you know, which of my kids to, to share with or to disclose and, and I was in my room and I was thinking and praying for just a few minutes and I realized what had happened. You know, I had overreacted because of how my child made me feel. And so I went to their room and I said, you know,

I'm so sorry for overreacting. And then the child apologized to me for their, "brattiness." But I think being a wall means we're quick to apologize because we are humans, we are going to react in anger or fear, or sadness. And when we do, we can repair that relationship. And I think get even closer when we're quick to apologize.

K

Kira Dorrian 22:28

So I'm curious for our non faith based listeners like myself, I would venture to guess that there's a way to take that faith in component and still apply it. And I'm curious, your thoughts on that?

K

Kara Powell 22:39

Yeah. Well, I'm so glad you asked. Because one of the things that that I believe, and we talked about this in the book, is that every person is asking three big questions. All of us, regardless of age. And those are questions of identity (Who am I?), belonging (Where do I fit?) and purpose (How will my life matter?). And so when it comes to, you know, I think all of us are asking. And let's just focus in on that last question, how will my life matter? And some of us might have a sense of calling or destiny that comes from our faith. And when that's not the case, that question of purpose can still be that compass that guides us. What what gifts do we have? What deep sense of calling do we have? What kind of legacy do we want to live leave in the world? And how can our morals, our values, the character, the kind of person that we want to be whether that's inspired by faith, or inspired by some other centralizing principle, that many of the questions are still the same about impact and legacy? So because we, I think, we all have the same questions we're wrestling with some of us might answer them with answers that are more grounded in faith. Others might use different kinds of language. But we're all wrestling with the same questions.

K

Kira Dorrian 24:05

Thank you for answering that so beautifully and articulately and really demonstrating something that I think Deana and I demonstrate all the time on the show, which is like these things, faith/not faith, they don't have to be as polarizing as they feel. You know, really at the heart of it. We are all asking those questions. And I think that's just, I really appreciate you taking the time to talk about it that way. Thank you.

K

Kara Powell 24:27

You bet.

D

Deana Thayer 24:27

So we are all about practical tools, tips and strategies for our listeners. So I want to make sure you get a chance to share kind of a key takeaway, maybe for those parents who are navigating this time with teens and young adults. But as I mentioned at the top of the episode, we also have a lot of listeners with younger ones. So is there also maybe a suggestion you might give for laying the foundation for this kind of growing with parenting?

K

Kara Powell 24:54

Well, I'll tell you what I'm working on these days in my own parenting and with the conflict I've just mentioned. A few days ago, I realized, oh man, if I had only done what I've been trying to do, I think we could have avoided that conflict. And part of growing with our kids means letting them make their own choices, letting them know we think they can make their own choices, and that we really trust them. That we're not going to micromanage. We're not going to get over involved. And again, the conflict that I had two days ago was because I was getting over involved with my child's summer plans. And this question that...I got the framing from another researcher, and it's been so helpful for me...to ask our kids (and I think this can start early) What's your plan? What's your plan? That simple three word phrase. What's your plan? Since I heard that in the research, I mean, I have used that with my kids. What's your plan for cleaning your room? What's your plan for getting your homework done? What's your plan for how you're going to get through finals? And, you know, two days ago, I thought to myself, oh if I'd only asked what's your plan and let my child first share what they're thinking about and again, giving them a sense of agency and autonomy and I find that when I start by letting them talk first about what they're thinking, then they're a lot more open to my questions or even advice after that. When I come in too soon as a parent and say, well, here's what I think you should say on this phone call and make sure you ask this and this which is exactly what I did two days ago, then I'm not honoring my my child who is growing. I'm trying to control and so the phrase what's your plan has been such a key tool for me and and the good news is (maybe this is a little unhealthy) but it also lets me gives me some semblance of assurance that oh, my kid does have it covered. So you know, it communicates agency, but I also do hear oh, but how are they planning on applying for college? How are they planning on navigating a challenging Saturday schedule? And it lets me know that they are at least mostly on top of it. So that practical phrase, "what's your plan?" is worth gold as far as I'm concerned.

K

Kira Dorrian 27:18

I love that. And it also sends that message that I assume you have one. I think I highly

enough of you to think that you have one and I'm interested, I want to know what it is. I literally just wrote that down in giant capital letters. I love it. So can you please tell our listeners where they can find you, buy your books, learn more, follow you, like give everybody all the details?

K

Kara Powell 27:42

Yeah, yeah. Well, I'd love to stay in touch with your listeners. The best website is the research center that I direct which is [fulleryouthinstitute.org](http://fulleryouthinstitute.org). And there you can read more about our Growing With book, we actually have a free 10 question quiz that any parent can take to help them assess is their child the Learner, Explorer or Focuser. And then what does that mean for their parent response? And I'm on social media generally my handle is @kpowellFYI, for the fuller youth Institute. I'd love to keep in touch with your listeners,

D

Deana Thayer 28:26

Kara, thank you so much for being with us and sharing this expertise because whether some of our listeners are there right now, even if they're not yet they are going to be and so these are important principles to be thinking about because we have a really unique opportunity. If we do have younger ones to be laying the foundation for this kind of platform that creates that great launchpad and it's it's just super important stuff. So FFPs out there we hope you found it helpful too and really gained some insight into how you can be really walking alongside your children and journeying with them rather than just watching them growing up and kind of crossing your fingers and hoping for the best. There are definite action steps you can take to navigate this well so we thank Dr. Powell for being with us today. We look forward to being back with you next time with more content and in the meantime, please do find us follow us on social media on Instagram and Facebook you can find us @FutureFocusedParenting, and we look forward to bringing you more content next week. Raising Adults is produced by Kira Dorrian and Deana Thayer recorded partially in Kira's laundry room, partially in Deana's bonus room right now. Music by Seattle band Hannalee. Thanks for listening