

Episode 91. Who's the Boss

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SPEAKERS

Deana Thayer, Kira Dorrian, Future Focused Parenting



Deana Thayer 00:00

So I think that consistency piece is one way we set up this dynamic of, you know what, I'm in charge. And so when I ask for something to cease, I actually do expect it to stop. And then if it doesn't, something happens that lets you know, I meant business. And I think this idea of I mean, business doesn't mean I'm a jerk, I'm a tyrant. It just means you know what, Mommy and Daddy really mean what they say when we're asking for something to stop or when we're giving you an instruction. And what I love about that is the message then translates to Mommy and Daddy really mean what they say when they say I love you, and you're one of my favorite people. And it's so great when I get to snuggle with you. And I'm so proud of you. So I think this is where this is so important to stop divorcing the message of love from a message of I'm in charge. Those two really are linked so inextricably, and I think consistency is part of how we convey that message.



Future Focused Parenting 00:52

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K

Kira Dorrian 01:15

Well, hi, everyone and welcome back to Raising Adults podcast Kira and Deana here with you today. We're so excited to be with you. Deana, how you doing?

D

Deana Thayer 01:23

I am doing well. How are you today?

K

Kira Dorrian 01:26

I'm okay. You know, this episode airs on the 14th of September, but today is not the 14th of September, right? So as we mentioned on social media this week that I am going in for major surgery on next Thursday on the September 3 and having a hysterectomy. And so you will hear this after that is done. But I can't tell you how it went because it hasn't happened yet. So I'm hoping it goes well! Yeah, Kira will be recovering and hopefully it went great. I welcome you know, backdated thoughts and prayers. Send those my way please. I'm probably in bed right now binge watching some Netflix show.

D

Deana Thayer 02:15

That sounds amazing. Can I be jealous in advance? Just of that part, not of the surgery!

K

Kira Dorrian 02:20

No, that's cool. I'm kind of looking forward to that part, too. I don't know if I'm going to be able to enjoy it. But I'm hoping that I'll be able to at least enjoy being bedridden for a couple of weeks. But I'm not gonna lie. I am nervous. And it's been something I've been planning for seven years. And now it's here. So that feels kind of bizarre, like, oh, that seemed such a long ways away. And then all of a sudden, it was like next week.

D

Deana Thayer 02:44

Yeah, that's normal to be apprehensive. And when it kind of it seemed so far out there for so long. And now it's right around the corner. It is not far out there.

K

Kira Dorrian 02:53

No. And you know what that also means? It also means that I'm almost 40 because the hysterectomy was supposed to happen right before I turned 40.

D

Deana Thayer 03:00

Right! It's coinciding with that.

K

Kira Dorrian 03:02

So I'll be 40 in January. And it's like, oh, wow, you know, really 40 seemed awfully far away. When we were originally talking about this. And now it's just right around the corner. But I'll be all healed up and healthy and able to enjoy my 40th birthday, which was my hope. So that's it works out pretty well. So we have a really important one today. I'm excited to talk about it. I know you are too friend, right?

D

Deana Thayer 03:28

For sure. And I know we say that a lot that it's an important issue. But I do think this issue of setting up in our home the dynamic of who's in charge, and that you can be a parental authority and still be really loving and emotionally intelligent, because I think sometimes those two get divorced, right, we hear about parents who are just these total tyrants or we hear about people where it's like all about the feelings and there's no boundaries, and there really is a way to do both. But what we haven't talked about is this exact aspect of it before, which is really helping your children learn who is in charge, and then how to respond to someone who's in charge. And it's really critical. So I know we say that often. But this is an important dynamic to set up in your home and to setup early.

K

Kira Dorrian 04:12

Yeah, because I think what I see a lot coaching and I think you do too, is a lot of scenarios where the parents aren't even aware the child is ruling the house or ruling this particular issue or or whatever it is that somehow that balance has gone askew, it can be kind of easy to miss. It's like the boiling the frog analogy when you've been in something for so long. Sometimes you don't even realize where you are. And so I think it is important that we talk about not just how to set this up well, but also how to spot it when maybe it's a little bit of a hidden dynamic that a lot of parents don't even realize is going on. Does that make sense?

D

Deana Thayer 04:49

Oh, for sure. I think it's a blind spot for a lot of parents, is a good way to say it. Excellent point, because it's not that they're really trying to have this issue. They don't realize it is an issue and then once they do they can make those course corrections. So hopefully we can

be helpful with that today.

K

Kira Dorrian 05:05

Yeah. And I think to your point exactly what you said that, because they don't realize it's an issue, but they also think, oh, if I have this realization that gosh, yes, the balance is askew, there's a fear that that means they have to be a tyrant to fix it. And that's not the answer, either. So I think to your point, there's a really important conversation that needs to be had about what does the middle look like? And how do we actually find that sweet spot that is really healthy for the whole family.

D

Deana Thayer 05:35

I couldn't agree more. That is what we're talking about today is what is the sweet spot? And what is the the line and that delicate balance? Because there is one. And as always, we like to start with our why. So Kira, what was your why around setting up who the boss was in your house? Not the sitcom! The who's the boss of your home.

K

Kira Dorrian 05:53

Yeah, I think I've mentioned this, you know, several times. But for me, it was really important to have a healthy, functioning home. And I do think that as I watched friends become parents, where the kid was the boss, what I saw a lot was that the house wasn't functioning well. And why would it, a kid was in charge. I wouldn't want a kid in charge of, you know, my business, for example, because they just haven't learned the skills that they need in order to really know what that long term thinking is. And I knew that the people in the home who had that long range view, who had that Future Focused mentality were Dave and I. And so it was really important that my children feel really seen and heard in our home, but that they understand that because of our life experience, we have a long range view that they don't. And so it's kind of like what you and I say all the time to our kids, your opinion matters to me, but I'm going to make that final decision. That was how I wanted the house to run was that their opinions are seen and heard and I can be influenced by that, because they matter. But that ultimately, I'm the grown up with the grown up perspective. And that that needs to land with me as the final call of everything.

D

Deana Thayer 07:02

I love that and tying it to a home that functions well, what a practical way to think about it. I think sometimes parents get really into the philosophical side of this and don't think, wow, practically just things will go smoother. I mean, what a great point. And my why was

layered, I guess because some of it is influenced by my beliefs. And I wanted my children to see that I also come under authority, because I come under God, and then they can come under me and watch that, oh, I'm not just making this up. I also do this. So there was some of that. But for me, I think the practical piece of this, and not separate but interwoven with the beliefs but it's more on the practical level, I guess, is that I believe, and I've talked about this on the podcast before, that one of the best ways we help our children is to set them up for the world they're going into. And the truth is, your children will have other authority figures, they will have a boss one day, they will have teachers, they will have coaches, they will have other leadership that they may need to answer to or just interact with whatever that might look like. And the home is such a great place to get to practice that and, and a safe place to get to practice that and a safe place to make mistakes with that. So what I like about this is that I think many parents get the misconception that by being in charge, I'm somehow mean or I'm not loving my child, or I'm a terrible person, when actually I think this is really loving them well, and setting them up for their future. And that really is being Future Focused. It's saying, You know what, I want to teach you how to do this, because you're going to do this all throughout your life.

K

Kira Dorrian 08:43

Yeah, I think that's so well said it's true. It's like what happens to these kids who have ruled the roost their entire life, right? And then they get out into the world. And they're like, oh, I'm not in charge of everything?! How devastating. How impossibly hard will that be? And I think the other piece that I know you and I both agree on, is that boundaries make our kids feel safe. At the end of the day, we are their protective person. And they see us that way for much longer than I think we realize that they do. We are their safe space. And if we're saying hey, you're in charge, it doesn't feel safe because they don't know everything. And they might think they know everything but on a deep level they know that they don't. And so if their protective person is not taking charge and I don't mean that in that nasty way, but isn't sort of saying hey, I've got you don't worry, I'm the grown up here. I'm going to keep you safe. They at their core are not going to feel truly protected if they're the ones in charge.

D

Deana Thayer 09:44

Absolutely. I have nothing to add.

K

Kira Dorrian 09:46

That's the episode!

D

Deana Thayer 09:47

We hope that was helpful. Have a great day :-) So let's talk some some practical things and I know you and I will have a lovely back and forth what one kind of first project But I wanted to just put out there as kind of an overarching principle, I guess I'll stick with that word principle because it's not, it's not a prescription. It's not, here's what you do. It's an overarching principle. And here's what it is you can still be an emotionally intelligent parent and be in charge. And one important way to think about this and how you deliver this is with your consistency. And again, consistency actually speaks the message to your child, that you're safe, secure, I've got you, I love you. It's not mean to follow through on what you say. So how that looks how that comes to look practically. So if the overall philosophy is I'm going to be a consistent parent, that's a pretty generic principle, right? But how that looks in practice is a couple of things. Number one, it means when you give a warning, say, if you continue to blah, blah, blah, here's what's going to happen, then if they continue, that needs to happen. And I know that sounds so basic, and so like, well, duh, but you would not believe and I think we can, we can all say...I've even caught myself, the amount of times that a parent says, oh, this is what's going to happen. And then it doesn't happen. So what the child has just learned from that moment, is actually don't really have to stop when you say that I need to stop. And so I think that consistency piece is one way we set up this dynamic of you know what, I'm in charge. And so when I asked for something to cease, I actually do expect it to stop. And then if it doesn't, something happens that lets you know, I meant business. And I think this idea of I mean business doesn't mean I'm a jerk, I'm a tyrant. It just means you know what, Mommy and Daddy really mean what they say when we're asking for something to stop or when we're giving you an instruction. And what I love about that is the message then translates to Mommy and Daddy really mean what they say when they say I love you. And you're one of my favorite people. And it's so great when I get to snuggle with you. And I'm so proud of you. So I think this is where this is so important to stop divorcing the message of love from a message of I'm in charge, those two really are linked so inextricably. And I think consistency is part of how we convey that message.

K

Kira Dorrian 12:06

Yes, I could not agree more. And I think it's hard. And that's why a lot of parents don't do it. Because it's incredibly challenging. To stick to your guns. It's incredibly challenging to be consistent when parenting is so all over the map and so challenging. But it comes back to that piece we say all the time: this is not about doing what's easiest or expedient. It's about doing what's best. And you have to think I mean, talk about long range view. What does it look like if you've been consistent over 18 years? What is that like for your kid to leave your home, having had consistent parents who they knew when my parent says something, they mean it, if they're going to, you know, help me with something, they're

really going to help me. If they're going to praise me, they really mean it. If they're, you know, asking me not to do something, they really mean that I need to not do that thing. What a safe environment when you think about the big picture. And so it's very hard in those little moments, to think that way, because you're just underwater, and you just want to use the threat. You know, if you do that, again, we're leaving. Now you have to leave. That's hard. So I would agree. And I would also say, I would just add to that, be careful what you say, because you have to follow it through. So don't threaten things that you're not willing to follow through on. And that's an important lesson too, if you're going to say we're going to leave, you need to leave. So if you're not willing to leave, I would pick a different thing that's going to happen if they keep doing it. Because that consistency is so important.

D

Deana Thayer 13:36

I love that because I was just gonna piggyback on that. And you said it, and I was gonna add that this is where then you need to be careful not to give an empty threat, like, I'm going to take away your birthday. How easily we fall into that or, you know, you're going to have a timeout, and you've never done timeouts as a consequence in your life, you know, you're not going to suddenly pull one out of your pocket now. Being really careful with what you say is going to happen and making sure it's something that you would actually do. Thank you for saying that.

K

Kira Dorrian 14:07

Well and here's the other thing is that parents who are listening, if you are someone who is going, oh gosh, I do that, I want you to stop and think how often does it work? Do the threats make the thing stop? No, they don't. Threatening to take away their birthday, unless you're a parent who's consistent and follows through, it doesn't stop the behavior. So we have to think about we can't just make it bigger and bigger and louder and louder. You've got to ask yourself, is it working? And I would venture to guess for most parents who are not following through, it's not working. So then we have to re-evaluate.

D

Deana Thayer 14:40

You do and I think to tie it back in, parents as you're thinking about that question Kira posed which is a great one, is it working? Remember that likely the reason it isn't is because there isn't follow through so this is really like a circle right? So you don't follow through which means when you issue a warning, they know you don't really mean it so the behavior continues. Which means your warning isn't working. So it's all tied together. So when the warning actually is followed by the consequence that you've discussed, now they

know that you mean it, and it will work.

K

Kira Dorrian 15:12

Yeah, absolutely. Can I share one at our house?

D

Deana Thayer 15:15

I'd love it.

K

Kira Dorrian 15:15

Okay, so, and I know you agree with this, I know you do this in your family, too. So it's like "our house", really, like yours and mine, is what today is all about. I think it's really important when you're thinking about who's in charge, and who's the boss to think about the kind of boss that you would like to work for, and be that person, because being the boss, and this is actually really speaks to what we were saying at the beginning, being the boss is not yelling. It's not squawking at your kids and empty threats, and all of that. No one wants to work for a boss like that. So you actually, I think, in order to truly set this tone that we're talking about, you have to be the kind of person that your child wants to work with. And that's my key thing is, how do we work together. And that's something that in our family has been huge. We have talked from the time our kids were one year old about how we're a team, and we work together. And it's a family that functions well, and how do we support each other and work as a team? And so even though Dave and I are the team captains, we are a team. And so you have to set that tone. And where I see a lot of times kids end up ruling the roost is actually the parents think they're ruling the roost by yelling and threatening and doing this and that, but what it's doing is creating such a disconnect between parent and child, that they don't feel like they're working together. And so the child actually becomes more and more likely to not do what you ask and more and more likely to be defiant, simply because they don't want to work with you, because you're not pleasant to work with. And that's hard. Because sometimes kids drive us to the brink, I know that I've been there. But as best we can to actually really be a leader that people are inspired by because those are the most effective leaders. And so that comes down to your modeling, how you talk with your children, you know, engaging them in conversation and emotionally intelligent conversation. So you know, when they are running ragged through the house, and you're asking them to stop to really talk to them about, hey, I'm wondering how you would feel if fill in the blank, that empathy piece, the kindness piece, the inclusive language, and the teamwork language is so important, when we're thinking about being leaders for our kids.

D

Deana Thayer 17:33

I love the team analogy that you're the team captains. But this is so true, right? Because if you set up a dynamic where they really see you as just scary, or unpredictable, I think unpredictability is really unsettling for children when they worry which thing is going to make my parent suddenly explode. And not knowing and even could depend on the day because we all have better and worse days. And so being that kind of parent, that's like the thing could just set you off. You don't want to do that because I think what you're saying is so true Kira, then the child actually becomes resistant to wanting to work with you, or comply with instructions or whatever it might be as simple as it's time to get on your shoes, we need to head out because they don't know what to expect from you. So again, this is this is really breeding security in your children when they know that you are the kind of "boss" that is reasonable and takes their viewpoint into consideration takes their personhood into consideration. I think this is also so important along with what you were saying that the boss isn't whoever can be the loudest. It also isn't the person who removes dignity. And so another thing that I think can be a really important how is making sure that even on those times where you do need to use that assertive stance of being the parent, that if it's appropriate, depending on the situation, it may be important that you remove them and do it somewhere privately. So we don't strip a child of their dignity and their personhood, just because we've given an instruction and it hasn't been followed. Right. So that's a again, it's like, under that umbrella of what you were saying. Being the kind of person who's in charge that a child would want to work with. It's like, wow, this person really protects who I am and doesn't embarrass me or shame me. We can talk about a behavior not being acceptable without making it sound like the child is unacceptable. That is really important distinction.

K

Kira Dorrian 19:23

Thank you for saying that. It's so so true. And so some phrases that I would like throw out that we've said on other shows, but I'll kind of like put them all in in order here for parents to take away is you know "that behavior is not okay, but the feelings are" or "those feelings are okay, but this behavior is not" which lets the child know you're okay, but what you're doing is not and also, I know you and I both use this, "your opinion really matters to me. I'm going to make the final decision, but I'd love to hear how you feel about it." Those are two phrases that you can use that really do create that connection with your child to let them know that they're holistically loved, seen and heard, and that you're the boss.

D

Deana Thayer 20:03

So what what you made me think about here here that I wanted to just mention, that's another important distinction because when we give an instruction, and we're working to

be that parent who is the boss, a kind boss, but who is the boss, we are probably going to elicit some strong reactions, because the odds are, we're going to give an instruction from time to time that our child doesn't like, and they might have a strong reaction to it all the way from just verbally indicating their displeasure all the way to, you know, behavioral, like tantrums and things like that. And so what I want to also tell parents as a key takeaway is to remember that to acknowledge your child's feelings is different than catering to their feelings. So, when you're a parent who's the boss, you don't cater to feelings, but it doesn't mean that you've suddenly stopped acknowledging them. It's absolutely okay, and in fact, we would say encouraged, to acknowledge that, wow, I see that that really made you upset that I said you couldn't have a second bowl of Froot Loops. That is fine to say. And I think it's important to say, however, it doesn't mean that you cave and give the second bowl of Froot Loops. And so I think parents sometimes get that line a little bit confused, if that makes sense. Where it's acknowledging the feelings doesn't mean we just enable them, cater to them, give in every time. It's like that Drain-o, example, you've given a few times on the show, if your child wants to play with something dangerous, and you say no, just because they're upset about it doesn't mean you go yes, please, have a household chemical! I mean, we don't do that.

K

Kira Dorrian 21:28

Oh, why not? Here's a straw! Right? No, I think that's such a such a good point. And I love how you put that because it is important that our kids know that we see that they're upset about something or that they don't like something and that their feelings are really valid. But that doesn't mean we're going to change our stance, it's that "your opinion matters to me, but I'm still the one in charge." And so again, that grown upperspective...kids want to drink Drain-o! That should tell us everything we need to know. You know what I mean? Like, let's just take a second...kids want to do things that they don't know aren't safe. So who should be in charge? The kid or the grown up that has some adult perspective. However, I do think, you know, as we said earlier, I'm often surprised by when I elicit my kids opinions how sometimes I'm like, that's interesting, I hadn't thought about it that way, or I didn't realize that was what was going on for you. And sometimes they will actually then influence my decision. And that is empowering to them to because I'm a boss who listens. And I'm a boss, who shows them that sometimes they can actually help me see something differently. And I will make a decision based on the information they've given me. So they know that when I ask for their opinion, I also really mean it.

D

Deana Thayer 22:39

Oh, for sure. And that's why like I've talked about I think on a previous episode, we instituted the ability for our children to give a polite appeal, we called it. So they could

appeal a decision I made and try to offer me some some new information. And sometimes that new information changed my mind or made me say, oh, you know what, I didn't have that piece of information before, let's do this differently. And what I love about that is even if I only do that, say, 10% of the time, they do know then that their voice matters. And it matters enough that sometimes the decision or instruction changes, which means that those times where I need to say you know what, I'm sorry, but my decision stands, they are fine with it, because they know how much they matter. And so I think that's a great precedent to set.

K

Kira Dorrian 23:19

So the other thing I think I want to make sure we cover today is how can parents maybe spot that the balance is out of whack in those situations where we as you know, parent coaches can go, oh, wow, there's a there's a balance issue here. But oftentimes, like I said, parents are a little bit like...they're just in it, and they don't always see it. So there are some ways that you can get clued into, wait a second, maybe I'm not the boss, maybe I think I'm the boss, but I'm not. So Deana, you have a great one that I know I've heard you share before. Can you share it again?

D

Deana Thayer 23:49

For sure. This comes up with parent coaching clients sometimes, and even sleep clients too. So if you catch yourself saying this phrase, you might want to take a look at the dynamic in your home. And here it is: my child won't let me _____. And that could be a baby. Oh, she won't let me put her down, all the way to a toddler...he won't let me say goodnight to him and leave the room. He won't let me tell him when it's time to put away his toys. If you have that phrase in your vocabulary, or you catch yourself saying that, that's really something worth looking at.

K

Kira Dorrian 24:21

Absolutely. Because at the end of the day, if you are in charge, if you are the team captain, then that means you're the one doing the letting. And again, that can look lovely and kind and beautiful. But a team captain would never say oh, one of my team won't let me _____. No, they're the team captain. And so they get to decide who lets what. Does that make sense?

D

Deana Thayer 24:45

Oh it does for sure. I mean, you wouldn't hear a baseball coach saying the pitcher won't

let me decide who's batting next.

K

Kira Dorrian 24:52

There we go! Thank you for saying that so articulately. That's what I meant listeners. But it's true right? And so I think that happens a lot where we feel almost scared of what's going to happen if we try to stop a behavior, because our child actually has so much power, and so much control, and that's where we get these phrases like, she won't let me put her down. Because what's going to happen if I put her down? Well, she's going to respond and have a lot of big feelings about it. And I would rather not have to deal with those feelings. And so I choose to just do what she wants to make my life easier. But the reality is, we have to as parents go, I can see you don't want me to put you down, I understand that, I still need to be able to put you down so that I can fill in the blank, whatever it is. And and it's important that our kids recognize that they are the center of our hearts, but not necessarily of our universe, that we have other things and other responsibilities. And when they grow up, they're going to have other things and other responsibilities. And they're going to be navigating relationships with peers, with coworkers, with partners, that mean it's not all about them, and they can't rule the roost. And so developing those skills of how do I understand that sometimes it isn't all about me, how do I understand that I'm not always going to get what I want, but I'm still loved and safe. That is critical as a parent.

D

Deana Thayer 26:15

Wow, I love what you just said, they're the center of your heart, but not the center of your universe. Again, I've said...what is this the fourth time I've said this in the episode? What an important distinction. So I think what we're finding is that being a parent who's lovingly in charge is a lot about finding those distinctions between acknowledging and enabling, for instance, or between giving an instruction and turning into a tyrant or giving a kind instruction. There's a lot of this, and that's one of them, your children are the center of your heart. But it doesn't mean that they are the boss, and they run the house. And what Kira said earlier listeners, I want you to take that away as well. And that is there is a reason you are the parent, I think it's really easy for us to kind of want to abdicate this or get afraid of owning the fact that we're the parent, but there is a reason and she hit this so beautifully. You bring knowledge and wisdom to bear certainly. But here's what you bring that's actually most critical, especially in those younger years. You bring a life experience to bear. They don't know the stove is hot, they don't know the Drain-o is poisonous. There are things you know, that can keep your child safe. And that is loving them well, to use your knowledge and life experience to help them navigate that is not being a tyrant.



Future Focused Parenting 26:19

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Kira Dorrian 27:29

No. That is a beautiful way to finish out this episode Deana, thank you so much. Well, listeners, I hope you found that conversation helpful and as you begin to think about, you know, your own parenting and maybe look at are there's some hidden things in there that even I didn't know was in there, and figure out a way to really create that team environment and be a loving team captain, but a team captain nonetheless. And if you're a new listener this week, we just want to welcome you to the show and to Raising Adults. We're so excited to have you here with us. Please do follow us on social media, we are @futurefocusedparenting and we post regularly on there and you can get all your updates and show updates there as well. And if you like what you hear, we always welcome those five star reviews, they really do make the difference between a successful podcast and not. We're so grateful to all of you who have taken the time to give us a nice review. And we will post it on social media if you write us a little note on there. So be sure to do that. For more information, you can always go to our website <https://futurefocusedparenting.com>. And don't forget, we now have membership available. If you go to the website, you can click on the button and find out all about it. Some of it even includes some coaching with us, so we hope you'll check it out. Thanks so much for listening. Raising Adults is produced by Kira Dorrian and Deana Thayer and recorded partially in my laundry room partially in Deana's office. Editing by Allison Preisinger. Music by Seattle band Hannalee. Thanks for listening