

Episode 101. How Research Can Help You Be Future Focused wit...

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SPEAKERS

Deana Thayer, Jen Lumanlan, Future Focused Parenting, Kira Dorrian



Jen Lumanlan 00:00

I mean, in so many ways, it can be really useful because it can help us to understand things in a way that other ways of understanding the world can't. And it helps us to see, well, if I do this one thing, does it really have an impact on this other thing, and I think a lot of parents want to know that. They want to know that a decision they're making today is most likely going to have some certain outcome tomorrow or in the future. In a way, I think we crave the sense of control.



Future Focused Parenting 00:32

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.



Kira Dorrian 00:55

Well, hi everyone and welcome back to Raising Adults podcast, Kira and Deana here in the laundry room office combo pack. Deana, how are you this week?

D Deana Thayer 01:06
Well, I'm still up against the throw pillows. And I'm happy to report I have not yet suffocated, so all as well.

K Kira Dorrian 01:14
It's going well, then. That's amazing. Well, we have an amazing guest today on the show. Unfortunately did not hit record in time for you to hear the conversation that just went down before we said hello, but we discovered that our guest Jen Lumanlan, who hosts the Your Parenting Mojo podcast, is connected to Deana and I in the most phenomenal ways. So Jen, I'm gonna have you just say hi before we get started.

J Jen Lumanlan 01:42
Hello!

K Kira Dorrian 01:42
Should we tell our listeners the weird coincidences that just happened?

J Jen Lumanlan 01:45
Yes!

K Kira Dorrian 01:45
Okay, so Jen, you are originally from?

J Jen Lumanlan 01:49
I'm from Essex, which all your British listeners will know exactly what that means and all you're American and other listeners will say what? Why does that matter? So yes, I'm an Essex girl.

K Kira Dorrian 01:59
She's an Essex girl. And my friend Claire, who I know is listening who lives in Essex is jumping up and down right now. And she is from the exact same town that my husband that Dave was born in, well not born, but he was raised there and went to school there.

And they are almost the exact same age. It's the bananas. And then she moved to a town right near the town where my husband went to university. So super bizarre. And so we were laughing and giggling about this.

D

Deana Thayer 02:26

And then we discover when Kira, as the prepared host that she is, is asking Jen how to pronounce her last name, she explains that it's Filipino. Well, as our listeners know, I also once had a Filipino last name because I have a couple Filipino children. So it was so bizarre that I mean, within the span of five minutes, all these just random little, it's like the synapses in your brain firing and connecting. It was like, what? We have all these random things in common.

J

Jen Lumanlan 02:54

And in between, there was a thing about my dad used to teach at the same school Kira's husband went to.

K

Kira Dorrian 02:59

Where Dave went! Totally bananas. So yeah, well, okay, so we're in for a great chat, I think today. I'm going to go ahead and introduce you, Jen. And then we can sort of dive right in. But I love the topic that we're going to discuss today, because Jen is a research based parent and really kind of leans into that type of approach to how she parents and how the research can inform her parenting. And also, I love this, the spots where the research doesn't give us the information we need. And we have to look elsewhere. And I just think for me, especially as someone who would like to be research based, but I just don't have the background in that and my brain doesn't know how to do that the way that I think that yours does Jen and so I think it's really cool to be able to share with our listeners, how they might be able to go about taking this approach and how it can actually really empower them as parents. So let me read your bio because it's pretty great. So Jen Lumanlan, I said it correctly. I'm dating myself, holds a Master of Science in psychology, child development, and a Master of Education and hosts the Your Parenting Mojo podcast, which is a reference guide for parents of toddlers and preschoolers based on scientific researchers, and the principles of respectful parenting. In each episode, she examines a topic related to parenting and child development from all sides to help parents understand how to make decisions about raising their children. She lives in California with her husband and daughter. So Jen, welcome to the show.



Jen Lumanlan 04:26

Thank you so much. It's great to be here.



Kira Dorrian 04:28

So do you want to start by just telling everyone a little bit about you and your family, and just what kind of led up to the discussion that we're gonna have today?



Jen Lumanlan 04:39

Well, I never saw myself as a parent. I never wanted to be a parent, had no interest in it whatsoever. And that kind of sets the stage for why I ended up here, why I ended up using scientific research and having a podcast and talking about the podcast with other people, which is that when my daughter was born, I delivered six years ago now, I realized what I had sort of known all along, which was that I had no parenting instinct whatsoever, really. But I already knew I had really great research skills. And I thought, hmm, there's an opportunity. I can use my research skills to plug my gaps in parenting intuition. And that was sort of how the podcast was born. Because I ended up going back to school and getting this Master's in psychology focused on child development, basically, because I had no idea what I was doing. I wanted some way to try to understand what is the framework around the ideas I should even be thinking about here. And that was what the Masters in psychology ended up helping me to do. And I think I've gone far beyond that now. I typically think of the average podcast episode is sort of like a class for a master's degree. And so I've got 120 episodes. And so that's probably a couple of more master's degrees if you count in that way. And I just found that it's a really invaluable tool to be able to understand what does the research say not just from you know, what the email that you get from babycenter, that says five ways you can see if your child has a developmental delay, and it will cite one study and not give you any sense of how that fits into the body of literature on a topic. And it's sort of just designed to get you to click through and for them to get more revenue. But really, what does the body of literature say about this? Is this one new study even worth paying attention to? Is it an outlier? Or does it confirm something we already thought to be true in the first place. And so that was really something that I found to be missing, I couldn't find that information anywhere. And so I decided to create it myself.



Deana Thayer 06:50

That's fantastic. And I really respect that you admitted that you feel like your parenting instincts were not spot on.



Jen Lumanlan 06:58

It was not that they weren't spot on it's that they weren't there at all.



Deana Thayer 07:00

They were just missing and for you to go, oh, here's where my strengths are, and then use that to fill the holes. That's so clever. So I know you already kind of talked about why you decided to use scientific research as a foundational element of your parenting, but I know probably for many parents, we might lean differently than you and maybe not feel like strong researchers, or research and statistics and analysis might actually even feel a little bit intimidating, I think to some parents, so I'm excited for you to break this down and make it accessible for us. So maybe you can start with, hey, let me tell you what's great about it. So Jen, what benefits does scientific research have as it pertains to parenting?



Jen Lumanlan 07:40

I mean, in so many ways, it can be really useful, because it can help us to understand things in a way that other ways of understanding the world can't. And it helps us to see, well, if I do this one thing, does it really have an impact on this other thing, and I think a lot of parents want to know that. They want to know that a decision they're making today is most likely going to have some certain outcome tomorrow or in the future, in a way, I think we crave the sense of control. We crave knowing what's going to happen, knowing that we're not going to screw this up. And I think some parents have, you know, some parents were fortunate to have had excellent parents, and a well developed sense of intuition. And they don't necessarily need the research as much. But for those of us who are on a little more shaky ground on that regard, or we're maybe we're looking at the way we were raised, and we're saying I do not want to raise my children that way. Or we're just saying, I don't really know how I feel about this, and I need some tools to guide me, then scientific research can be a useful tool to help to fill that gap to help us to understand well, what actually might happen here? If I do x, is y likely to result? Or is some other thing likely to happen instead?



Kira Dorrian 08:56

I love that. Wow. So I'm curious, you know, as you dug into the research, and you had these research skills, and you're discovering all this information, how then does the research change your approach to parenting? And I'm also curious, I want to throw in what happens when the research is conflicting? We see that all the time, right? Like, you know, it's like with eggs. Eggs cause cholesterol? No, they are great for you. No, they're

gonna kill you. You know, and I think with parent parenting, that is especially true. So how does it influence your parenting once you have this information?

J Jen Lumanlan 09:30

Yeah, I think I wrote an article, it was probably a year or more ago now called Why Does Parenting Advice Change So Often? And so I mean, let's start with how has it changed my approach to parenting, and then we can come back to why does it change? And so how has it changed my parenting? It's been profound. It's been an absolutely profound shift in almost everything. The way that I was raised and the way that I would think, well, of course, that's the natural, natural, logical way of doing it turns out to be something that isn't necessarily research supported. So just as a simple example, eating vegetables. When I was growing up, my parents would say, you better clean your plate. And if you don't clean your plate, you're not getting dessert specifically, if you don't eat your vegetables, you're not getting dessert. And so when we take a step back from that, and we think well, what is our goal here? What are we trying to do when we're talking with our children about food, most of us are trying to raise a child who has a healthy relationship with food, who doesn't feel as though they must never eat certain kinds of foods, or can only eat certain kinds of foods. So they feel they can have a balanced diet, and they can enjoy a lot of different kinds of foods in moderation. And when we are talking about doing things like essentially bribing children to eat vegetables, which is what we're doing, the dessert is the bribe and eating vegetables is thing you have to do, we are setting up the vegetable to be what's called a gateway food or gateway action. And when we do that, what we're doing is we're making the the reward at the other end more likeable. We're making the gateway food or the gateway action less likeable. And what the research shown is the only predictor of a child who is willing to eat vegetables? It's how much they like vegetables. When we bribe a child to eat vegetables, we, and I don't like to use sort of war metaphors, but in this case, I think it's sort of appropriate, we're winning the battle, we're getting the child to eat the vegetables. On this occasion, we feel like I did my job as a parent today, they ate a serving of vegetables today. But we're losing the war, because we're not setting our child up to like and enjoy vegetables, which is probably going to come back to haunt us when they don't want to eat vegetables down the line.

D Deana Thayer 11:45
That is really fascinating.

K Kira Dorrian 11:47
Yeah, it makes so much sense too, presented like that.



Jen Lumanlan 11:51

Yeah, and then you can of course, extrapolate that to so many other kinds of parenting. I mean, one that's really relevant right now is related to screentime, and school work, and a lot of parents are finding themselves in the position of being the enforcer, a position they've never been in before, where it used to be the teacher and the peers and the behavior charts and the grades and all the rest of it, that happened at school that motivated their children to engage in schoolwork. And now a lot of that is not happening. And so the parents are finding themselves being the one who has to motivate their child to do something they don't really want to do. And okay, well, is my goal to get my kid to do this single task? Or do I want my child to have a lifelong love of learning? And if it's to get them to do the task, then you know, rewarding them with screentime, or whatever is their favorite thing at the other end? Not so bad. But if you want them to have a love of learning, then bribing them to engage in learning activities is probably actually not going to have the result that we hope it will.



Deana Thayer 12:49

Sure actually could be really counterproductive.



Jen Lumanlan 12:51

It certainly can. Yeah, so that's kind of one, just one example on one topic. And it I mean, it goes really, across the board. I mean, I was listening to some of your episodes over the last few days. And one that stuck out to me was on on healthy body image. And something that I learned when I was researching that was, you know, we think, oh, well, I'll teach my daughter what's called media literacy, which is I'll teach her that images are airbrushed, and that these aren't real people, and that she shouldn't aspire to having this certain kind of body because it's not actually real anyway. And what the research has shown us on that front is that, you know, we can do that, and that that is important work. But that by itself is not enough. Because if you show images of women and pictures who have been airbrushed, and you show those pictures to women in an experimental situation, and you say, you know, these are airbrushed. And now do some journaling and think about what is it that you want to take away from this lesson. What the women say is, you know, oh, that's so terrible, that should never happen. I wish I didn't have to bring up a child in the world where images were doctored in this way, and then they pause, and then they say, how do I get my arms to be that thin? And so we what we realized is that just learning that an image is an airbrush is not enough, we would hope that if we can logically rationally teach our child, this image is airbrushed, don't aspire to it, that then our child will say, oh, yeah, of course, I'm not going to aspire to that. But in actuality, it doesn't work that way for us, and it doesn't work that way for them. And self compassion is a tool

that's so needed and so much more powerful in terms of combating those kinds of messages that our children get from media.

K

Kira Dorrian 14:33

Wow. What about when the research conflicts?

J

Jen Lumanlan 14:37

Well, it does conflict almost all the time. And so that's really, I mean, that goes back to the story about why I started the show in the first place was because most of the resources I was finding would be from somebody who would find one study, maybe it was a study that just got released, maybe it was the first study that popped up when you Google growth mindset or grit or whatever the topic of the day is, and that will often have a sort of positive result. And then the person who's writing the article will say, okay, well growth mindset is important. Grit is important. And so here are five ways you can get growth mindset or grit. But what we need to understand is what was that study an outlier? Did it confirm what decades of research have shown? Or did it go in a completely different direction? Do we understand if the results went a completely different direction? Why that is? And is that, you know, should we pay attention to that? And should that pull our attention in that way, or the fact that they they modeled the results differently, or they set up the study differently should mean that we look at it and we say, yeah, you know what, we actually think that this other way that everybody else has been doing it is probably the better way to understand this. So you don't really kind of get to that until you get into reading those papers and understanding them. And even then there, there can be some conflicts. And we're kind of starting to get into ways that the scientific research fall short. You know, we have this idea that science is neutral, science is value neutral. And so sometimes I get negative comments in my reviews on Apple podcasts for the podcast episodes because I'm biased, because scientific research is supposed to be unbiased. But actually, researchers have biases, you have biases, I have biases, we all have biases. And these can all work their way into the study in so many different ways. And if we can seek to understand those things, and tease those apart and say, okay, this is how this all fits together. And therefore, we believe that overall, we can do a, what's called a meta analysis, and say, overall, statistically speaking, we think the evidence points in this direction, then we can kind of head off in that direction. and ignore those three studies over there that said something different.

D

Deana Thayer 16:52

Yeah, that's really important. And I think you started to kind of talk about this, maybe a

little bit, of the areas where research falls short after talking about all the ways that it's amazing. And besides things like bias on the part of the researchers or, of course, even us going in, right, we can have confirmation bias, like I'm interested in finding something that will confirm what I already think. What are other things that we should watch for? I mean, where else does maybe scientific research fall short?



Jen Lumanlan 17:19

Scientific research is an incredibly useful tool, if you understand its limitations. And so yeah, that bias that we talked about, can come in at so many different phases in the study from just the way the question is posed in the first place at the outset of the study, which can, I've seen plenty of plenty of studies of immigrants, where the researcher is White, and the question is phrased in a way that makes sense to the White researcher, but that just doesn't make sense to the study participants. There are, the typical way that samples are drawn for, for these kinds of research studies is that the person doing the research is probably a psychology professor. They're probably teaching a psych 101 class in a university, and they will offer their students course credit in exchange for doing a survey or whatever you're participating in, whatever study that they're working on right now. And so what we end up with is a really good picture of how undergraduates in North America in the US particularly think about all these issues, and then the results are kind of extrapolated as if they're applicable to all mankind, when that's certainly not the case, we don't even know if it's applicable to young children, to adults, to, you know, old people, we just have no idea how those things apply. Outside of that, why that narrow band of children who are young adults who are in the undergraduate setting, and that's been called out over the last probably decade or so, it's called WEIRDness in the research, it stands for Western, Educated, Industrialized, Rich, Democratic. And the fact that 90 plus percent of psychological research is done on people, and particularly college students in these countries, and then extrapolated as if it's applicable to everybody, when actually we have no idea if that's the case. I mean, it can happen in even in terms of the way the analysis is conducted. And when you do a certain kind of analysis, and you'll throw out one variable that doesn't seem as though it's relevant. And actually, you probably should have left that in because it is having meaningful impact on the results. And so they're these kinds of things happen throughout the study. And each of those decisions is a result of some person's upbringing and training and the biases that they bring to this. And those kind of stack up through the process of doing the research and analyzing the research. And so to think of science as value free, as neutral, is just a fundamental misunderstanding of what research is, it has values baked into it and our job is to understand those and to see how can it serve us anyway.

- K** Kira Dorrian 20:04
Okay, so now I want to know where that leaves your podcast for someone like me. I mean, you just said a lot of really smart things that I'm sitting here kind of trying to unpack it. I'm picturing, here's what I'm picturing...I'm picturing myself going to my computer and researching something and pulling up a study and having no idea how to do what you just did. I'm assuming, correct me if I'm wrong, that that's the goal of the podcast is help someone like me, who has no research instincts, but has some really good parenting instincts, get that information and be able to make decisions. So tell us maybe about your show.
- D** Deana Thayer 20:45
Yes! How it helps us non-researchers.
- K** Kira Dorrian 20:47
You know, Deana, I feel like you're much better at this than I am.
- D** Deana Thayer 20:52
Oh I don't know about that.
- K** Kira Dorrian 20:53
I don't know. You don't get overwhelmed the way I do. You're good at, like, being able to look at all the parts and I get stressed. I'm like, it's too much information!
- J** Jen Lumanlan 21:03
Yeah, it's so funny how we all bring different skills to this, right? I mean, I get so many people saying, well, how do you do this? And this must be so difficult. And, it's, I don't think that I'm that smart. It's just that I enjoy this kind of work and this kind of thinking. And so it's not a burden to me it I don't look at a list of 50 results on Google Scholar and think, you know, this is overwhelming, I think, okay, here we go. Right?
- K** Kira Dorrian 21:31
You don't curl up into a ball?



Jen Lumanlan 21:33

No. And I was thinking about that recently, actually, because I'm just kind of getting into a phase where I'm researching a lot of, putting preliminary research into a lot of podcast episodes and kind of seeing which ones pan out. And I'm thinking okay, what what is it I like about this so much? And what is the phase I like? And it's kind of that moment where I'm figuring out, okay, is this topic kind of bounded in the right way? Is it discrete enough that I can find the precise term that's going to yield a bunch of studies, but not too many studies, that we can actually get enough research, but not too much research to understand what the bodies of research say on this particular topic? And that really, that's kind of it for me. And that process of reading through them. And okay, well, what, what is this one really saying? And how is it drawing that conclusion? And how is that different from what this one is saying? I find that fun, I don't find it intimidating at all. And so we all bring these unique skill sets to the world. And I just kind of see this as mine and my responsibility to share it with others who, who want this information who want to be able to act on this information. But they bring other skill sets that are sorely lacking, lacking in me, to the world. And so the world needs their abilities, and the world needs mine and in those different ways. So yeah, on the show, we really try to, I mean, we take one issue at a time, whether it's grit or growth mindset, or eating vegetables, or whatever it is, and say, okay, well, where where are we going with this? What is the body of research saying as a whole? And where are we falling short here, because there are plenty of ways where it falls short. And I would say that primary among these is the fact that scientific research is kind of grounded in a patriarchal view of the world. And I think that there's a tendency to think oh, she said the P word. She must be a feminist. I get dinged for that as well. And I haven't historically, I'm gonna be honest here. I haven't thought of myself as a feminist because I shaved my legs. I'm like, Can I really be a feminist if I shave my legs?



Kira Dorrian 23:38

I hope so!



Jen Lumanlan 23:39

And so yeah, the more I've learned about feminism, which wasn't something I'd really learned much about, the more I learned, you know, what I kind of am because I kind of agree with this vision of the world where everybody brings their value to the world where, where we're not dominated by a certain, you know, one group of people's way of viewing the world that an intersectional feminist lens that values everybody's contribution, is kind of a world I want to be in, is a world I want to raise my daughter in. And so where we see scientific research is is purported to be value neutral and cognitive based explanations, you know, things that happen in your mind, are the primary importance and issues that

are seen as more kind of feminine based, like how do we experience the world with our bodies. I mean, it wasn't until a year ago that I learned that my body has something to say about my experience as a person, because our patriarchal society has sort of made this body brain split, where cognitive thinking is valued, and because I think in that way, my thinking is valued. But there's this whole other way of processing information in our bodies, that the research has very little to say about that. And so how can we bring in that kind of understanding of the world and what else is missing out there that the research doesn't even consider. So that's what I'm now trying to shift the podcast to do is to bring in more of that as well not to neglect the research to say, yeah, we're gonna use it, where it where it's helpful. But also there's this other stuff that we need to consider as well.

K

Kira Dorrian 25:13

Sounds like a very balanced approach to presenting that information

J

Jen Lumanlan 25:18

We're trying.

D

Deana Thayer 25:19

And it's robust. And people like me who don't lean toward research land really needed as well. So that's fabulous. So Jen, if people do want to find you, if they would like to check out your podcast, if they would like to follow you on social, can you just provide us with ways to connect with you give us all the things the social media handles, your podcast, website, all that good stuff?

J

Jen Lumanlan 25:40

Yep, it's relatively easy, actually. Everything can be found through <https://YourParentingMojo.com> is the the name of the podcast and the website. And you can find me on Facebook and Instagram @YourParentingMojo. But really, everything flows through the website, and you can subscribe to the show to get updates. I post a new episode every other week with some aspect of research based information or, you know, moving beyond the research where the research is lacking. And every other week, I release a blog post where it kind of draws ideas together across the podcast episode. So in the podcast episodes, we go deep and say, let's really understand this topic. In the blog post, we kind of take a step back and say, okay, well, now we really understand these topics, how does that all fit together? What does that mean for the way we're raising our children? And so you can get all of that at <https://yourparentingmojo.com>

D Deana Thayer 26:31
Wow, fabulous. Jen, thank you so much for sharing with our listeners.

J Jen Lumanlan 26:35
Yeah. Thanks for having me. And it's awesome that we have so many connections in so many areas of our lives.

K Kira Dorrian 26:40
Absolutely. Well, everyone, we hope that you found that as interesting as we did. That was like kind of mind blowing for me, Deana.

D Deana Thayer 26:50
Oh, yeah. I'm still processing? And I was taking notes. Literally taking notes? Yeah, it was amazing. There's a lot to unpack.

K Kira Dorrian 26:57
And what a fantastic resource for parents like me. And you, although I don't necessarily buy that you fit entirely into that category. Because I've seen you research and you're pretty good at it.

D Deana Thayer 27:07
An aptitude for something and enjoyment are not always together, right? No, just my first question to her. I mean, it really was true. Like for me, this is almost a little bit intimidating. So I think her breaking it down and making it accessible and like you know what, you can do this too, even if this isn't the your natural bent, I think is really helpful to parents who might feel a little bit that's a little bit daunting to them.

K Kira Dorrian 27:29
Yeah, absolutely. So listeners do go check out Your Parenting Mojo, the podcast, I think you will get as much out of it as I will. And we thank you so much for being with us. We look forward to being with you next week. Don't forget if you haven't yet followed us on Facebook and Instagram We are @FutureFocusedParenting. And if you haven't yet subscribed to the podcast, you're going to want to hit that subscribe button so that you

never miss an episode. Thanks so much for being with us. Have a wonderful week. Raising Adults is produced by Kira Dorrian and Deana Thayer and recorded partially in my laundry room partially in Deana's office. Editing by Alison Preisinger. Music by Seattle band Hannalee. Thanks for listening



Future Focused Parenting 28:07

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