

Raising Parents Podcast - Epis...(Tracey Ehl-Harrison) - edited

📅 Fri, Aug 23, 2024 2:34PM ⌚ 33:56

SUMMARY KEYWORDS

kids, parenting, parent, experience, question, people, thought, milestones, parenting style, tunnel, tracy, growing, guess, curfew, answer, boundaries, important, family, raising, point



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Kay, Hello everyone, and welcome to the fourth edition of raising parents. To those who may be joining us for the first time, I'll just take a minute to clarify the meaning of the podcast title. First of all, my name is Kay parent, and I have two grown daughters, Brianna and Holly, so initially I thought it would be cool to interview them, to get the inside scoop on what it was really like being raised in the parent household. But the more I thought about it, the more I realized that children play a part in raising their parents too. In addition to interviewing my own kids, I thought it would also be interesting to get some insights from other thought leaders in this parenting business. So far, I have had the pleasure of speaking to and learning from Brianna parent, my oldest daughter, and parenting veterans, Jane shufler And Nicole reist. And today, I would like to welcome my dear friend Tracy I Harrison. We have both certainly experienced ups and downs of parenting over the years, and it seems, no matter how busy she is, and she definitely is, she always makes the time to lend a helping hand and a compassionate ear. I asked her to join the podcast today because I really admire her parenting skills. I respect her ability to juggle multiple responsibilities, and I've really enjoyed watching her two children, Michaela and Luke, grow up to be intelligent and thoughtful young adults. So without further ado, Tracy, welcome to the podcast.



01:35

Thank you so much for having me.



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You're very welcome, Tracy, so I'm just going to dive right into it. And question number one is, what does the word parent mean to you? Well, thank you for the question and well, it means your last name.



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And beyond that,



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it means for me, forever and unconditional. It also means gratitude for that role as a parent and a real kind of blessing and transformative change in life. When I said unconditional, I meant love, and I meant giver and receiver of unconditional love, because certainly the love of a young one and as they grow, is just something that is unparalleled in other parts of life. And then I would also say parent is a guide, somebody who gives root, a supporter, an agitator. Sometimes I find I would say a roller coaster rider beside, behind, sometimes in front, and a pieces picker upper. Well, that's quite the list of phrases to describe the word parent, because it certainly is all of those things and more. As you said, it's quite a transformative experience, and I think that's that's a great word to describe it amongst all the others you listed. Okay, so quick fire responses. How would you define your parenting style? So again, I'm going to throw out a couple words, and you can just quickly choose the one that you think matches your parenting style. First one, teacher or disciplinarian. Teacher number two, structured or flexible. It depends, but let's go with flexible. It's interesting that you say that, because every interview that I've done so far on this topic, there's always a pause when I want to ask that question. They're like, well, it depends. You kind of have to be both. But yeah, it's it's good to sort of have the ability to be one or the other when the situation calls for it. But yeah, flexible. Sounds like is your answer awesome? Moving on, playful or serious, playful, okay, next one, logical or emotional. Emotional, okay, there's no right or wrong answers, by the way. These are just mostly for fun, okay, yes, because if there was, I'd be getting them all wrong. There is no right or wrong. I mean, the only answer that makes them correct, I guess, is, is the the nature of your relationship with your kids. So that's the only thing that's that's relevant in in these two words, the last one, authoritative or permissive, permissive. All right, so no more quick fire. We're moving on to another question. What is your favorite, or one of your favorites anyway? Parenting, memory. Thanks for the question. And I would say it's a group of experiences that. That can be described as getting away from the hustle of our regular day in and day out, and being together, watching Luke and Michaela try new things, either being part of that, or just witnessing that sense of adventure and having fun, of course, and laughing at the epic fails that happen, which we can't sometimes laugh during the day to day hustle, but yeah, laughing when we crash on a surfboard and celebrating when we stay and Ride the wave, even just for a little bit of time. And so it's metaphorical, but it's also a thing that we've done a couple of times with Luca. Michaela, we've tried surfing something that none of us had ever done. Yeah, just and seeing that kind of perseverance and grit, get up try it again. Who wants to pack it in? Who wants to try it again? And knowing that we the adults were the first ones that wanted to pack it in was, I think, also part of that happy parenting memory that they wanted to keep going till they could so they could stand up and go, that is so cool. Well, I love the fact that your, your example is both literal and metaphorical. I think that's, that's very cool. Okay, so I always have to kind of follow up those types of questions with the flip side. Do you have a least favorite parenting memory, yes and again. I think it's kind of like a bundle, because it didn't just happen once, but it was seeing either one, Luke or Mick in emotional pain and not knowing what it was all about. So maybe when they both kind of entered those years where things were a bit more secretive, some people that I've talked to about these experiences have said, yeah, they go into a tunnel, and eventually they come out of the tunnel, and but when that they're in there, is a lot of kind of it's part of growing independence, I guess, yeah, but not also not sharing to the same level or amount that you've been accustomed to. And I think partly it's them trying to sort through things as well, and just knowing how they can keep a poker face for a really long time until things get to be really big, that those are my least favorite, and when I heard one of our kids say, I don't want to go to school tomorrow, and When they had loved it or seemingly been

okay going up until that point, like I've missed something here, and I've missed something important. And so it's not only, I guess, about it's not about me and missing something, but that is my least favorite. It's how they're adapting to change and managing when people aren't kind. Yeah, and, and all of those kind of pieces, yeah. And I think it's, it's natural to wonder, you know, did I miss something? Should I have seen the signal? Should, you know? But, I mean, I think, you know, when they're in that tunnel, or there was, there was an episode of modern family where they talked about, you know, that them going to the, like, the other side of the moon, or they're, they're behind the moon, like on a spaceship, I think was the metaphor. And like, you know, eventually they're going to round the bend, and they're going to, you know, reappear back into your life and and resemble, to some degree, the person that you remember them being, but while they're behind the moon or wherever they are, it's, it's kind of a frightening experience. You're, you're so accustomed to being part of their every day, every thought, every movement, and then when they go into that tunnel or behind the moon, it's, it's kind of scary because, you know, there's something going on in that tunnel, but if they don't want to talk about it. There's not much you can do to force it out of them. Or at least, that was my experience. So I same, totally, totally understand what you mean by that, and it can make the gap wider. What's going on, what's happening, I know. Why can't you tell me? I know. Just tell me. I can help you. I might, you know, and yeah, it's, it's, it's something that, I think, in a way, if they don't kind of struggle a little bit and try to figure it out themselves, we're not. We're not, that's also probably not a good thing either, to hover too much so that they don't ultimately trust their instincts and figure out how to problem solve and whatever. But man alive when there. Like you said, in that tunnel, it's pretty tough to witness and hope that they're, they're going to come to you if it gets to be too much to manage on their own. Yeah, I totally get it. Okay, so let's, let's move on. My next question is a bit of a strange one, perhaps, but because I have two girls, two daughters. I have always been really curious about what it might be like to have a son, and it's way too late for me to have a son. So that curiosity stops at the word curiosity only. But I I've been curious what insights might you be able to share about what it was like to raise both a girl and a boy, did you have any differences in parenting styles or anything that you felt you had to incorporate with one or the other?



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Well, firstly, if you want to borrow with sun, like



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get in some of those experiences and and grow the gray hairs that are rapid,



11:00

I've got enough of those



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like I'm doing, and my sample size is so small with one and one and but still, you have expertise. You've got, you've got one of each, whereas I I have two of the same. So Well, I say the same but really no two kids are the same anyway. I'll let you answer and that's just it

the same, but really, no two kids are the same anyway. I'll let you answer, and that's just it. That's, I think, where I was going, was I, I don't know if their differences are fully attributed to gender differences or just totally different temperament. And I would say that we've made a conscious effort from the beginning in our marital relationship to try to transcend gender stereotypes. So Doug does a lot of cooking. We try to do equal cleaning. I repair things when I can. So so just quick examples, maybe, of gender stereotypes and so with our kids, I would say. But yet, that's not how the world around us operate. So there's this expectation, I think, in the community that we're in, that they'll both play sports. Well, our son didn't really like playing sports, so we we thought, okay, we should at least introduce him to these things, because I mean, the teamwork aspect of it, the fun potential, the potential for fun, exercise, all of that stuff. And we're not from here, so we don't have deep roots in this community. So I guess for them and for us to meet other people, but it wasn't, it wasn't necessarily to be. And so I would say we implemented, or I implemented. I call it the Kenny Rogers rule, which is it came from his song The Gambler, you gotta know when to hold them, know when to fold them, yeah, when to walk away, and know when the heck to run. And so you know, after some failed attempts at sports, for example, like, Okay, what do you want to do? And then kind of following that lead, which led him to some really great passions, and finding his people, and so getting out of his way, I think, was more of a strategy. But also it required some firmer boundaries than with with our daughter. So again, I don't know if those are related specifically to their genders or just related to their unique their personalities. Yeah, absolutely. And I think that's completely fair. It's, it's, and I think it kind of something that you said in terms of, you know, getting out of his way, or letting him, you know, show you what it is that he is more passionate about. If it wasn't sports, then, you know what? What else might you like to try, or whatever. That's kind of the point of, you know, the title raising parents like, you know, yes, we try to introduce our children to different experiences and sports and things that we either enjoy growing up ourselves or we just feel they might, you know, get something from, be it teamwork, new friendships, whatever. But at the end of the day, some things will work and some things won't, and and it's as much a learning process for us as parents as it is for them. So yeah, thank you. And no problem, I would just add that they're both very sensitive individuals, and so giving him, in particular, a safe. Place to go through those strong emotions was really important because, again, with respect to stereotypes, I feel like, still, we're in a time and place when the guys are, you know, crying is not necessarily an acceptable thing in all social circles. It's unfortunate, but still true, yeah, and, or, you know, having a place just to Yeah, express those strong emotions. I think that was really important piece, not unlike for for Michaela, but just making sure that we did understand how sensitive he was for forever. It's just part of him. So, yeah, excellent. Okay, so I think you may have partially answered this next question, but I'm going to ask it nonetheless. Were there any particular family traditions that were important to you growing up that you have now shared with your own family. Well, yes, my family was a lot of the traditions that I remember are centered on celebrating milestones, people coming together to celebrate around food and so that's something that we have tried to foster, celebrating milestones, birthdays, holidays, accomplishments or non accomplishments, and also involving our extended family as much as we can so we our family does not live here in this community where we have settled, and so switching weekends between my family and Doug's family was a big part of their growing up processes. And I would say, unfortunately, they both lost the influence of their both grandfathers fairly early on when they were young. So they they missed that idea, of course. So those were the big ones that came to into my mind just around bringing the importance of family going above and beyond and extra miles for your family, oh yeah, when it's unhandy for unhandy as heck for you, the individual. Yeah, and just bringing people together for those celebrations and one specific food, one in my family from Eastern Europe, you know, making traditional foods, including sausages. For example, we have had lots of sausage making parties. Oh, wow, that's very cool. And so, so I'm back to your comment that you made with Doug doing

a lot of the cooking. Does he What does he do with the sausages? Does he grill them? Do you make pasta with them? Like yes, yes and yes, yes, all of the above because it's my grandfather's secret recipe. Oh, that's very cool. Continue to use and I mean, through the years, everybody's gone through phases of being a vegetarian, free, all of these things, so we've had to adapt, but, but still, we appreciate the food, the goodness of food, and sharing it with people that's lovely, and sharing with extended family As as much and as often as you can i i may be somewhat similar to you, although I think your extended families at least within some driving distance, you know, having extended family far away is, is, is hard, you know. So I mean, as much as you can make them a part of your your day to day, or at least those milestones that you mentioned, is super important, and hopefully you know something that your own kids will will continue on as they get older and maybe have families of their own. Yeah. Okay, next question, again, the flip side of the previous question, is there anything that you deliberately chose to do differently compared to your own upbringing? Sure, yes. And I just want to start by saying I am very grateful for my upbringing. There's not a chance that my mom will listen to this unless I play it for her. But



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nonetheless, yes,



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so I'm not doing it for points, but I am very grateful for my upbringing in small town, it was fairly strict. You know, church was every Sunday morning, so I wasn't allowed to go to sleepovers or date until. After I was 16, I had a curfew. Wasn't allowed to go to parties, and so I made up for that when I went away to school and then some so that's where I'll focus my answer, and I was just knowing how I behaved. We thought taking away that forbidden fruit would be good and also, you know, help them to build up their senses of moderation at an earlier age. So our kids sleepovers, yes, they had no curfew, and they didn't really, ever or very rarely, take advantage of that. They were exposed to different people, culturally, in different places. My family didn't really travel. We went to Florida on a number of road trips, but we thought it was really important, given kind of the place and time we live in, that they have exposure to different cultures, peoples places, including those that have fallen on hard times and other places that have wonderful cultural richness and diversity. You know, go to a museum, go to an art gallery, go to the opera, like just different kinds of life experience. Yeah, and I don't feel like I missed out. I can make those choices as a late teen and adult to go to those things, but we just went with our kids to those places at a younger age, I guess, and now they can make the choices which of those things they liked enough to continue to pursue. And I think you make a good point about the the forbidden fruit. I think sometimes when we hold on too tight, they don't, they don't learn how to moderate. They don't learn how to experience things, you know, in a responsible way, right? Because if, if they're not allowed to do it or practice in a safe environment, I guess we'll say, when they're then unsupervised, they're inclined to overindulge perhaps, yes, yeah, yeah. We'll just, we'll just leave it at that. Yeah, we'll just leave it at that. Okay, next question. I'm just keeping my eye on the time too, and I know you've got other things to do probably this evening. What little is left of it? But what do you wish you had known or better understood about your kids when they were growing up? So I'll keep this one brief, because I want to repeat myself too much. That's fine. I would say it really goes back to the their how sensitive their souls are, and just how deeply they could be

affected or influenced by peers, by things people say or don't say, and also, I wish I would have understood when more boundaries were needed. You know, just in terms, it's not just about a curfew, but about understanding your own self worth and assisting them or giving them examples of how to set boundaries so people didn't hurt them in an ongoing way. Yeah, that's that's interesting. I've often wondered about that myself. I mean, I never really wanted my kids to see me as a, you know, authoritarian kind of person that that, you know, establish all these rules and boundaries and didn't let them explore and and make mistakes, and, you know, just be a kid and and experience some of the things that childhood offers. And, you know, safely, of course, but you know, I didn't want it to be so restrictive that they didn't enjoy that time with us, right? I mean, it's such a fine line, right? You're supposed to teach them and protect them, and, you know, not always be their best buddy, because they're supposed to learn lessons and be respectful and do all the things that we you know, we want them to be able to do, but you don't want to be so strict and rigid that there's no room for them to teach us a different way, perhaps, than the way that we might have been taught or The environment we might have grown up in. So anyway, yeah, it's there's no right or wrong, but it is a fine line sometimes, trying to figure out where those boundaries need to be, either for them to set them themselves, or for us to set them for them. Okay,



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this is kind of a tricky



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question. Question, and I'm not even sure how I would answer it myself. So so give it a shot. Is there anything you wish they had better understood about you during those developmental years? Well, the first thing that popped to mind was that I was winging it. I was never one that aspired to be, hmm, I don't want to say I didn't ever aspire to be a parent. That's how this started. My answer started though I would say I'd never had a plan for parenting. So I wasn't I didn't know I wanted to have four kids, or that they should try this, or that they should do that, or that I felt strongly about this. Sometimes I didn't understand that I felt strongly about something until the situation arose, because I didn't predict it. Yeah, there was no there was no game plan exactly before for how you thought this situation might unfold.



26:01

There was no real plan



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for them, for us together as a family, except for to go on adventures and try to find and maintain happiness and strong relationship. So that that is about it. There was really no plan. And the other thing is that I've talked a number of times about sensitivity, and I think that they don't come it's not a mystery why they are sensitive humans, if they share genetics, I am that way as well. And I think a lot of times I tried to kind of hide the way things that things were bothering me in general, or some of the things that they did that were hurtful, and just get on

with my day that we would figure things out as we go. So I guess that's it too. But this whole notion of your kids seeing you as a human as well is something that comes as they come from the moon, the back of the moon, or through the tunnel. So I'm not sure that's a fair expectation, but you said wish and not Yes, and you know what? It isn't. It isn't necessarily a reasonable expectation for them when they're really young, because they're their kids are self centered. That's, that's who they are at that time in their lives. They're they're mostly focused on how it is that they feel and and the whole compassion and empathy and whatever we try to build that in them, but it takes time for them to to understand what those things mean and how to apply it towards other people. And yeah, I mean, of course, it would be great if they could be as sensitive to us during all of those years as we tried to be towards them. But yeah, it's, I think you nailed it on the head when you said, if they could have seen you as a person with the same kind of strong feelings and emotions and sensitivities as they themselves had, it might have made a few situations easier. It would have in my household anyway, but yeah, probably not, not a an easy thing for them to have been able to do in their level of immaturity, probably at that time, now that they're older, the kids. I mean, even though they're always going to be kids to in my mind, at least, how has your relationship with them changed or evolved? I would say that we're all gaining confidence in our roles and in our relationship together as adults. It's fun that we share some interests. I share some really strong interests with Mick, I would say, and also with Luke and it's great to be moving away from, I think, will always be a guide, but it's not as intense sometimes now, right? And it can be more fun. And also they lead now, sometimes more than I would say, more than not, and show me new things. I mean, they always have, but just teaching me new things all the time and new perspectives and reminding me of my own root, because I'm finding and I'm not, maybe I'm getting more set in my ways, or reflecting some of my parents, more traditional views as I age, and it kind of remind me sometimes about that kind of more open, spirited way that I wanted to and that adventure, some spirit that I wanted to meet the world with. Well. Well, rounding the band to my final question, yeah. What? What advice might you give to other parents based on your own parenting experience, if you kind of had to sum it up in two or three points, what would you say



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two or three points? Okay, well,



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I'm going to draw on something my dad told me early on, which was trace put down the book. You've got this because I was so concerned, especially early on. Are we hitting the milestones? Are they? Are they doing this? Are they that? And, you know, continues throughout their formal schooling? Are they accomplishing this? Are they doing that? And those are kind of societal pieces. But put down the book experience, go with your gut, because the answer is in there doesn't have to be perfect. And if they miss a milestone by a week, it's okay. And then just, I guess Point number two is lead by example, through things, by doing things like showing them that you can have a fight and that makeup process, showing them how to manage mistakes in a positive way, rather than kind of covering them up, yeah, Showing them absolutely it's so important for them to see, as you said, I think in a previous answer, you know that you're a human being, you make mistakes, and it's okay. And in fact, it's it's good to make mistakes. That's how we all learn and but, but showing them not to be afraid of that process, I think, is hugely important. I'm sorry. Interrupted. You keep going, Oh, you didn't. That's good. And then

just the last thing. Point number three, keep up with your own passions, interests, friends, because that is another way to lead by example. Is to know, prioritize, in some ways, your own happiness and journey, because I think that puts you in a better place to support theirs Absolutely. The more fulfilled an individual is, the more they can give to others. It's kind of interesting giving. Give to yourself so you can give to others. That's excellent. Well, Tracy, thank you so much for making the time to chat with me today, or, I should say, this evening. I know you have a really busy schedule, and I appreciate you setting aside some time for me to to go over these, these questions. I imagine some of the questions may not have been super easy to answer, and I really appreciate your your openness and your candor, but most of all, your friendship. Hey, I appreciate you too. Kay, this awesome experience. Yeah, I hope so. I hope you felt it was interesting and thought provoking. You bet I loved your question and your style. So excellent for Episode Five and beyond. Well, I hope there, there is going to be a next episode, because my, my, my youngest daughter, Holly, she's kind of next on my list of people to approach, and she's right in the middle of a pretty intense study session. So I'm going to leave her V for the time being, but I've already interviewed her older sister, so she's next on my list. So in closing, I wanted to also thank everyone who is listening today for tuning into this episode of raising parents and again, thank you, Tracy for joining us. I'm hoping the next edition, as I said, will include my my daughter, Holly. So stay tuned for that. But in the meantime, be on the lookout for those tidbits of parenting wisdom you just never know where you might find them. You.