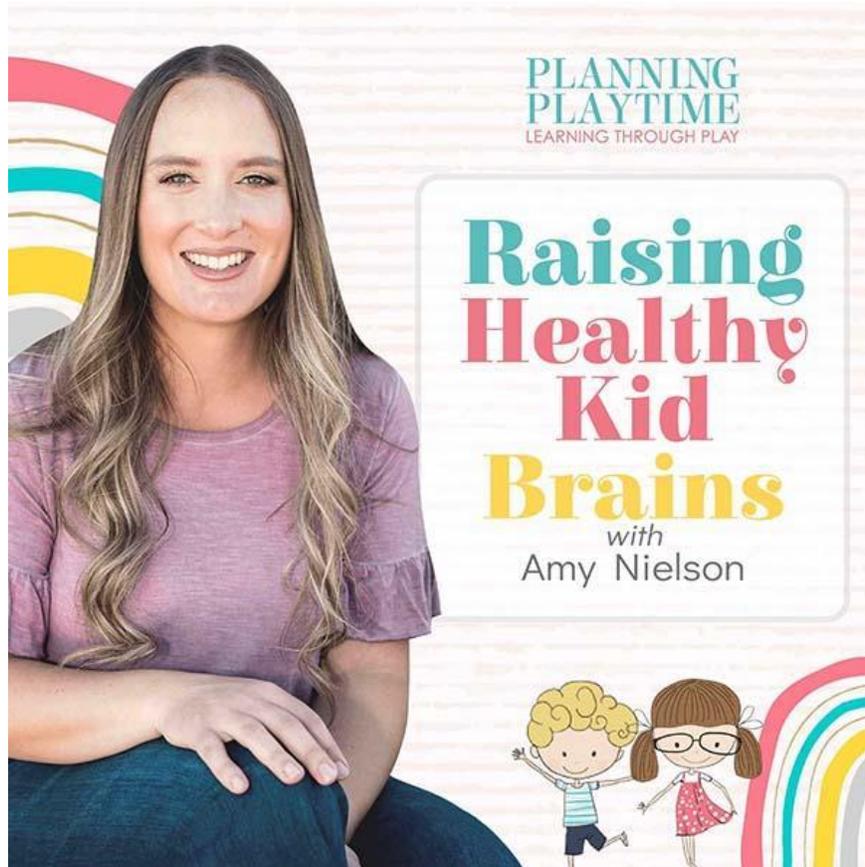


## Ep #7: Helping Your Child Understand Their Feelings with Bree Nelson



### Full Episode Transcript

With Your Host

**Amy Nielson**

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What makes us feel sad or mad? Is it the thing that happens to us like your friend or a classmate scribbling on your picture? Or is it something else? I think a lot of us grew up thinking that something that happens to us is what causes us to feel something. But today I'm going to be talking with Bree Nelson. She is a certified life coach through The Life Coach School. She coaches children ages eight and up and their mamas.

And she is going to be telling us about something in between, something in between that circumstance, the thing that happened and the feeling that you're having and how we can use that to change the feelings that we feel. Learning about this was a game changer for me and I can't wait for you to hear all about it coming right up with Bree Nelson.

Welcome to the Raising Healthy Kid Brains podcast where moms and teachers come to learn all about kids' brains, how they work, how they learn, how they grow and simple tips and tricks for raising the most resilient, kind, smart, compassionate kids we can. All while having lots of grace and compassion for ourselves because you know what? We all really need and deserve that too. I am your host, Amy Nielson. Let's get ready to start the show.

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Amy: I'm here with Bree Nelson, welcome to the show, so happy to have you here today.

Bree: Hey, it's so good to be here.

Amy: So I am excited. For people who don't know what a life coach is, can you tell us a little bit about that?

Bree: Yeah, for sure. Okay, life coaching is the best, first of all. I'm just going to throw that out. But life coaching is really just taking people right where they are and then just kind of talking about what do you want now? What do you want to create? What do you want your life to look like? And how do we get there? So

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it's kind of like this acceptance of where we're at. We don't necessarily - you can totally dive into the past with a life coach. That's not usually our focus, is not kind of pulling up things from the past.

But usually we just are like, how do we accept where we are and love ourselves in that place? And then what do we want to create for our future and how do we get there? And let's do it together.

Amy: Wow. And you do that for children and parents, what a powerful thing to start as a child and starting to be able to accept and love who you are right now. But then also be able to look forward and create what you want instead of just life happens to me. You have some influence and power there. How amazing is that?

Bree: Oh my gosh, it's been so cool. It's interesting because I really don't hear very many at all life coaches that coach younger kids. And so I was a little bit hesitant and then I just had all of these moms coming to me like, "What do I do with my child?" And right off the bat I'm like, "Well, you probably want to work with the mom." But then I was like, "Well, let's take a look at this." What can we do for children? And so as I started working with kids, I have been blown away with the progress that they can make.

The, I don't know, just huge leaps and bounds in their emotional maturity levels and their ability to handle day-to-day life is huge. They really can learn and grasp all of these concepts and obviously it's on their level, not on an adult level. So it's age appropriate. But it's been really awesome and rewarding to watch that. And kids, they have the ability to understand these things, so why are we not teaching it? Let's teach them.

Amy: I love it so much. You and I spoke earlier, one of the people that you trained under was Brooke Castillo. And I have been listening to her podcast for years. And life coaching has impacted my life through her. And I started using some of those same things with my children and it's kind of amazing to see the impact both with my teenagers and even with my younger kids, the impact it's

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having which is so cool. So I'm so excited to have you here with us today to kind of give everybody a little bit of a glimpse into what this can look like.

And maybe just something to start with, and so we were talking about the Model. And tell us a little bit about what the Model is and why it matters.

Bree: Okay, the Model. So I was trained at The Life Coach School under Brooke Castillo. And Brooke Castillo kind of created this Model and that's what we're trained with. And it's basically, what, five lines I think. It's circumstance, thought, feeling, action, results. So it just kind of starts at the top and it works for really anything in your life.

But in the circumstance line you want to put a fact, anything that somebody said, something that's factual that can be proven in a court of law. A text message. Something somebody did, the weather, things like that, a weight, number, a number in your bank account, something like that that's very factual.

Amy: So something, maybe something that happened to you. So if a child is like, "Well, this thing happened to me or my teacher got upset because I was talking during class." Or just something specific happened and that would be a circumstance?

Bree: Yes, but you want to take all drama, any dramatic word out of it. So you would say, "My teacher said you are going to lose your recess." That could be a circumstance. You wouldn't even put in there like, "My teacher got upset with me because x, y, z." You wouldn't put that in there. So the words that she said would go in there. And then the thought line is all the magic, the thought line, so important. And that is just what we're thinking. It's self-explanatory. So whatever we're thinking, based on the circumstance or the fact that you're using. So if you're using the fact like, "My teacher said you lose your recess."

Then whatever the child is thinking about that, you're going to pull out only one sentence, one phrase actually. You don't even want a sentence, there's two separate phrases. You want to put one short phrase in the thought line. And that

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is so important because a lot of times we have, well, first of all you're going to have a million different thoughts. All you need to do is pull out one thought.

Amy: So give me an example of what a thought would be with this recess example. So my teacher said, "I was going to have to stay in from recess." What's a thought then that you would put in that line?

Bree: Something like, "She's so mean." Or we can just go with that, "She's so mean." Or, "That's unfair." They're going to have a whole list of thoughts. "She didn't do that to someone else and I didn't even do anything wrong", and blah, blah, blah. So we're going to take a look at one of them. So let's say, "She's so mean." Put that in the thought line. And then the next is feeling. So then you're going to pay attention to that specific phrase that you put in the thought line and you're going to ask yourself, when I think that thought, how do I feel?

So when that child is thinking, she's so mean, what one word feeling do they feel? So what do you think, what's a feeling that they would feel?

Amy: Upset, angry.

Bree: Yeah. So you want to be careful on this one, that you don't put more thoughts. So you don't want to be like, "I feel like she's mean." That's a thought again. So just the one word, so they're upset. And then so your thought, this is really, really important is that you can see from this example that we're doing is that it's the thought that is creating that feeling of upset. And that's really important. And it's really important to teach kids that because then they understand that they're the creator of their feelings.

Amy: So it wasn't the circumstance, it wasn't being kept in from recess that caused them to be upset, it was the thought that they had about the circumstance that created the feeling of being upset. Wow, that's a big one.

Bree: Yeah, it's huge for kids because they're like, "For sure my teacher made me mad. For sure I'm mad because my teacher did that." But it's really interesting because you can look at it and you can think, would some other child have a different thought about that? If the teacher was like, "Okay, you're staying

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in for recess.” There may be another kid, let’s say some other kid has a bully out at recess. And the teacher’s like, “You have to stay in for recess.” That child’s going to have a different thought that’s like, phew, I didn’t want to go out there anyway and they feel relieved.

Amy: Yeah, and so their feeling would be different.

Bree: And so same circumstance, the teacher says, “You have to stay in for recess.” But their feeling is completely different because they’re thinking something different.

Amy: Interesting. I love that example.

Bree: Yeah, so interesting. So anyway, so our thoughts drive our feelings. Our thoughts create our feelings which is really, really important for kids to understand, and adults. Anyways, okay, so we’ve done the circumstance, then the thought, then the feeling, then the action is next. So then what we take a look at is what actions do you take from a feeling of upset? Because you’re thinking, she was so mean, that was so mean. Was that our thought? I forgot.

Amy: Yeah, that she’s mean.

Bree: So then that thought is creating a feeling of upset. And then from upset what do you do? How do you respond? How do you show up? And we even take a look at what’s going on in your brain? Are you just making a list of all the reasons why your teacher’s mean? You’re creating more, you’re finding more proof and more evidence for it. And then how are you treating your teacher? How are you treating your friends? How are you talking to yourself? All those kinds of things. And then our actions then create our results which is everything that we create in our life comes from these.

So then the results in this model, typically our results tie back to our thoughts, which is always so interesting that we make our thoughts true. So the thought here, she’s so mean. So then she’s upset. And then they’re taking all this action, finding all the proof why your teacher is mean. Treating other people mean, not being kind in our own head, maybe being mean to ourselves. Like, you’re such

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an idiot, why did you do that? You shouldn't have done that or whatever. Whatever the action is, and we then create possibly a result of then you aren't being kind.

You're not being kind to you. You're not being kind to the teacher. Can you see how that ties back to your thought of she's so mean? And then what do you become? You become mean.

Amy: So if you want to change your results, then the thing you would go back into and change since you can't always change circumstance is you would go right back to the thought and change the thought, which would change your feeling. Which changes your action. Which then changes your results.

Bree: Yes, that's exactly right. Powerful, right? Yeah. And a lot of times, when I work with the kiddos, we work a lot on just allowing the feeling and pausing or stopping the Model at the feeling line. So it's totally fine for them to be like, "She's so mean", and feel upset. But can we just feel upset in our body and process, and allow that feeling of being upset and not act from it? Can we just let it be there and let it move through us and not react or not act from that? So we do a lot of processing emotions and things like that when I'm working with the kids.

Because sometimes those thoughts are kind of hard to change in the moment. But that feeling, if you're okay to just be like, "Okay, I'm upset." And remind yourself, this is what I teach the kids all the time. Just remind yourself that you're creating it from your thoughts. It's coming from your thoughts. Own it. You've got to own that. And then just be like, "I'm upset because I'm thinking she's so mean." Okay, and then you just sit with that feeling of upset and just let it move through you. We work a lot on that.

Amy: Interesting, I like that. So you're not necessarily going all the way through to the end, you're trying to kind of stop it there. But then allowing them to sit with it. And then we talked, I know when we were talking in our conversation previously about how to maybe start working on attempting or trying out different thoughts. I was telling you, I listened, I actually got to listen to Brooke Castillo

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talk on stage in Florida a couple of months ago. And she's a fun, fabulous human.

And she loves clothes and so she's on stage in this beautiful, fabulous dress. And she said, "Sometimes I like to try on thoughts like clothes." And she says, "You look at one and you're like, "That looks amazing, I'm going to try that on." And you try it on and then you're like, "I don't actually really like how this feels." So you take it off and try on another one." And I loved that, that imagery, that mental picture. And I have used that with my children. Sometimes we can just try on thoughts and have just kind of a different test that out.

I know one day my daughter was getting ready to go to school and she was stressing out about a band audition. And the teacher was not going to let her do it and there were all these things. And you could just see this spiral going and it was unhealthy. And I'm like, "Okay, so that could be true. But maybe we could try on a different thought that maybe he had a really busy weekend and he just hasn't had a chance to respond yet. And we could just try that on and maybe it'll go really well and your audition will happen and it will go great. And will you just try that on?"

Because we actually really have no idea which thought is or which circumstance is actually true.

Bree: [**Crosstalk 14:34**].

Amy: So maybe we should just try it on because it was a lot more fun to think that thought. So we tried that on and then within an hour of her getting to school she texted me and was like, "This happened. And I got to audition and everything." And I'm like, "All of the thoughts we tried on this morning actually happened. How fun is that?"

Bree: That's an amazing example. I love that, yes.

Amy: What is a way to maybe start introducing that to even really young children where you're allowed to feel and then maybe just taking ownership of, okay, so I'm feeling this and it's okay that I'm feeling this. But I did create it with my

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thought that I had. And then maybe say, “When I’m done feeling this is there a way that I could try on a different thought, if I kind of want to change how I feel, if I don’t love staying in this feeling and I might maybe want to try a different one?” How do we do that with young children?

Bree: Yeah, I love that question. Okay, so I find that even with my own kids I do this a lot. So when they’re sad I choose my words pretty carefully. I don’t usually say things like, “What made you sad?” Because then that really does put the responsibility on things outside of their control. That thing made me sad or that person made me sad. So I kind of change the wording just a little tiny bit and I ask questions like, “What are you thinking that’s making you feel sad?” And that is what I really focus on. So then they’ll say, “Well, they said this and that. And that makes me sad.”

And I’m like, “Well, hold on one second.” I’m like, “Well, tell me what are you thinking about what they said? Tell me that. Tell me that part. And then they’ll tell me, “Well, I’m thinking that they’re a jerk”, or whatever. And I’m like, “Okay, yeah, that would make me feel sad. When I think that somebody is intentionally being mean or somebody is a jerk, that does make me feel sad, yeah.” And it really is fine for them to feel that way. But I do really want to teach them that they’re the creators of all of it.

So just changing that wording just a little bit, “Tell me [**crosstalk 16:45**] that’s making you feel sad?” Just a tiny little switch but it places the emphasis on themselves. It gives them the control back. And then I usually say, this actually happened to my son the other day. He was really sad. And I don’t even remember why. Oh my goodness. He was really sad about something and he came and laid by me in bed and I was like, “Tell me what you’re thinking that’s making you feel sad?” And he told me and I was like, “Do you want to keep feeling sad?” He’s like, “Yeah.”

I’m like, “Okay, you can feel sad as long as you want. I’m right here for you.” And we did all this exercise where we find it in the body and kind of sit with that feeling. And I can explain that further if you want but we did that. And then I was like, “Are you still sad?” He’s like, “Yeah.” “What are you thinking right now?”

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And he told me again what he was thinking and I was like, “Okay, well, you get to feel sad as long as you want but when you’re ready, you let me know and I’ll help you find some other thoughts that will make you feel different feelings, whenever you’re ready, no rush.”

It’s sometimes also trying to teach the kids that no feeling is bad. We’re here on Earth to feel all the feelings. And none of them are bad and they don’t hurt us. Basically they don’t make us break our legs or whatever. They’re uncomfortable but they’re not going to physically hurt us, so anyway.

Amy: Which is such an interesting thing and I love that you talk about that and feeling it in the body and just kind of noticing what it feels like instead of trying to get rid of it and be afraid of it. And that we can sit with feelings and just feel them and it’s okay. But then also giving them the power to change it. This is so good. Can you imagine? I’m like, “I want to go back and give myself this little parenting thing way back when.”

Bree: Well, it works for all ages including adults. I use the same tools on myself and I’m like, “You can be mad as long as you want but you can change it whenever you’re ready.” But one thing I do want to point out is that the purpose of moving, one of the purposes I should say, of moving out of your head and into your body is that when we stay in our head we really just spin and spin in those thoughts that are creating that feeling. So we’re just staying in it and it’s really hard to [19:20] emotion when you keep feeding it to yourself over, and over, and over again.

And so when I teach the kids, I’m like, “Let’s find it. Tell me, where is that at in your body?” It helps them to drop the thoughts and focus on something else for a minute. And then your body can process it. And it really is amazing how quickly that feeling will dissipate when you give it a little attention.

Amy: That is so interesting. So you have them find it in their body and where they’re actually feeling it and then that takes it a little bit out of their head. So good.

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Bree: Yes, it's so good. When they find out, I'll just tell you real quick if any of your listeners want to try it with their kids. So let's just go through an example real quick, they're spinning in their heads. I'm like, "Okay, Tommy. Real quick, Tommy, where do you feel sadness? Where do you feel that at?" And it doesn't matter, there's no right or wrong answer literally at all except I don't like them to stay in their heads because I don't want them to stay up there. So I'm like, "From your throat on down, find a place that you feel sadness, stomach, your chest." Your hands I get sometimes, your throat, shoulders.

So they find it in their stomach and then the way to kind of sit with an emotion for a minute is to ask that emotion some questions. So it sounds kind of woo woo and a little bit goofy but kids are totally cool with it.

Amy: They love that.

Bree: Okay, yeah. And so you just ask questions like, "Okay, so you feel it in your stomach, is it like a tight ball or is it moving around? Is it moving?" And they'll answer, "It's a tight ball." I'm like, "Is it hot or is it cold in your stomach?" "It's hot." "Is it light or dark?" "It's dark." And then I'll repeat back to them, "Okay, so it's like a hard ball that's hot and dark in your stomach. Okay, okay, stay with me, stay in your stomach for a minute." Keep them there. "And is it moving at all right now? Do you feel it moving out at all?" And they're like, "No."

"Just keep staying there, what color is it, what color is sadness for you?" "Blue." "Okay, it's like a blue hard ball." So you're just kind of getting them to stay in their bodies and feel it. You stay there, you ask them questions for long enough and they're going to be like, "Well, it doesn't feel that strong anymore. It feels like it's kind of going away." It's like magic. And then I'm like, "It passes and it may come back in waves but we can handle it." And every time we do that I remind them, "Remember that that's coming from your thoughts but also that you can handle all of it. You can do that at any point."

Amy: So good. Yes. I love all this, this is so good. We talked too about teaching children to take emotional responsibility and maybe some of the language around that. What are some examples, maybe just a phrase or things we can

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use or maybe even not use to kind of help our children start taking responsibility for their own emotions?

Bree: Yeah, that is such a good question. So a lot of times, we all grew up with this language and so it's not a surprise that we all then teach it like that to our children like, "Don't say that, you're going to hurt her feelings." Or, "You need to share your toys so that she can be happy." And after all the things we've talked about today, you can see that that really places emotional responsibility on other people for others' emotions. So I just tweak it just a little tiny bit.

And I just say things like, "Wait, we don't say things like that because we're kind people. Remember, you're such a kind kid, we don't want to say that because you're so kind." I really try to focus on these character traits that we're developing. And like, "I think you should share that toy because you are such a generous friend. You're so kind and generous. That feels so good to you when you share that toy because you get to feel generous."

Amy: I love that so much because you're putting the power in the child themselves to create their own results, and their own feelings, and their own thoughts, and all that. So good.

Bree: Yeah, totally. It's awesome.

Amy: And then do you use specific language around trying to help children not feel like any emotions are bad. That they're allowed to have all the emotions or is it that kind of a part of just helping them find it in their body and just talking about it and discovering what it looks like. And kind of getting to know it maybe instead of trying to fix it and get them out of it. Which I think is kind of our tendency or maybe how we were raised to react to strong emotion.

Bree: Yes. I do think that that is the way. And it is our tendency to be like, "Okay, that's enough. No more being sad. We're all done." And it's fine. We were raised like that and your child is going to be fine if that's the way you've done it, that's the way you do it. It's all okay. But it's actually surprising how much quicker they'll move through that emotion if you just take a minute to sit with them in it

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and let them be in it and talk with them through it. And it is, it is like when you're in those moments, it's just saying, "It's okay to be sad. It's okay to feel mad." Just acknowledging that there are not any bad emotions.

Some are more comfortable than others but to be honest, I think children learning to allow and process those harder emotions actually increases their confidence exponentially, so much. When they learn, when I work with these kids and they see that – a big one is embarrassment. Kids are really anxious about possibly feeling embarrassed. And working through it with them and helping them to understand that it's just a feeling that we feel in our bodies, that's the biggest thing we're afraid of is feeling that negative emotion.

And then when they feel it and they process it, and allow it, the amount of confidence they feel to do that thing or something bigger again is huge. So yeah, I think just, yeah, talking like that. "It's okay, you can be mad as long as you want. It won't hurt you. It's okay."

Amy: It's so powerful, I love that idea of the confidence that it builds because yeah, so many things that are causing us that tension is fear of feeling a negative emotion that is scary and that we don't want to feel. And so learning that we can just experience it and it's not going to really hurt us. That is so good. Is there anything I should have asked you that I didn't ask you that you just want to share before our conversation is over?

Bree: Well, I think all of the things that we're teaching to children are so applicable to adults too. And so think about in your own life, what am I running from because I'm afraid of feeling an emotion that makes me feel uncomfortable? And I face this, I struggle with anxiety too. And all the time I find myself telling myself, "You're okay, it's just an uncomfortable feeling. It feels like a pit in your stomach. It feels like an eye twitch, [**crosstalk 27:21**]." I just talk myself through these.

And I'm like, "You can do the thing and feel anxious and it's not going to hurt you, you can do it anyway." And so just kind of taking these tools that we want to teach our children and using them in our own life and then modeling that for the

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kids. I will even say to my kids, “Hey, I have this podcast interview coming up and I’m nervous. I’m nervous about it.” And my eye’s twitching and I have this pit in my stomach but I’m going to go do it and it’s going to be just fine. I can do it and feel anxious and it’s going to be totally fine. And just like [**crosstalk 28:02**] for them is huge too, so I don’t know.

Amy: I love that and it makes us, yeah, it makes us healthier too which allows us to be in a better space to help the children that we care about.

Bree: For sure. For sure. And when they can see, my mom has to do that too, there’s nothing wrong with me. The thing is, is that I see this all the time that our kids feel anxious, or sad, or fearful. And then the parent feels anxious, or sadness, or fearful about their children’s feelings. And if we can just cut that part out, our kids are supposed to experience all of it. And we don’t have to be anxious, or fearful, or sad about it for them and it doesn’t help anyway.

Amy: Yes. I think it makes it worse. This is so good. Bree, tell us where people can find you if they want to get to know you better or work with you?

Bree: Sure. Okay, you guys, I’m not very active on social media but I’m going to get better. I’m going to work on that, [29:12], New Year’s goals. But I am at [breenelsoncoaching](https://www.breenelsoncoaching.com) B-R-E-E Nelson N-E-L-S-O-N coaching on Instagram and my website is [breenelson.com](https://www.breenelson.com).

Amy: Awesome and we will definitely include those links in the show notes so people can just click on those and find you really easily.

Bree: Yeah, totally. And I work with kids eight and up generally and their moms. I love working with moms. So I’m here for all of that.

Amy: That is so amazing. Thank you so much for coming on today and having this conversation with me. I’ve enjoyed it so much and have some new ideas to go back with for my own kids and hopefully our audience can try some of these things out as well.

Bree: Okay, thanks for having me, it has been super fun.

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Amy: Thank you, alright.

Bree: See you.

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Thank you so much for spending some time with me today and listening to this episode of the Raising Healthy Kid Brains podcast. We are a brand new podcast which means we are harder to find than the perfect LEGO in a big box full of LEGO. And we need your help so that we can reach more moms, and parents, and teachers with this information about their children's brains. So how can you help? You can follow this podcast wherever you listen to podcasts and leave us a rating and a review. That would mean the absolute world to us.

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