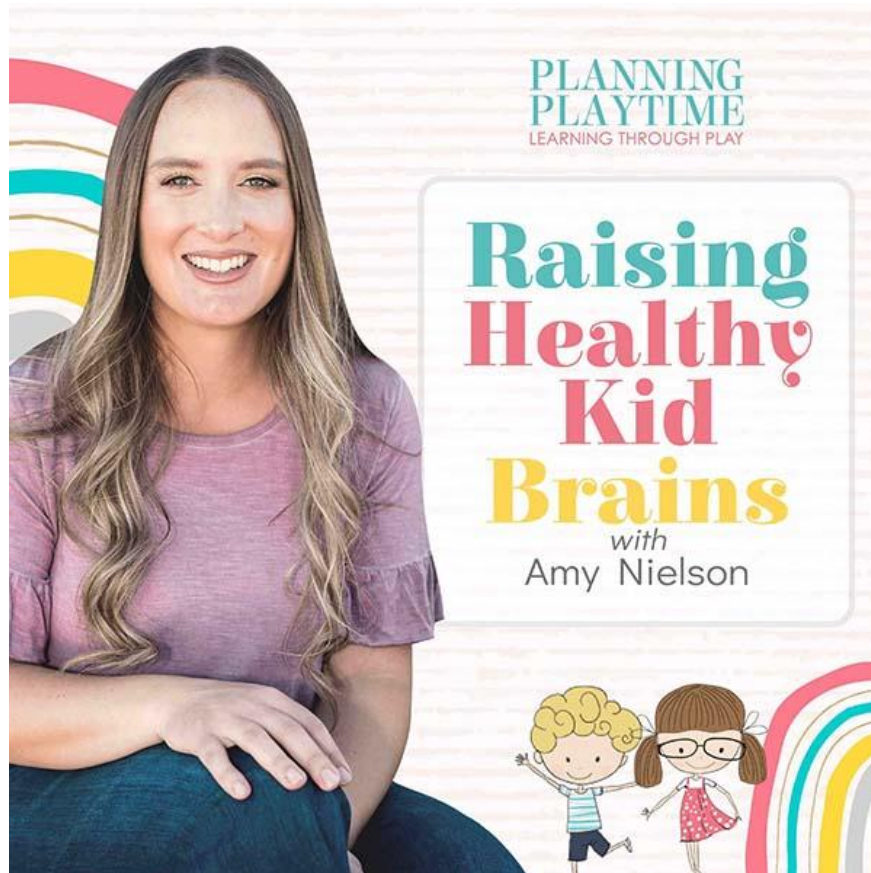


Ep #69: The Parent's Role in Children's Emotional Regulation with Dr. Cindy Hovington, Ph.D.



Full Episode Transcript

With Your Host

Amy Nielson

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What is the best way to teach our children emotional regulation? Today I'm talking to Dr. Cindy Hovington and she says it starts with us. We had an incredible conversation today about a three part model for emotional regulation. She talks about parenting styles and discusses four different types of parenting styles and what she recommends. She talks about modeling, coping with our emotions for our children and this being one of the most important parts of teaching children, emotional regulation.

And she talks about tips and strategies for how to become more emotionally intelligent ourselves so that we are better at modeling that for our kids. And then the third part was communication and conflict resolution with other adults in our household and modeling that for children which was really interesting. We talked about single parenting and what that looks like as well as working with other adults in a household. And then one of my favorite parts of her conversation with me was sharing the red, yellow, green zone for figuring out where we are emotionally. So you'll want to listen for that.

Dr. Cindy Hovington is a mother of three from Montreal, Canada, she has a PhD in neuroscience. She is the founder of the Curious Neuron, an online resource to help parents protect their children's emotional health through science backed tips. She is also the co-founder of Wondergrade, a company and app that helps children develop emotional regulation skills. Cindy is also the host of the Curious Neuron Podcast. She was an absolute delight to talk to and I hope you really enjoy this conversation. It's coming up next on this episode of the *Raising Healthy Kid Brains* podcast.

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: Dr. Cindy Hovington, welcome to the show. We're so happy to have you on today.

Cindy: Hi, thanks for having me.

Amy: I am so excited to have this conversation but first I'm just curious how you got into neuroscience because I just find it really fascinating.

Cindy: So I was doing a master's degree in rehabilitation actually. I was studying people who had a stroke and they were imagining movements, not physically able to do it but just thinking about it. And I was testing their brain to see where the activation was and if it was in the right spots of their brain. And that was an indication that we still had ways to train their brain to help them move eventually. That's when I became fascinated with neuroscience. I realized the potential of the brain and so I did my PhD in neuroscience and I studied schizophrenia and psychosis and how that impacts our thinking and emotions and all that.

So that's how I got into that part which eventually led to me becoming a parent and realizing that there was a lot of science around emotions that we parents needed to know. And that's what led to Curious Neuron as well.

Amy: Yes, oh my goodness. Yes, we need to know about our kids' brains. We just need more information on this so I'm so happy to have you on to talk about this today.

Cindy: Thanks for having me.

Amy: Yes, we're going to talk about emotional regulation a little bit because that's a thing.

Cindy: Yes, very much so.

Amy: So tell me this big, long phrase that we're talking about today.

Cindy: So I want, yeah, the tripartite model of parental socialization is one of these terms in science that we won't say this again the rest of the talk. But it's something that I want to talk a lot about a lot more because it's broken into three

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parts. And each of these three parts are difficult for me as a parent and I know are difficult for parents out there. And this model talks about the fact that if you want your child to develop these really healthy social emotional skills then these three aspects of the model are what contribute the most to it.

The hard part about it is that these three parts of the model that we're going to talk about in a second fall back on us, the parent. And a lot of it is how we regulate our emotions, how we regulate emotions in conversation, in arguments, how we're parenting our child. All of that really impacts our child's social emotional skills. So a lot of people out there right now are talking about emotional regulation skills and social emotional skills, emotional intelligence. All of those terms, that come back to how we are handling or coping with emotions. And there's a lot of steps that come with that.

So that tripartite model talks about three parts. The first aspect of it is how we model our own ability to cope with emotions and regulate emotions. The second part is the type of parenting style that we're implementing within our home with our child. And then the third one is how we regulate our emotions with people in our home. So that child's immediate environment, whether it's a partner, whether it's a grandparent that lives with us, how are we modeling the way we cope with emotions in those arguments or conversations with them in that immediate environment and we'll break it down today, but those are three really important parts.

Amy: I'm so excited to get to talk about those and break that down. So let's start with the first part, which is parenting style. Tell me about that.

Cindy: Sure. Parenting style, we hear a lot about this positive parenting or I don't even know all the terms to be honest with you because in the end it comes down to what the research says and that's my background, understanding. This is what I do with the work I do is just trying to pull the research out to help parents. So in research there are four different kinds of parenting styles. And what you want to align yourself with in your home is really balancing warmth and sensitivity towards your child, including their emotions and boundaries for your child.

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A child needs both to thrive really. So that type of parenting style is called authoritative parenting. Regardless of the term you really want to remember that throughout your interactions with your child and the environment you're creating for them, to always balance that warmth and sensitivity with the limits and the boundaries. And let's just remove the boundaries. Let's say there's a child who has freedom to do whatever they want, and I think that's one of the misconceptions around positive parenting or attachment parenting or whatever the kind of parenting.

I think this misconception around the idea that we are their best friend, they can do whatever they want is wrong. They need the boundaries because children who do not grow up with any limits and boundaries will really struggle when it hits them, that there are limits and boundaries within the real world. And as teenagers and young adults they have a higher chance of mental health issues because they haven't experienced the discomfort that comes with having a boundary and a limit. So we do need to incorporate those with our kids.

And then let's say there is a child without the warmth, let's say we're only about limits and boundaries within their home which I think a lot of us were sort of raised in that environment growing up, I was. And I think our parents didn't know any better. They were just doing what they had learned.

But now we know that this authoritarian kind of parenting style where it's all about the limits and boundaries and a lot less sensitivity norms towards emotions and a way a child feels, that leads to a lot of behavioral issues and a lot of issues with mental health as well because you don't know how to express emotions. You don't think that it's normal or right to do so. So there are behavioral issues in kids that are raised this way. There are emotional issues as well. So we know that a child really needs both.

Just a little side note, because with the work I've done for years with parents and myself as a parent, a mom of three I know that we're not always going to balance that warmth and boundary. We're not always going to have the perfect balance and that's okay. So whoever's listening, if you're like, "Well, around 4:00pm I am not really balancing that warmth with the boundaries." It's perhaps

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more limits and boundaries at that time because I am stressed out and I'm tapped out. That's okay.

What you want to do is really sit back and look at the big picture. Are you on average balancing that? The second thing I just want to address around that is if your partner seems to be a little bit more on the boundaries and limits side and you're more on the warmth and the sensitivity side, that's a balance itself. As long as with the home there are both and that your limits and boundaries don't cross the line of shaming or harm towards your child and your child still feels safe.

So any of the spanking or language that might make a child feel, even if they're getting the sensitivity from another parent they might still feel ashamed that they're sad or that there's something wrong with them. That's where you cross the line. So we do want to make sure that we don't cross that line of making a child not feel safe or soothed, which goes back to a lot of Daniel Siegel's work of how to help a child feel secure which is safe, seen and soothed. Those three S's really lead to that. So all of that to say, really balancing warmth and sensitivity with the boundaries and limits.

Amy: Wow. That is really cool. So I love the idea that sometimes there's a different dynamic with different parents but as long as we're kind of getting both, that can be okay. And then just we don't have to be perfect, so shooting for trying to kind of make sure we're working on getting both in and yeah, that's so good. Okay, so parenting style, we're looking at getting both of those pieces. Let's talk about the next part which was modeling.

Cindy: Yeah. And that's honestly, well, each one could be very difficult because if we think back to our own childhoods. So each step of these three parts of the model can be difficult for a lot of adults and parents. That step of modeling, I mean to model, a healthy way of coping with emotions looks like, means that you know how to recognize your own triggers and emotions. It means that you're able to understand it and say, "I need to step away from this moment, it's triggering." Or set a boundary and say I'm speaking to somebody on the phone and they've crossed the line, I'm going to let go now.

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These are all things that honestly I've learned five years ago after having my third child. A couple of years ago, I just realized that I had a lot to work on. And that's why I talk about it this way because it doesn't matter if you're a neuroscientist and you know what the model is. When it comes to real life all your own past comes into play and you weren't prepared for that, none of us were really. So I think that it's really important to take a moment.

What helped me a lot was journaling about emotional moments, not during the moment but at the end of the day saying, "This moment caused me a lot of pleasure. This moment caused me a lot of displeasure and uncomfortableness." And that's when I started identifying things that were triggering for me emotionally. Our nervous system is highly impacted by our childhood. And what I mean by that is I was raised in an environment where by the time I was 10 my parents divorced and the environment was very hostile between them.

So my nervous system is very different than a person who wasn't raised in that environment which means I might get triggered more easily by something. My nervous system is not always at zero. I like to picture the sort of meter, with a green, yellow and then the red. And I picture that throughout my day, honestly, every single day at several points of my day because it helps me assess my own system. You could look at it in terms of stress, I call it my dysregulation meter in my mind because you could feel calm.

But when you really think about that moment, you can wake up in the morning and not be at your green zone in terms of being regulated. You might have had an argument with a partner the night before that is unsolved or unresolved. And you still have emotions stirring up inside you or you might have had a conversation with a family member. Or you might have a deadline that day. So you're not waking up in the green zone. If we can at least take the moment to see where we are internally, for example, you wake up and you have a deadline, you might be worried about it and you're thinking about it.

So if your child spills milk during breakfast or says something to you or forgets to put their book in their school bag. You're not going to respond the same way as if you were in the green zone where you're completely calm and regulated and

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you've got all the good internal talk and positive reinforcement for yourself and you've got this. Your internal dialogue might be different in the yellow zone. Your heart rate might be different in the yellow zone. Your ability to control your emotions will be different.

So if you become more aware of how you cope with emotions then in that moment where your child spills the milk, if you've already labeled yourself as yellow zone waking up, you know what you need. You have to develop that understanding of yourself, which is what I did through journaling. But you'll know that in that moment, instead of just reacting, you'll create perhaps let's say a pause between your child's action and your reaction so that you know, okay, this isn't about them, this is about me. It's not the end of the world, they spilled milk and it's literally just on the table, it's fine.

Versus if you don't take that moment to pause or be attuned to your nervous system, then that happens and you're like, "Why did you do that?" And then you realize, why did I say that? Then you kind of think back. So I really encourage parents to kind of journal about your emotions, just take notes on your phone, make it an audio, whatever is easiest for you but to really understand what causes certain emotions in you. If you get to work and you're anxious around certain people, why? Are they speaking to you, a certain way? Do you need to set boundaries?

Is it because you feel that you're not enough? Is it a confidence thing that you need to work on? There are so many ways that emotions impact us throughout our day that we just kind of power through. And if we take a moment to look at that then we'll have more power in that moment to say, "Okay, Cindy." I was pitching for example a couple of weeks ago for the work that I do. And going into the pitch I was like, "I'm going to ruin it. I won't do well." But then I had to get back to my thoughts and say, "Cindy, you're doing it again, just stop it. You know, you practiced, you're ready for this, just go in there."

And then you walk in with a higher, you know, your shoulders up and your head up but you have to do that, nobody else can. So I'm saying all of this because this impacts how we parent as well and how we respond to our kids. So knowing

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where our nervous system is, doing the work whether it's with a therapist or ourselves by reading books like *The Permission to Feel* by Marc Brackett is a really good one. *Chatter* by Ethan Kross is another book that helps with our dialogue, that helps us understand our emotions but our childhood impacts that.

So we spoke about parenting style and I said that many of us were raised in that authoritarian environment. That means that many of us might not know how to express our emotions and might not know what a safe space for emotions looks like. And if we want to create that safe space for our kids, how can we do that if we don't know what it feels like for ourselves?

And I think that comes back to a lot of dads as well that might not have had that safe space growing up. And now they're parents and in a relationship and we ask them, "How are you?" And they're always fine even if you know they might be dysregulated in that moment. But my partner and I have had this discussion a lot where it's okay not to be fine. It's not a weakness, it's just a moment where you can ask me for help as your partner. And I want you to know that this is a safe space for you to not be fine. And we have to repeat it because it's a lot of unlearning. So just trying to do that.

I spoke with a mom, was it last week or the week before where she's been working on herself and they moved out of the country and it's a big move for their two young daughters. And one of the daughters was behaving very differently. And it's very easy to see the behavior and not the underlying emotion. But there's almost always, and I don't want to say always but almost always an underlying emotion around a child's behavior and even ours.

And that parent was able to create a safe space for that child to say, "Are you mad at me?" And the child let it all out and said, "How could you do this to me? You took me away from my friends, my teacher." And that parent said, "It's okay to feel that way, I get it. I hope you can trust that there was a reason for this." But just to say, that parent created that safe space because they had done years of work on themselves. So we're still under the modeling, the modeling part of this tripartite model, but modeling emotions is a lot of work.

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And if we are struggling with mental health, we will struggle with modeling emotions. It doesn't mean that there's something wrong with us, it just means that we need to ask for help if we need to or take moments where we can re-energize ourselves if we need it or fill our cup in whichever way. But we have to be aware of what that is for us. Yeah, it's a lot for that part but yeah.

Amy: That is a big one. So I have, I guess a question I have for follow-up on that is, is there any value in talking it out when you are feeling dysregulated? And is there any value to talking that out with children at a developmentally appropriate level and say, "I'm feeling this and so I'm probably going to go do this", or something like that?

Cindy: Yes. At a developmentally appropriate level, yes. So even if you have a four or a five year old child, you could have a moment where you feel overwhelmed. Using that word in that moment, "I'm overwhelmed", and it could be because of work. Obviously you want to keep it at their level if you're overwhelmed because a sick parent or a dying parent or a family member, it's very different. But you can say, "I'm feeling overwhelmed because of family things."

And if they ask for details or if it's something that you can't explain, you could just say, "Well, it's a bit more complicated but here's basically what's on my mind or I'm mad because somebody said something to me. And I really want to take a moment to go in my room and just think about that or do whatever I have to do." I had given a workshop in a school and there was a father who brought up that question exactly and said, "I understand that you're saying that we need to express that but if I'm the authoritative figure in their lives, why would I show this sort of weakness of not being able to cope with all my emotions?"

And my answer to him was, "It doesn't make you weaker, it makes you human and we're all human. And we all have emotions. And it's not about weakness." So you do have to model those emotions at a level that makes sense for that child. And the more you do that, your child will start to understand, okay, there are different emotions that happen and sometimes we even have a mix of emotions. We don't only have to be happy or sad or it could be mad and sad at

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the same time. It could be happy and sad at the same time. It depends on the situation.

And the more we can have those dialogues within our home then our child will understand and recognize their emotions within themselves.

Amy: That's so cool. Yeah, I love that idea of being able to talk it out and let them see because sometimes I feel like kids for some reason see us as more capable than we are or think we have it all together which is hilarious because they live with us. But somehow they think we've got it together and so having them be able to walk through it and say, "Oh, no, I'm not just happy all the time. And I don't have it all together and there's things that are going wrong. There's hard things in my life and here's what I do when I have a hard thing." It feels like maybe that's part of modeling a little bit as well.

Cindy: It is, that is a big part of modeling because you're showing that an event will trigger or cause an emotion or several emotions. And that these emotions will show up behaviorally in a certain way. You might show them that your heart is pounding. I've done that with my kids. I get anxious very easily but I try to show the little ones. When I was leaving for the first time, I left my kids to take a business trip and I placed their hand on my heart. I was like, "Do you feel my heart pounding? I'm a little nervous about leaving you guys because I'll miss you so much."

And you find there are so many moments within the day that you can do that. You could start baking something and you're sure you had three eggs in the fridge and there's only two and now you can't. Even I would do that with my two year olds at that time, was like, "I'm so frustrated, I was sure I had three eggs and now I don't. What am I going to do?" Okay, well, either go to the neighbor's house and get an egg or how do you problem solve?

So when you start kind of externalizing your thoughts around emotions and the way that you problem solve around them, now your child sees, okay, so emotions are normal, first of all. And nobody's getting mad at mommy or daddy for experiencing these emotions, or a family member or whatever it is. And now there is a way to problem solve through every single emotion, clearly, there

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really is. The thing is that we don't know all the ways to do that. So the more we can externalize that and show them.

Or even actually, even if you yelled at them and there was a moment where you were overwhelmed, you could come back and say, "I'm feeling a little tired and I lost control of my emotions. I'm really sorry, I didn't mean to yell at you that way. Do you want to take a moment to read a book together?" It's okay to have those moments. Apologizing is not wrong, it's good for a child to see that. And the more we can do that with them, the more easily they'll come to us one day and say, "You know what, I was at school and this happened and I'm feeling overwhelmed, I don't know what to do."

They'll open up a lot more with their emotions and we'll be able to support them and help them problem solve through these emotions that they're experiencing. And that's to me an emotionally well home. That's emotional wellbeing. It's not about not experiencing an emotion in that moment. It's not about somebody telling you off at work. You're like, "I'm fine, look, see, I have no reaction." That's not the end goal. The end goal is to do what you need, first recognize the emotion that it's throwing up in you, deal with the emotion a certain way if you have to. Set your boundary.

Tell the person, "I need to walk away and take a breath. I don't agree with what you're saying", whatever it is. Expressing the emotion in a healthy way and then regulating it. Now you know your heart's pounding, you know you're really upset at that colleague of yours and you know that what helps you is taking a walk or listening to a certain song or some music, journaling about it, getting it out, calling a friend, whatever it is. Having a coffee, I don't know, it's different for everybody. And if somebody ever paints this one size fits all solution to emotions, it's wrong.

There is no way, everybody is different, whether you're neurotypical or neurodivergent, there are so many ways to deal with emotions but we need to figure it out. We need to become attuned with ourselves and our emotions first so that we can understand it. And once we understand how to do it ourselves, that's when we'll be able to do that for our child but it really starts with us.

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Amy: Yes, I love that and being comfortable, building a comfort level with having emotion instead of maybe being afraid of it or feeling like it's something to avoid so that they can become comfortable having emotions too and not be afraid of them maybe.

Cindy: Exactly, yeah, but we weren't taught that. We weren't taught to move those. Positive emotions are good. And I think back to my own upbringing, anything that was negative within our home was considered being rude. How could you be mad that I made this food or whatever it is? I made it for you. And I get it, I understand looking back. There aren't any hard feelings there but I do recognize that we have a lot of work to do on ourselves. And that's what I've been trying to do through the education with Curious Neuron through the app as well that I have called Wondergrade, but I just really want to give parents these tools.

And we often paint this picture of mental wellbeing or emotional wellbeing in a child as having this – taking a deep breath and everything will be okay. But if you don't know when to take that deep breath or if you take that deep breath but don't deal with the inner dialogue, that will cause you to breathe faster then there's no point to that. And the same thing for us, I get emails from parents saying, "I'm taking these three deep breaths and it doesn't change anything. I still lose it on my child", and because there's a lot that goes before that.

Understanding your nervous system, understanding why you're triggered or why that situation is causing really strong emotions in you, there's a lot that goes into it. So there's a lot of work.

Amy: Yeah. And we're doing it together, we're all, in our own little way we're all working on it together.

Cindy: We really are.

Amy: I love it. Alright, let's talk about that last piece of the model.

Cindy: Yeah, that's another hard one. Sorry. All three are so challenging. And the third one has to do with how we communicate our emotions and how we

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regulate our emotions with somebody else in front of our child because they are listening and watching it. I know it's hard to hear that sometimes. But midway through the lockdown I was starting to get emails from parents saying, "I'm afraid that my child won't develop social emotional skills because they're not seeing their friends", young children under the age of five.

"They're not seeing their friends, they're not going to daycare or preschool, they're not seeing other people, they're just within our home." And my answer to that was, "The home is the best place to learn it if everything is okay." But everything wasn't okay within our homes, let's be honest. We were all stuck together and that's what I think caused a lot of issues. There's a mental health crisis in kids now and lots of big organizations are warning us about this. But we're putting the funding into kids and solutions for that but we're not taking care of the parents.

So that's my biggest thing is let's funnel some of that money to parents to have connections or outlets for them. We need that outlet and we don't have anything. But when it comes to communicating emotions, if you're in a home, and I'm very aware that there are homes that are more difficult. I grew up in one of those homes where parents just don't get along. And I don't want parents to feel guilty because sometimes we can't change that situation. But I just want parents to be aware of the impact that it could have on their kids and what we can do to help them.

So if you are yourself yelling a lot at your partner or any other adult that's in your home, or being yelled at and words aren't very kind, what you want to do is try your best to have that away from your child. But also make sure that your child, if they're able to speak, that they have an outlet to ask questions, to feel connected to somebody else. If there's trauma, sometimes I get emails from parents and a child, a very young child experienced some sort of trauma within their home and they ask about the damage.

Well, Dr. Bruce Perry talks a lot about this in his books and what you do want to do is find ways to help your child connect to somebody. It could be a grandparent if it's outside your home, but just finding ways to help your child

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develop healthy relationships with other adults. It's okay if it's other adults, their educator at school and then within the home as much as possible. So that's the worst case scenario.

If you are in a relationship and there's bickering here and there, that's okay. What you want to highlight for your child is having an argument is healthy but after an argument there's always repair, whether that's with your child or with your partner in your home or a family member that's within your home. There is a moment where somebody has to apologize, somebody, or I don't know every time. But there has to be some sort of, I can tell by their body language that everything is okay, some sort of closure to that argument.

And that's what you want to kind of aim for if things are normal, normal-ish within your home because a child is watching. And they're going to learn what emotions look like within an argument and with another person, how to do that with a friend, how to do that with a colleague, how to do that in their own relationship. And if you are also, so there are different ways of regulating emotions. You could internalize them.

So you could be the person that kind of sits there and somebody's yelling and you're always okay and fine and you're keeping it all in, the anger, the sadness, the frustration. That is also not healthy. It's not about taking it all and accepting everything that comes. It's about setting boundaries. That's part of emotional regulation. Showing your child when to stand up for yourself, to be confident and to show empathy towards somebody else.

There's a lot that plays into that when you're with another person. And that's where those social emotional skills come in, especially under the age of five and how they're learning that within the home. So yeah, it's another big part that could become complicated sometimes.

Amy: I have so many questions. I'll ask a couple. So here's one, or we'll maybe do some another day, I don't know, I'll come listen to you on Instagram. So one of the questions that I have then is, so we're not necessarily, because I feel like was maybe this mindset for a long time of just trying to avoid any kind of conflict.

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In fact I often hear almost people complimenting their parents or somebody saying, "I never saw them fight ever in front of me", or something like that.

And I guess my question is, is there some value to children seeing conflict but not necessarily negative conflict, a fighting kind of thing but being able to see differences of opinion in some kind of conflict but done in a way that is emotionally regulated? Is there something healthy about that for children?

Cindy: There is, yeah, there is. And again as long as it doesn't cross that line of shaming, again, same thing with your child, with a partner, name calling or shaming or putting down or gaslighting, whatever it is. That's not what you want to model, but healthy arguments are good for kids to see. It's okay to have moments, first of all, kids read our body language very well. After I gave birth to my third child, I went through some mental challenges postpartum.

And it was really hard because I was at home with three kids and the younger two, they need a mommy. And in that moment I didn't even know what was going on with me, even if I studied mental health. In the moment I was like, "Okay, it'll pass or I'm overwhelmed, tomorrow will be better." But it was never getting better and it was my partner who recognized it within me and said, "It's okay. You can ask for help." And we have this idea of powering through everything and doing it all. And that's when I realized that I couldn't and it was okay.

But all this to say, I would sing kid songs in the moments when I really felt like I was going to have a breakdown, whether it was Old MacDonald or Twinkle Twinkle, whatever it was. I was literally singing the song out loud as a way to try to regulate myself, I thought I was. My oldest at that time was barely four. At one point she said, "Mommy, why do you sing when you're mad?" And I was like, "How did you know?" This was my secret. And she called me out and that was the last time I sang to let it all out, but just to say, they know.

So going back to your question, if there is a moment between you and your partner and it triggers an emotion in you, it'll show internally, your heart rate might increase, your breathing might increase. You might not even be aware of that and my Apple watch tells me, but yeah, in those moments. But just to say

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that you might have some sort of internal response because that is what emotional regulation is. There's an internal response to an emotion and there's an external one.

So we see that in kids, we call them tantrums, but it's emotional regulation just like us in adults. So I guess technically we have tantrums too. But then with your partner you might say something a little bit more cold or direct or your language and tone will change, your body language will change. You might have been all cooking together and then all of a sudden you're no longer speaking, kids notice. So these are the moments where it's okay to say, "I don't agree with what you just said." Or, "Don't say that, it causes this emotion."

Or, "I don't like it when you say that because it makes me feel like I'm not enough or I don't feel seen when you don't acknowledge what I just said." Whatever it is, it's okay to let it out and your child's going to hear that language of I don't feel seen when you do that or I feel like I'm not enough when you do that. Can you please say it differently? There's a way to communicate with our partners that will show our children there are moments we make mistakes, there are moments we say things and we didn't mean to say it that way and that will be modeled for them.

It could get heated too, again, as long as it's respectful. And then your child will see you guys kind of arguing and then coming back down to, okay, I got it out, I feel better now, good, I'm good, let's continue. And all of a sudden you're talking again. The body language is different, the tones are different. So that's what you want to show them because later on they're going to be in their own relationship and they're going to know that that's normal. They're going to know that when a partner says something, that it's okay to say, "I don't agree with that." Or, "The tone that you just said that to me in, I didn't like it very much."

And to have that conversation and find solutions and problem solve which comes back to everything about emotions, so it is important. I hope that explains it.

Amy: No, it was so good. Okay, I'd like one last question then I'll let you go but what about a situation where there's not another adult in the home, if you don't

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have a partner, if you're a single parent and there's not another adult in the home, are children missing out from that? Is there a way to create that for them without having another adult in the home?

Cindy: Yes, they can still develop healthy emotion regulation skills. Obviously it's so much harder. I was raised by a single mom and I get it. I get that there's moments, there will probably be more moments where that single parent struggles regulating their own emotions because your cup is full most of the time, I get that. In terms of the modeling, you will be around other people. I just think about driving and somebody cuts you off, it's a good time to model emotion regulation skills.

So there will always be situations, you could be at the grocery store and somebody cuts in front of you and you're like, oh, wait, well, that's not cool. And you could say to the person in a respectful way or you can share with your child that it's a 90 year old woman and there's no point in telling them they cut the line because you want to just respect them. And they're probably tired. You'll always have situations in your child's life and again it goes back to what you said at the start.

As long as we're kind of putting it out there, taking the moment to say, "That was an emotionally charged moment that I could highlight with my child." Or, "I was feeling overwhelmed getting ready that morning because I had a deadline." I could share that in the car and just say, "Sorry, I know mommy or daddy, I snapped at you and I didn't give you the opportunity to tie your own shoes and I know you really, really wanted to tie your shoes, but it takes so long", and you don't want to tell them that. "But I just couldn't, I'm a little nervous, I have a meeting this morning and I'm not ready for it.

So I need to be at work a little bit earlier today, I hope you understand. Tonight, maybe we could, when we get home, we'll take your shoe off, you'll put it back on and you can tie it." Just having those moments, those really human moments where you had those emotions and so on. So yes, you can still model the emotions.

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And when it comes to being a single parent, what I would really recommend is that journaling aspect of that emotional journal of just recognizing what causes stronger emotions in you, both negative and positive. Because if speaking to your friend or somebody in particular every morning or every night for five minutes allows you to prepare for your day or end your day a certain way in a much better way.

Then that's something you want to be consciously aware of, that five minutes makes a difference for you because it puts you maybe out of that red or yellow zone because of your day or your morning and brings you back into the green zone and you can deal with bedtime a little bit better. Maybe in the morning it really helps for you to bring your kids 15 minutes earlier to daycare and then you have a walk around the block or a coffee on your own before you go to work. Just figure out what brings you that sort of joy and what fills your cup.

You need to be aware of that because again we will power through the day without realizing what's causing us joy, what's not, what's causing us to stress. And the day's over and we're always overwhelmed because we didn't take a moment to let that kind of, what I call little dopamine moments of feeling good. In that moment we don't allow that moment to sit. We don't sit with that moment and we kind of let the bad moments or difficult moments linger a little bit too long. So if we can be more aware of all the emotional situations within our day we can approach them very differently, so that's the first thing for a single parent.

And then the second thing is if you were not given a safe space to express emotions as a child, and actually whether you're a single parent or not, one of the biggest take homes I think for parents is really to take the time to think about whether or not you had a safe space for emotions as a child. And if you didn't, that could be coming into your marriage, your relationships, your parenting because you might not know how to create that safe space. So when somebody says, "I'm really angry at you, ego kicks in and you're like, "How could you be mad at me? I gave you everything that you want", whether it's a partner or a child.

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Versus saying, "What led to that?" And being curious and compassionate with each other which is what I try to tell parents through Curious Neuron is really if we can approach it that way then we can create a safe space for everyone around us, but it starts with us.

Amy: Okay, so for all of us that want to keep learning from you, where is the best place to find you?

Cindy: There are a few. So I do have a podcast, the Curious Neuron Podcast available everywhere. There is a website, curiousneuron.com. I have graduate students that are summarizing research on the website. I have an academy where you can take little webinars or buy a PDF as well. That summarizes the research for you. Then I also have an app called Wondergrade, can visit wondergrade.com. There is the Instagram account, Wondergrade. And it's an app that helps kids ages three to eight learn how to cope with emotions.

There's a parent center because we know the big picture is that we have to work on the parents as well. And we're developing new products right now. So there's a lot more coming.

Amy: That's amazing. Thank you so much for coming on and sharing all this with us today. And we will include those links down in the show notes for everyone so they can find those as well. And it has just been a pleasure to have this conversation with you so thank you.

Cindy: Thank you so much.

Thank you for hanging out with me today for this fun chat on *Raising Healthy Kid Brains*. If you want to see more of what we're doing to support kiddos and their amazing brains, come visit us on our website, planningplaytime.com. See you next week.