



THE GROWING BRAIN

Episode 2: Positive Discipline

Guest: Magela Robinson, M.Ed., LPC-S, RPT-S

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We've never met a child who has never misbehaved, so every parent needs to know how to effectively use discipline. In this episode, we learn discipline strategies that help build children's capacity to make good choices.

Welcome to The Growing Brain, a social emotional health podcast. This podcast is produced by Momentous Institute, a nonprofit in Dallas, Texas, dedicated to social emotional health for kids, families, adults, and communities. This first season of The Growing Brain is dedicated to parents. We will explore the joys, challenges and mysteries of parenthood through the lens of social emotional health. In this series, we'll shed light on topics such as how kids' brains work and healthy discipline, all better equipping parents to grow healthy brains. I'm your host, Maureen Fernandez with Momentous Institute.

Maureen *Welcome back to The Growing Brain podcast. Our guest today is my Magela Robinson; she goes by Maggie. Maggie is a licensed professional counselor and a registered play therapist on our therapeutic services team at Momentous Institute. She's also our training manager, she works with practicum students, and she's a supervisor. And she's here today to talk with us about one of the hottest topics in parenting – one of the topics that we get the most questions about, and that is discipline. I don't know about you, I've never met a child who behaves perfectly all the time. So every parent I know and you know, is going to have to deal with discipline at some point. And, and like with all things, there are healthy ways to discipline children, and then there are less healthy, less effective ways to discipline kids. So I'm so grateful you're here today. I'm excited to have this conversation.*

Maggie Thank you for having me.

Maureen *Um, so let's start with the basics. Can you tell us what... what is discipline?*

Maggie So, you know, when I talk to, um, parents or clients about discipline, I feel like it kind of has this, um, negative kind of message to it, attached to it. And I often wonder when that happened, right. So if we look back in time, so discipline actually, um, comes from a Latin word disciplina, which means it's to teach. So rather than it being a punishment, it's actually, you're teaching a lesson. That's, that's what it means. Um, so if you look at the definition, so discipline means to teach and the point of the discipline is to teach children skills, to help them healthy, productive, make them into healthy, productive adults in the future.

Whereas punishment on the other hand is a meaning that causes injury, pain, or suffering for something that the child has committed or an individual has committed. So punishment includes, um, you know, physical corporal punishment, such as hitting, spanking, but can also include yelling, complaining, threatening, or long sermons by, by the parents. So they're, they're very different.

Maureen *Yeah. So, so discipline is, is to teach. Let's talk a little bit more about that. So how, how can we use discipline to teach?*

Maggie So discipline, um, the way that it teaches the child, is that it is directly connected to the incident that happened. Right? So let's say if a child is three years old and they're drawing on the cupboard, right. They grab some crayons and they're drawing on the cupboard and you catch them and you're upset about it. You would correct them and let them know that the cupboard's not for, for drawing on, but then you would set a consequence in regards to that. So that it is connected to, to what has been done. So maybe saying, you know, now that you chose to draw on here, now you choose to lose your crayons for the rest of the afternoon, and you're not allowed to draw with the crayons.

Whereas punishment, if you're, um, incorporating some of the, the hitting, the yelling where we're teaching the child. I mean, it's not connected to the incident at all. They're not really learning a lesson and what they learn is, um, by even modeling what the behavior that the adult's showing is that when something bad happens, this is how I'm supposed to act and react.

Maureen *Mm. Yeah. So you're saying like, um, parents are modeling that sort of, anger and violent behavior is an appropriate reaction...*

Maggie ...of how they cope to something that maybe they didn't agree with, rather than just correcting the behavior and letting the child know. So again, the teaching part would be, um, maybe going forward, um, towards the child and saying, I know that you really want to draw, but the cupboard is not for drawing on. You may choose to draw on your coloring books or on a board. Um, so, you know, since you decided to, to draw on the, on the cupboard today, then you choose to lose that privilege for the, for the rest of the day. Whereas the punishment would just be, go up to the child, you spank them, but you don't tell them why you spank them. Um, or maybe you're yelling. And when you're yelling, you know, we know that the children become dysregulated and they might not be hearing what you're saying. So, um, it doesn't, it doesn't teach. It has no teaching connection.

Maureen *I like the language you just used there. When you said you choose to color on the cupboard, then you choose not to use your crayons for the rest of the day. I'm sure it was intentional. Why didn't you, can you explain that language around you... you made this choice?*

Maggie Hmm. And I think something that I'm just so used to using, you know, um, and I think it's really important for parents to start using those type of vocabulary, right. Because we're not choosing for the child to stop drawing on the, on the cupboard. Right. We

want them to continue, um, drawing, but maybe drawing somewhere else, drawing on a coloring book or drawing on a board. Um, but when you let them know that *you* chose, it means, again, it kind of takes that punishment away. Right. So I'm not punishing you. You're the one that chose to draw on here and that is not okay. So then you choose for a consequence.

Maureen *Nice. I assume in this example that you, that the child already has the expectation, we don't draw on the cupboard, right. And the first time the child draws on the cupboard, then of course that's a different conversation and they don't maybe necessarily even get a punishment or a consequence at first, the first time you're just saying, oh, we don't draw on the cupboard. You can draw on paper. So that, so I think that's the reason I'm saying that is because I think it's important that we have to make sure kids even understand the expectations before we start giving out consequences.*

Maggie Even that they, they, they learned that they do have choices, you know, like, just like the drawing on the cupboard was a choice. They also had the choice to draw somewhere else, coloring book or a board.

Maureen *Yeah. Um, so you talked a little bit about consequences and I know I'm so guilty of this, of providing consequences that, that have nothing to do with the behavior at all. Like you're coloring on the cupboard and now you don't get to play with your friends, and those things are so unrelated. I've totally done that. I'm sure lots of parents have done that. So can you give us some guidance on an appropriate way to provide consequences?*

Maggie So if you want the, um, you want the child to learn from, from what they were being disciplined for or for the, um, the action that they have taken, you would apply consequences that apply to that. So setting a consequence, it's, it's very unrealistic if we set a consequence, let's say like, like you just mentioned, or even having, um, a teenager maybe that comes home past the curfew, and then you say your consequence is now to clean the bathroom. It has nothing to do with, um, what, you know, the teenager did wrong. Right. So there's no lesson there, no lesson taught in, in that type of scenario. Um, or even like, like the scenario that you mentioned, you have to make sure that you attach it to the action that was done, that you would like to see corrected. Does that make sense?

Maureen *It does. So can you give us, can you give us some example, some examples?*

Maggie Okay. So for example, um, I'm thinking of the child, you know, since we started the child that, um, is drawing on the cupboard, um, and they're drawing on there and they know they've already, this is maybe the second time that they do it. So they already know. Um, as a parent, the best method would be to approach the child. And I call them the ABCs. And so the first A will be Acknowledge the feeling. So saying, you know, Johnny, I see that you're drawing on the cupboard and I know that you really want to draw. You really love to draw. But the cupboards not for, for drawing on. So then you're correcting it. And then you said the consequences are setting the limit and saying, you know, um, since you chose to draw on the cupboard, now this is the consequence - you lose the

crayons for the rest of the afternoon. Or you choose to, um, maybe not draw with markers for the rest of the afternoon.

Maureen *Or you clean the cupboard...*

Maggie Or you clean the cupboard, clean the cupboard would be a good one.

Maureen *Yes. So let, so let's recap. So A is acknowledge the behavior... or the feeling. And B is...*

Maggie Um, correcting the behavior and then C would be applying the consequence.

Maureen *Okay. So let's use that ABC one more time so we can get it. So can you give that example with an, let's say the older kid who comes in past their curfew, how would you do that same strategy with that kid?*

Maggie Okay. So I would, um, first of all, acknowledge, um, the teenager, right? So I would say, you know, Sam, I know that, um, you came home late. You must've been having a good time and sometimes it's hard to leave situations or leave friends when you're having a good time with them. You're enjoying the company, however, as a result of this... and then you target the behavior and you said, you know, this was not acceptable. This was a rule that we had set in our house, or you're supposed to be here by 10 and you chose to break that. And then you target the consequences. And you say, as a result of that, you have chosen to, um, maybe have a shorter curfew the rest of the week, maybe eight o'clock. Um, so that's the way that, that it would be set up.

Maureen *Yeah, that makes a lot of sense.*

Maggie And then the, "you choose" kind of takes you away from that as well, because I find that children a lot of times, um, a lot of my clients will say, my parents are mean, they punished me and they have all these rules. Well, they have the rules, right, but the child has the choice whether to follow them or break them. And then when they break them, that choice landed on the child. The child made that decision to break the rule, not the parent. So even saying you chose for the curfew to be, um, moved to an earlier time, it put the responsibility on the child rather than on the parent.

Maureen *Oh, that's so good. That makes total sense. So, as I mentioned at the beginning that there are, you know, good, positive ways to discipline, like we've been talking about, and then there are some that are less constructive or less... they just, they just don't work as well. And they can kind of do damage to the relationship between a child and parent. So can you tell us about some of the discipline methods you've seen that, that fall in that category?*

Maggie So some of them would be, um, you know, the, the popular ones I think that I see a lot of parents using would be the spanking or the yelling. Um, but some of the other ones that I think parents tend to use without even noticing would be, um, begging, or begging the child to stop a behavior, complaining about the behavior, um, bribing kids. So that's a popular one. Like if you, um, if you're quiet, I'll give you this, you know, um, and then other ones would be, um, like false threats. So letting them know, um, you

know, something like let's use the, the child that drew on the cupboard. If you choose to draw on the cupboard again, then I'm going to take your crayons forever. Well, we know that would be a false threat. We can't take crayons forever. They'll be able to use them in school at some point, they're going to need crayons to do homework or whatnot. Um, other things would be, um, demanding, demanding that the child stops a behavior which could work and the child, um, might stop. But then again, there's no lesson that they learned, right.

Um, some parents will use the, I have seen them use in fives and in threes, like if I count to five or three, you have to stop and then the children do stop. But however, they're not learning a reason why, what's the meaning behind why the behavior has to stop or, um, you know, the incident had to stop. There's no learning lesson attached to it.

Maureen *And, and I assume, uh, I want to go back to bribery cause I know that's a really popular one, is the same reason that bribery is not effective is, is that they're not learning the lesson?*

Maggie So using bribery as a method of communication, it tells the child that they only need to behave or follow directions when they're being rewarded. So when they're given something, when they're bribed, you know, do this for this, rather than doing it because, um, you know, they just have to maybe behave a certain way in a certain setting or just maybe certain things are just not appropriate, like the drawing or um, you're in a restaurant and they're throwing food at another table, you know?

Maureen *Yeah. Yeah. That's good. So, so, you know, I'm thinking about what you said at the beginning that the whole point of discipline is to teach a lesson. And, and I'm thinking about the long-term, my goal as a parent of course, is long-term that my kids will have, you know, be successful adults and they will be able to function in the world. So sometimes the discipline lesson or the lesson that you want them to learn is very short-term like, don't draw on the cupboards. And sometimes the lesson you want them to learn is something that will help them throughout their life, like being respectful. And so I think there's probably different ways that you interact when you're teaching them one of those lessons that is, that is linked to that lifelong skill. So if my kids are disrespectful to another person, I'm going to handle that maybe a little differently than if they're just coloring on the wall. Coloring on the wall is a thing that three-year-olds do. They're not going to do it when they're seven, you know? Um, and, and if they're saying, if they're talking bad about people or something, then that's really behavior I have to really target and focus on.*

Maggie Um, and I think it's, it's important for parents to model that, right? I think sometimes, um, we're... a lot of times we tell children behave a certain way. Don't talk bad about this person, but then it's, it's a parent, if we're doing that, we're talking bad about other family members or other, um, members of our community. They pay attention to that. So really paying attention to what we're asking of them. What are the expectations we have for them, but also modeling the same expectations because, um, yeah, I, you know, I've worked with parents, they would say, I want them to stop, um, maybe bullying other kids, but then they're also doing that as adults in their settings as well.

Um, and children are always, always watching us just like we watch them, they're always watching us and paying attention to the way that we act and handle situations.

Maureen *Yeah. I'm so glad you said that because as I was sort of thinking about this conversation today, I was thinking about how maybe half the battle of discipline is really paying attention to ourselves. And so much of how we discipline kids has to do with our own self-reflection. And so, um, you know, what, what behaviors that my kids do upset me more than other behaviors? So for example, I don't really mind when my kids are bickering with each other. I can, I have a pretty high tolerance for that. I'm like - kids bicker with each other. They're just, it's fine. They'll work it out. I have some friends who, when their kids start fighting with each other, it just sends prickles down their spine. They just like - stop fighting, you know? Um, and so that's an example of, is it something that is personally triggering to me? And, and then of course there are things that my kids do that upset me more than other behaviors. So if my kids, uh, laugh when I'm trying to discipline them, or if I'm being stern or serious with them and they're laughing in my face. I just have no tolerance for that. You know, it makes me so upset. So a lot of that is what is that about? Why do I react the way I do? Why does this upset me and this doesn't upset me? So much of this self-reflection, and is that a bigger problem than the other problems, or is it about my reaction to them?*

Maggie So I think, I mean, as a parent, uh, you know, if you're thinking of our day-to-day as parents, we're doing a lot of things, right. There's work, there's, there's parenting there's, um, you know, handling other, um, other situations, having other family members. So we're constantly doing things. There's grocery shopping. There's houses to be cleaned, you know, there's, there's a lot that we do from day to day. And I think as adults, we carry, um, a lot of stress and um, a lot of responsibilities and then you add this piece of the discipline, right? And I think for the part of discipline, I think as a parent, you have to be really ready and have to be really grounded to be able to do all those steps and really maintain, um, a posture of, um, you know, of calmness in that tells the child, you know, hey, this is wrong. I'm not yelling at you. I'm not screaming at you, right. I'm not acting in those, um, negative, um, ways.

Um, so it involves a lot of self-care. I would say that that's the, the biggest, um, piece here for parents to really take a look at the way that things outside of life maybe are impacting them or things that maybe have happened to them in the past that they haven't maybe dealt with. Maybe they haven't seek mental health help for, or um, you know, they just might need a little break or so the self-care, uh, as a parent, it's really important because if you're not, you know, I always tell parents, um, it's kind of like when you're in an airplane, right. And they always tell you if, um, there's going to be a lack of oxygen, masks are going to fall. Right. And they always say, put your mask on first and then put it on your children. And I always use that example with parents to, to show them that we have to take care of ourselves as individuals, as adults, because otherwise, how are we going to be able to then implement all this discipline and teaching and doing all that with the child. So if we're okay and we're grounded and we're taking care of ourselves, then we'll be more efficient taking care of others around us.

Maureen *Yeah. Yeah. That's so that's so true. And you know, the, um, maybe a week or two ago, I was at the zoo with my kids and with my family, my husband and kids, and everything was fine. We're having a great day and then we were leaving and my husband said, I'll run up and get the car cause we'd parked kind of far away. So I was just hanging out in this open space with my kids. We were just waiting for him to get the car. They were running around, everything was fine. And since I wasn't doing anything, I checked my email on my phone. And then, you know, I had a couple of emails that were slightly urgent. So I was kind of responding to those. And then everything my kids were doing was, was bothering me, but the same behavior that was totally fine a minute ago, and now I was on my phone and I was looking at my email and I was like, stop running around, stay here with me. Don't... where are you going? And when I was thinking about it later, I was like, that was a hundred percent on me. They were having, they were exhibiting the same behavior consistently. And what changed in the picture was not their behavior. It was me and I stopped paying attention to them. And then they started getting in trouble.*

Maggie Yes. And you know, a lot of times I think we get preoccupied with other things, like you said, you thought, hey, this is an opportunity for me to check my email and there might be something on there that kind of preoccupied, or even dysregulated you a little bit. Um, so you're feeling a little bit more tense, right? And then when they're exhibiting a certain behavior that before was okay, now it is not okay. You know, and yes, and I think a lot of times that has to do with the parent and things that, that are going on for us. That's why it's so important. It's important that you identified it and you were able to recognize that. So then the next time that you do read an email, you know, the, maybe take a couple of minutes right after you read the email to kind of just do some deep breathing exercises, just really regulate yourself and then be present with them. Because if we're trying to be in too many places at once, we can't do it all, really. We really cannot.

Maureen *Yeah. So in an ideal world, we wouldn't have to discipline our kids at all because they'd be perfect little angels, but we know that's not true. Um, so what, but there are things we can do that kind of create a buffer so that, so that we're not constantly in the discipline mode of misbehavior, discipline, misbehavior, discipline. There are things we can do to sort of build that tolerance. So what are some of the things that you tell clients or that you recommend for parents to pay attention to?*

Maggie So I think it's really important to have clear expectations, clear rules, clear communication in the home. Right? So I work with a lot of clients that will tell me, well, um, I'm punished this week, but I'm not really sure why I'm punished, um, because it was more of a general term, like you behaved bad. Okay. Was it that I was disrespectful to my mother? Was it that I got a bad grade in school? Which one was it? So they're not really sure which one to correct.

Um, and then even when things are taken away, so I work with a lot of teenagers that, um, the phone is the big thing, right, that the parents are now using to discipline the children. So they take the phones away. Um, and a lot of times, you know, that, um, it's not so helpful because that's the way that they, um, communicate with other peers or maybe they're doing schoolwork through there. They're really having some of those

connections through there. And a lot of them have a really hard time when those things are taken away. Right. And not understanding how they can get it back. I think it's really hard for them. So once you have those clear expectations, clear rules, clear communication, I think it, it allows for, um, you'll find yourself getting into less of those situations because the children or the teenagers know what's expected of them, but if they don't know, um, that's when a lot of the problems start happening as far as, you know, miscommunication and misunderstanding.

Maureen *Um, I'll add to that. Um, I, one thing that I do is I try not to over-discipline, so I let something slide and then I, I feel like I discipline when something... that there's a tolerance, that I don't discipline all the tiny infractions, that I really only focus my discipline efforts on things that really merit it. So like in the example of my kids bickering with each other, I'm not, you know, that that's really normal, kids bicker with each other and yeah, as long as they're not hurting each other or saying things that are totally inappropriate, I can just let that slide, you know, and if they come to me, oh, she said that, you know, okay, work it out. You know, I'm not going to, what did she say? And what did you say? You know, I'm not gonna waste my discipline efforts and waste my energy on the small things and really focus more on the things that are helping build those long-term skills.*

Maggie And some of those things are things that they learn, right, through life. They're having to learn through, um, situations that they're going through. Um, and I, and I'd like to think of those two as natural consequences and, um, logical consequences. And the natural consequences would be that, more of the bickering, or if a child, um, wants to wear a short sleeve shirt when it's fall, and it's a little bit chilly outside, if that's what they choose to do, and we know that they're not going to get sick and they're going to be okay and they go, they usually learn the lesson. They'll go to school and they'll say I was really cold today. I didn't bring my sweater. And the next time they'll bring the sweater.

Whereas the logical consequences would be more when you want to keep the children safe. Like you said, if your children were hurting each other, hitting each other in a way that's causing harm to one another, those would be those logical consequences when you would step in and then, um, teach the, the, the discipline, um, fix the behavior, teach them what, how to fix the behavior. Um, so that's how those two look different.

Maureen *Yeah. That makes sense. And then of course the third is the illogical consequences, which we talked about earlier. Like, now you can't go to Disney World!*

Maggie Right, yeah.

Maureen *Okay. So this is a big one that we see and hear about all the time. Timeout. What are your thoughts about timeout?*

Maggie So I think there's a difference, right? I think timeout would be considered, um, would fall under that category of punishment. A lot of children are sent to time out and they're sent to their rooms. And they go to the rooms and they're not sure again why they went to the room. Um, they're not really sure what the message is behind that.

Um, and sometimes it, um, can have some connection to feeling some shame, right. Um, feeling, um, embarrassed that, that something happened. Something didn't go right. Whereas what I like to do in our family, it's what we call time in. So they do still go ahead and go to their rooms or they choose a place where they can, um, go, but they have the ability to go to this place, it's kind of a little bit more, um, separated from, you know, from maybe the place where the incident happened. So they're able to have some time to, um, self-regulate and by that, I mean, maybe I'm taking some deep breaths, just really calming themselves. Um, because if they're upset and we're upset, they're not going to listen to us. We're not going to listen to them. And then the lesson just kind of went poof. Right. It kind of just disappeared. It's not going to settle. So allowing them to have some time, to have some, some time in, to really think about what was the incident that happened. Um, what was it that the parents were mad about and how to maybe fix that next time or not do that next time.

Whereas I think when it's, um, they're sent to timeout and they believe that they're punished, they go to timeout being mad and they, all they think about is I'm so mad at mom or I'm so mad at dad and they're not really thinking about the lesson that we want them to learn. So it's very different.

Maureen *Yeah. So how does time in work? How do you explain that to your kids?*

Maggie So, how do I explain it is that, um, well, first before we, um, talk about a place, you know, we identify a place where would be a place that you would like to go so you can have some time to yourself to think about what has happened. Um, we talk about the incident. So maybe if he was, um, eating six cookies at a time, and that was something he was not supposed to do. I would say, you know, I know that you love cookies. Um, I know that you love the treats. However, um, this was not okay. You're not supposed to eat six cookies. Mommy said that you could only eat one. Um, so it seems like you have chosen to have some time to, to have some time in and think about what has just happened. And hopefully this doesn't happen again. So then he knows that the place that he's identified, he goes to that place. Um, and then he has some time to really, um, do some thinking, right? Think about it, um, and, and regulate his emotions. So I would say maybe practice doing some, some deep breathing, um, you know, grab a stuffed animal and maybe, um, hold on to that stuffed animal, something that kind of helps him regulate those emotions and calm himself down rather than saying: you ate six cookies, you're in trouble, now go to your room. And then he goes to the room and all he can think about is my mom is so mean and she didn't let me... she didn't let me eat cookies. I love cookies. So you can see the difference.

The other part that it's really important about parents doing that self care and being regulated. I always tell parents that, um, you know, the tone of voice and the message really has to match. If your tone of voice is yelling, but the message is a positive one, or you're trying to teach a lesson with, um, with a yelling voice or, um, you know, your body postures, even if it feels a little bit off, you're not, you're not calm. They can pick that up and that's, um, they're incongruent for them, right. It doesn't match what she just told me. It doesn't match the way that she appeared. She appeared very angry yet she told me something positive. Right. So really even, um, making sure that we do practice some of that self care. So we are able to put them or send them to time in with

a calm, um, tone of voice. And then our body posture also matches that. We're not having clenching fists or we're not, um, our face doesn't, um, express, um, maybe like an anger, um, feeling that that we're feeling. So really making sure that we are, um, regulated as adults.

Maureen *And then after a certain amount of time where they're in this time in area and they're calming down, then you go check on them or how, how long do you...?*

Maggie So that's really important. Yes. Yeah. So a lot of parents will say, I send them to timeout. You know, I don't, I don't hear a lot of the time in, but even sending them to time in for 30 minutes, if they're a five-year-old, it's just not efficient. It's um, it's going to be counterproductive. The child's not going to learn in 30 minutes. They'll probably fall asleep, to be honest. They'll self-regulate and they'll probably be so exhausted that they will fall asleep. Um, so I always tell parents to do it depending on the age, you know? So a five-year-old that would be appropriate to do maybe five minutes, um, a two year old, two minutes, one minute, something that, um, kind of really matches the age is that, and that's developmentally appropriate and not doing it, you know, overboard and saying, you're going to time out for an hour or 30 minutes. Cause, it's just, it's not going to be helpful. And then after my child, um, finishes the time in, I'll go back to the room or the place that he has chosen to go to and I'll have a conversation with him. And I'll say, you know, do you understand why you had to have some time in, tell me about that. What did you think about, how can we do this differently next time? And we have that conversation. We just don't leave it as, um, okay, you went to time in or time out and now you're out and that's it. We have a conversation about why it happened and what the hope and the expectation is, um, for the next time.

Maureen *That's really good. I'll add to that. I've done something similar. Not, not as structured with my kids, but, um, depending on the incident and depending on each of my kids' personalities, it... there may be times when I actually sit there with them as they regulate. So I am not talking, I'm not trying to teach a lesson, but I'm rubbing their back or I'm letting them put their head on my lap or something just depending on whether the kid needs to be alone. Some, some of my, one of my kids likes more to be alone for those kinds of things. And one of my kids more likes to be with me during those kinds of things. So I may sit there with them, but I'm not using that as a time to talk about the incident or try and teach a lesson, but just my physical presence helps dysregulate, or it helps regulate them.*

Maggie Definitely. Yeah. So having a regulated adult, it helps. If somebody who's dysregulated, if you put a regulated adult in somebody who's dysregulated in the same room, it is a proven fact that, um, the person that's, uh, regulated can help co-regulate the other person. So, yes, that's helpful um, for children as well. And like you said, you're not talking, you're not continuing, um, maybe the discipline or even the teaching, you're just sitting there calmly modeling, right. Modeling the behavior that you're hoping for the child to match. So maybe doing some of those deep breathing exercises, rubbing their back, um, you know, humming or meditating and then the child um, usually, you know, I always tell parents, you can't have an argument in a single party, right? So if the child's mad and they're really mad at you and they're screaming or they're... you know, complaining and you're regulated, eventually they're going to become regulated. Or

you'll get dysregulated and then you argue back. Right, right. But if we're taking care of ourselves and we're able to ground ourselves, we can sit in the room and just hear them, you know, screaming or crying, whatever they need to, to do to process their feelings. And, and we can help them regulate by, by matching modeling that.

Maureen *And like you said it, well, it won't work if I'm really upset. So if the, if the dis—... if the reason they're in time in is cause they broke my heirloom special thing and I'm really upset, they broke my great-grandma's, whatever, you know, then that would not be a good time for me to choose to go to time in with them because I'm probably needing some of my own time as well.*

Maggie So definitely having, um, some time to ourselves so we can be ready for those challenging... um, cause they can be challenging. They can be hard. Some of those, um, they're teaching lessons. So again, punishments would be quicker. You send them to the room or you yell at them or you spank them and then it moves quickly. But again, you're not teaching the lesson, but when you're teaching it, it involves, um, a lot of, um, time and effort from, from the adult.

Maureen *Yeah.*

Maggie Um, you know, so I think of myself had, um, you know, the importance of really doing practice and self care and taking care of yourself so you can be grounded and you can be regulated when your child is not. And I can think of a time where my child was, um, around three years old and we were at a coffee shop and, um, we were getting donuts and I had asked my child if he wanted to get a donut. And he said, no, but he wanted to get, um, the iPad instead. And I said, well, this is a place that we're going to come for donuts. This is not a place that we're coming to, to, to play with the iPad. You can choose to get a donut or you can choose to not get a donut, but we're not going to play with the iPad. And he was really upset and he wanted the iPad. He wanted the iPad and he went on and on and I kept setting the limit. And I just, and I kept reminding him and I said, do you want to choose to, um, do you choose to get a donut? Or do you choose to not get a donut today? Eventually, you know, we sat down, we grabbed our donuts, we ate our donuts, the rest of the family, and he chose not to get one. And at the end of the, um, of the meal of, I asked him again, do you choose to, to get a donut to go home? Or do you choose not to get a donut? And he continued saying, I choose to get the iPad. And I said, well, that iPad is not part of this choice. So what do you think happened as soon as we got in the car?

Maureen *Yeah. I can see where this is going.*

Maggie Yeah. So he wanted a donut, right. And he was really, yeah, angry. And he cried the whole home the whole way home for 45 minutes. Um, kicking, screaming, crying, saying that he wanted a donut and that mommy didn't get him the donut. And again, it took a lot for me, but, um, I was very relaxed. I was very calm, because I do practice a lot of self care. So I was very regulated. And I set the whole trip was I know that you're really upset. I know that you really wanted a donut. Those donuts were really good. Um, but this time you chose to not get a donut. I hope next time you choose to get one. And he continued crying and screaming and screaming. And I just kept saying, you know, you

chose to want to play with the iPad. That was not a choice. And you chose not to get a donut.

Well, the next day on the way to school, he said, mommy, you remember yesterday? And I said, yes. And he said, next time we do to that donut shop, I'm going to choose to get a donut. Um, and that's when he was three and he still talks about that. And he still, he now he chooses to get a donut every time we go. Um, and it was a learning lesson.

Maureen *I love that. So the alternative would be stop screaming, stop kicking your seat, be quiet. As soon as we get home, you're going to go to timeout. Now I'm never going to buy you a donut again for the rest of your life. And, and, you know, you escalate, I've totally been guilty of that. Like I'm taking away a toy, now I'm taking away all your toys. Now you have no more toys, you know.*

Maggie And that that's the false, the false threat and children are really smart and they'll know, you know, I, he would know if I say you're never going to have a donut. That's unrealistic. Right? We learned that really early on that in, and then what messages that sound, that I'm also, um, you know, setting false threats and what it, you know, which ones of my statements are consistent and which ones are going to, um, be true to what I say and which ones are not. So it also creates this inconsistency.

Maureen *That's a such a great example. I love that. Um, and. And like you said, he's still, he still remembers that. And he, so he learned, so not only did he not get in trouble for, you know, developmentally appropriate behavior, three-year-old not getting a donut is distressing, so of course crying is reasonable. Um, and so he didn't get punished for that. And it achieved the goal that you talked about at the beginning, of the goal of discipline is to teach a lesson. So it taught him the lesson. He learned, I made a choice and I didn't get what I wanted. My mom held through with that. She didn't just, okay, we'll stop at a different donut shop on the way home, just to get you to be quiet. Like my choice had a consequence. A natural consequence. I didn't get the donut and now I learned next time I go, then I have to, it's on me to make a different choice.*

Maggie And it's important that we teach them early on. You know, like I said, he was three, but early, since two, I use a lot of you choose. You choose, you choose. But we are, um, raising adults, right? We want them to be autonomous. We want them to be independent. And, um, you know, I always think of that, that one day they're not going to live in the home and they're going to have to, um, make decisions. And every decision that they make will have a consequence. And we won't always be there as parents to save them. Right. Um, to buy them the donut, they have to learn that, um, there are consequences for the decisions that they, that they make.

Maureen *Yeah. That's so good because it's easy to fall into that trap of, oh, I want my kids to have a nice life or an easy life, or I don't want, you know, I'll just... poor guy, you know, he's only three and he didn't really know, I'll buy him a donut, you know, but you're right. If you think about that kid, your kid at 20, he's going to have, he's going to have to make those kinds of choices and he's going to have consequences for his choices.*

- Maggie And he was three. And I could have easily said I'll buy another donut, but I thought this is a learning lesson. And um, the next time he, he got a donut, he gets a donut every time. So it wasn't something that I, um, kept from him or that I was punishing him. He had the choice to get a donut or not, and he chose not to.
- Maureen *Yeah, that's great. That's a really great example. So we're, we're running out of time. I just want to close with this idea of the... probably the most important foundational part of discipline is that strong relationship between a parent and a child. So if a child is scared of their parent, or if the parent is totally inconsistent, sometimes enforces, sometimes doesn't, threatens, uses violence, then discipline's not going to be as strong. But if a child and a parent have a strong relationship, the child knows, okay, my mom's not punishing me. I made a choice not to get the donut and my mom's not going to hit me later. You know? So if there's that, that solid relationship, then that those discipline lessons can land a little bit better. So I just want to close with that idea that the most foundational thing we can do, more important than any in-the-moment strategy or anything is that, is that basic work of building that relationship between children and parents. And do you have any sort of closing thoughts on that?*
- Maggie Sure. That, um, we're really focusing on the trust and making sure that the children know that this is a safe relationship and we do that in many, um, many different ways, but one of the ways that I like to think about it, so it's kind of like a, so imagine like a kids piggy bank, right? So you have the little piggy bank and as adults, when we are with children and we tell them that we love them, or we meet their basic needs would, which would be maybe, um, what, which would include, um, giving them meals or giving them a snack. Um, if we tell them that we're going to pick them up at a certain time, be there to pick them up. Right. All of those things, um, build the trust and build a safe relationship with the child. So I always imagine it is coins going into this piggy bank, right. That I think throughout the day, we do so many, so many different ways. Um, you know, if the child's in the park and falls, we attend to them and we check on them and we love on them and nurture them. All those things will be coins going in. So when we have to discipline, we have to teach, send the kids to time in, to think about what has happened. Um, it's taking a coin out. I'm not going to say that it's two or three. Sometimes there's a couple, but we're not emptying out the whole piggybank, we just take one out. But again, the relationship has already been established. The child already knows that we have their best interest in mind. They're the most important individual to us and that, um, we're teaching them or we're disciplining them because it was needed. Otherwise, you know, um, you know, parents that discipline all the time. That's also what makes message, you know, what is the expectation, um, is this relationship safe? What do they, what do they expect from me? But if we are, um, nurturing them and, um, and keeping them safe and loving on them, they, they learn that, um, if we have to discipline them a few times, um, within the week it's okay.
- Maureen *And so that's that strategic discipline when necessary and not just constantly disciplining every little thing and pulling all those coins out of the piggy bank, because then you're going to be left with, with nothing, it'll be empty when you need to discipline. And then that, that foundational trust won't be there at all is what you're saying.*

Maggie Right. So I always think of one of my professors always said, um, it's not important what you did, but it's what you do afterwards. And so focusing on the importance of the repairing, right? So. Um, if they're putting the kids in time in or time out and, um, and it's really important to then go back, like I said, and have a conversation with them, check in on them, let them know that you still love them. you still care about them. However, you know, they had to be disciplined because this was not appropriate or this was not okay. Um, and just kind of checking in with them. But again, repairing, if there has been some, um, something that was done, um, to rupture the relationship, going back and repairing it. And if there's enough coins, you don't need to do a lot of that repairing because the relationship is already safe and healthy.

Maureen *That's good. That makes sense. Thank you so much for this conversation. It's been so interesting.*

Maggie It's been wonderful. Thank you for having me. Thank you so much.

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