



FREE ONLINE CONFERENCE, JANUARY 23-27

Jennifer Miller

Can We All Just Get Along: Using Fair Fighting Build Family Harmony

Welcome to Happily Family. I'm Cecilia Hilkey. And I'm Jason Hilkey. And we're delighted today to have Jennifer Miller with us. Jennifer has worked with educators and families to help them become more effective with Children through social emotional learning, with coaching, curriculum development in consultation in Ohio and nationally. She's the author and illustrator of the Blog and the new book Confident Parents. Confident Kids. Welcome, Jennifer. It's great to have you. Thanks for being here, Jennifer. Thank you. What a treat To be back with you. I'm excited about our conversation today.

Oh, we are, too. Yes, me too. And we were talking how much we are enjoying confident parents, comforting kids. Um, and I just wanted to kind of talk about your book and to frame the conversation, because I know so much of your work focuses on confidence. Why? Why? Look at that. And what is that? What his confidence really mean to you? Well, you know, I kind of went into this work trying to figure it out for myself. What if,

If that's really my goal as a parent to help raise a confident kid and to become confident myself? Then what does that look like in the messy context of family life. And interestingly, when I actually interviewed parents and surveyed parents, it came back that that by and large parents

are interested in that that they want. They want to feel confident in themselves, and they realized that their own confidence will translate into raising confident kids. So, I really have spent my eight years blogging trying to figure that out and raising that question.

And I think it came to a couple of things. I mean that to know kind of three components of what it means to be a confident parent, raising a confident kid. One is a belief that we're all learning. In other words, our children are learning and developing. We are also adults in a household who are learning and developing. And there's a rhythm that we can get into in offering each other grace with the many mistakes and missteps and even causing harm inadvertently or inadvertently, that happens with our learning processes.

So I think that belief of I know that you're learning and I give you Grace in that process is really critical to being a confident parent. If we keep that at the four, then we're we're not looking at gotchas, right? Gotcha. We caught you making a mistake, but, oh, how is this a part of your learning process and how can we contribute to and support that learning process? So that's that's one major component and that I have to mention When I announced that I was publishing a parenting book,

I started having people come up to me with kind of eyes lowered like confessing their sins. I am, You know, I'm not a perfect parent. So, um, this is really has nothing to do with perfect parenting. In fact, it's about the opposite. The fact that we are, um, needing to give each other grace the learning process and then the second component of.. Can I say something about that real quick course just reminded me so We've interviewed Jason Abraham and Dayna Abraham and talking about parenting as a

couple and getting your partner on board and giving each other Grace and recognizing that you're both figuring it out is,

you know, I hear you say it like about us as a parent and also for our kids, but like allowing us to do that with our partner in the same way like it was so powerful in their journey of parenting together definitely in ours. I just really keyed into that when you were saying that like that goes beyond just us as individuals and just for our kids. Um and I I appreciate the way you framed that. It's especially hard when you're as an individual, working really hard to adopt new practices.

You're trying to create new habits and create change in your family. And then your partner does things that maybe conflict with that. It is very hard, not Thio. Be judgy and get in there and and scrap with your partner about. That's That's not what we're trying to do. Um, so I think you're right. Standing back and remembering that we're all learning, including our spouse, is our learning in the process. And how can we give them the space to end the grace to learn. right?

So thanks, I just wanted to just Yeah, boy, it's important, and I We, too, are are working on that regularly, so it's a good one. Um, the second component of confidence is learning or building your social and emotional confidence. So how can you develop your own tool set in dealing with the big feelings of life. Anger, anxiety. Worry, um, and then helping your child do the same. So, I hopefully we'll talk more about specifics with that today, Um, and then kind of the third piece.

So we talked about the belief that everyone's learning social emotional competence, and then the third would be, what's the purpose of it all,

really connecting to a sense of purpose in our lives, connecting to a sense of meaning? What am I about as a parents? How does it get me up in the morning and and serve is a meaningful role? And how will I look at it as a legacy later on in my life, the raising of my Children? And how can I help cultivated in her life and my Children and help them understand their sense and discover their sense of purpose and meaning in life?

So I I think those kind of three components, or what helped contribute to our sense of confidence? That's great. I still want to talk about that 3rd 1 because it's just so alive for me right now. But I know something well, I just want to say, like with you and with so many speakers, Um, it's like parenting is about so much more than getting the kids out the door in the morning. It's about so much more than, ah, like the little things. It's like if we connect sewer,

Greater sense of purpose for us and for them, I think it it just helps guide us that the guiding light, it's the North stars. So I like that we're framing this whole conversation, which actually I want to talk to you about, like, fighting in a family, a very real like practical thing. I love that we're framing that in, um, looking at our values, looking at our purpose. Oh, yeah, I just thought that this was alive for me because we were just talking about.

I just talked with our kids, and sometimes it's like, you know, he's just it's about they're like, going to school now quietly go in school like, What's the purpose of these? This homework, you know, And then there's like they're being faced with like, oh, having make life choices and what's next for them after school and what happens after that. And like that, and like college and Yeah, they're like, they're stressed and they're, like,

overwhelmed by their teens right now. But then I started looking for myself.

I'm like, Well, yeah, I get that. Like, What is it? What is it for them? And then I started looking out for myself. Like, what is it for me like, What's the What's the purpose that we're bringing to our parenting into supporting them and really like recognizing like the bigger draw for us? And what I enjoy about what you're talking about is that we can role model it for them? We can we can look into ourselves and work on ourselves, and that supports them.

It's not so much about like, Hey, what do we need to do for them? It's like what we do for ourselves that they then could be benefiting from this. Well, I really appreciate that, because if we do hold our sense of purpose and meaning as our North star and Jason you're saying model that for our Children,

then those daily daily kind of routine or or stumbles, our logistics that we come across that are challenging can be placed in a context.

They can be thought of it in a greater context of, Well, you know, yes, we're down in this this mire of messy dirty dishes and taking responsibility for dirty dishes.

But yet I'm looking at myself as a parent, and and I am trying to understand how I can prepare you to someday be an independent,

capable, confident adults. And how can I best work with you so that we can learn together and you can contribute to our household?

So? So if you pull that that your values as the North Star then you help your child have the bigger picture in mind.

And I really think it becomes a context that helps deal with anxiety and worried because you can always go back to that reframe of we we have,

Ah, central purpose and meaning in our family life and his individuals. Let's go back to that and understand what we're all about.

And then how our day to day life relates to that. I think it's really important. I just want to say real quick.

You just touched on anxiety and those feelings. And, um, we've had a few speakers in this conference that we've been talking with that about how anxious kids are right now,

and they're growing up in this world of anxiety and depression, and their parents are as well and that I want to underscore the importance of that of how this can alleviate that not just for us,

but also for them in creating this environment. To downplay that anxiety, I agree. Jason and I think what it does is it creates creates a sense of agency that we as parents have agency and that our Children have agency

instead of social media and the likes and follows that we get determine our worth.

Instead, it's that we are cultivating this inner life that aligns with our outer choices and values. And how can we use that as our anchor so that we are really contributing the best of who we are in expressing the best of who we are and modeling that for our Children.

I think that's how we help our Children and the best way to deal with anxiety down the road, you know,

um, so on this foundation, I think this is a nice segue way into talking about fights and arguments and conflict in family like stay grounded in our values.

Um, purpose North Star. Ah, and yet there are these kind of everyday things that we trip over.

Um, one of the things that you and you have a really nice section in your book, uh,

about conflict and families. So I wanted to pull out some of those tools and have you talked to the audience here about them?

Um, one of the things that you that you talked about is arguing to learn instead of to win.

Oh, yeah, that's good. So, anyway, talk about what I mean, when you just think about our national or even global conversation,

just flip on the news and ask the question. Are we arguing to win or are we arguing to learn?

Um, I think it is part of, ah, much larger dynamic in our culture. There was a really wonderful small study done at Yale by some cognitive scientists that wanted to look at the just pulled small groups together of college students.

And they introduced a topic for a dialogue and they set a goal. And it was either the goal was argued to win or argue to learn.

And, um, you can imagine what took place in the argue to win conversations. The conversations were very short because if you have a point to make,

that is as far as you go and you may try to argue that point and and create debates around that point.

But it kind of stops the conversation because that's that's you're not in it to learn. You're you're not in it for depth.

You're in it to prove your point and get out right? But the conversations that were about arguing to learn just with that simple goal in mind the dialogue was rich.

It was collaborative. People came away with new ideas and new questions. So what? The researchers kind of concluded Was that when you come with a particular vantage,

either winning or learning, it changes the question itself. In other words, Ah, what? Um who's gonna,

uh, what are we gonna play today? Football, You know, on the playground or ball tag,

it's It's a binary conversation when it's an argue to win and somebody is gonna win and somebody's gonna lose.

If we say, How do we determine collaboratively the rules of football at recess time? Then it's the question is completely different than they have to work as a team to figure out what should be our safety rules for football during recess.

So this really applies to family life. If you think about it, we have families argue as a matter of course not as a matter of weakness.

We all we live together, we argue, right? So, uh, so how can we begin?

Challenges begin conversations about difficult issues in ways that are set up for success. In other words, let's learn together more about this difficulty,

maybe screen time. You're trying to limit screen time in your household, and that's a real issue. And you feel like you know your Children are just going off on screen time and what do we do about it?

And I don't want to be a nag every day instead of saying, you know, laying down the law we've got you know,

you've got two hours and that's it. Ah, or doing the nagging, you can say, How can we learn about this together?

What? I wanna understand how it impacts your development. I know you know. It must impact your development.

So let's research it together and really understand what the impact is so we can make a really good decision about what's healthy for you.

So it really changes our conversation. And with teenagers, boys that important as power struggles or rise right,

and I and the need for independence is so strong it they're still living in there. Your household and maybe they haven't developed have healthy habits yet.

So, um, so how can we argue to to learn versus argue to win? Jennifer, What I really appreciate about what you're talking about is that in the past 24 hours,

because the conversations were on social media and bedtimes phone use air so big in our house, I've had two different conversations.

One of them was definitely and argue to win. And the other one was argue to learn, and they were dramatically different.

And I might, you know, still need to set a limit. But when I came into the situation really trying to understand what?

What do you like about social media? What do you What are you doing on there? What do your friends doing?

How to use it to connect? What are the parts that you don't like? Ah, what do you value about that experience?

Uh, it was totally different emotionally and the connection and everything was dramatically different. I bet, and I really like how you are seeking input for So you're actually approaching the conversation with an opportunity for you to learn about your teen's values around social media,

her motivations what's important to her before you launch into any limits. So right there that opens the door to dialogue,

and she's not gonna want to shut it down. She's gonna want to share with you what's important to her.

And then the next step is how can we learn together what's really healthy and safe for you while also getting your needs met?

So I understand connecting with your friends is really important, and that's where everybody is, right? So how can we be sure that you are getting that opportunity to connect with your friends?

But let's also learn about how this affects your brain development and how we can set reasonable limits that work for you and us,

and and we all agree, feel healthy for our family life in doing that, then, all of a sudden she has thought it through.

She's felt understood by you. You've agreed on a core set of values you've established that she can still get her needs,

met and stay healthy. So it accomplishes all sorts of important goals versus Here's a limit, you know,

I know best, right? Which I clearly don't. I don't know. I totally actually tried that.

And it didn't work your battle right, but, you know, and, uh, differently. You know,

we're talking a little bit about adolescents here and kids who would be like, Hey, let's let's figure out how this affects your brain development.

But what would the conversation sound like to a three year old? Or when we're working with a three year old?

I mean, I can see about what it's like to be curious, and that's a lot of what we're talking about is going into the conversation.

If we're going in to understand, we're going in with curiosity. But what would it sound like? You know,

get ready to leave and my kiddo doesn't want to stop playing or or some other example. I wanna have a cookie before dinner.

Yeah, how do we How do we have that conversation with the younger till we can't be like, Hey,

let's let's look at how sugar breaks down in your body and see how it affects your brain. They're gonna be like what?

Like so what do you do it? It's younger. Treat younger kids. It is a different conversation,

but I would say there's a fabulous Parents teen bearers book that shows how sugar breaks down in your body,

and I used that with my three year old. It's very helpful to educate on nutrition education, right?

So but But with the three year old, it is different, and and so if you're running into a potential power struggle with your three year old,

you can still engage their motivation, and you can still think about their values and needs. But it looks very differently,

right? So instead, you might say to your three year old, Would you like to put your Legos away or your books away?

So you give them a limited but authentic choice that moves in the direction of what you need them to do the choices not we need.

So should we go or not go? We need to go. But how can we put stuff away to move toward our goal?

So that's that's one way, you know, to give an authentic choice another one is to ask for help.

How can you engage your three year old in helping behaviors so that instead of struggling together, you can work together to accomplish a goal?

So how can you? Can you Can you contribute your big, strong arms helping Mommy lift this these this stack of books over here so that we can move on to our next activity.

So it's It's a way of redirecting that creates positive behaviors in a young child. And those strategies asking kids to help,

like they work for the teens to Oh, sure. Bedtime. I'm thinking. Oh, like one of them would totally actually help the other one get to bed on time like OK,

well, hi, you this anyway. Yeah, I love that. I want to go back around.

to one of the strategies you talked in your book was problem solved together on issues of family concerns.

And what I guess we've already been talking about this. How are we problem? Solve together, understanding what they value,

what we value. Is there anything else that we should add to that conversation? Well, I think the just bringing the intent to work through,

uh, concerns as a family is really important. In other words, we make a whole lot of quick decisions in our day,

and sometimes our quick decisions concerned the whole family. Yet we don't involve the whole family and decision making.

So if we kind of set that as an intention that it really is important for are, are Children to learn responsible decision making skills?

And if they're going to do that, then they need practice. And if we practice is a family,

it could be on small issues. But it can also be on large issues. It could be on household chores,

but it can also be on bigger concerns like family vacations or, well, where we go for the holidays or when we visit Grandma,

you know? So um so I think just bringing the intent that we will involve our family members in decision making together,

even though sometimes it's messy, even though sometimes we have to wrestle with it and and spend more time figuring it out together.

It's really worthwhile in helping our Children grapple with those things with us because it really is guided practice in making good choices.

And I, like not only is it, supporting them in developing that skill. But that extra time like you were talking about this is something we hear often is like,

you know, it's just much faster. If I just made the decisions, my decision, we've moved on.

Like if I did, all my kids just takes so much like But instead, like at least what comes to mind immediately for me is if we're involving them in that decision making process,

there more on board. Not only are they feeling like there are valuable members, that's not only all the other stuff they're talking about,

but from a very practical time management perspective. When it's time to go do that, whatever that is that we're maybe it's an activity or,

ah, vacation. They're gonna be on board. They're more excited. They're gonna be more participating. There's less time that's gonna be taken like.

Okay, guys, let's get packed up. Okay, guys, here we go like it's not. It's less less coaxing and moving them towards what we had decided when they're on board there.

Really? Yeah. Here we go. We got to go do the stuff that we all decided that So it were playing the long game than that really does actually save us time.

You may not in the immediate moment, but in the long in the long term, I think you can really save us some time.

Definitely saved me energy, that's for sure. I'm an joy. I mean, I really think what you're saying,

Jason, is that because they're more invested and because they feel like they were in on the front going through these these family activities,

All right, I think thinking about the long game makes a lot of sense. It really does make a difference to take that time up front,

to talk through things together. So I appreciate this conversation because I think it also gives our kids a really valuable message.

When we take the time to, figure out a solution that works for everyone. It gives them the message that everyone's needs matter,

that they have a voice that expresses so much more about our underlying family values. Then the decision of like what restaurant we're gonna go to.

What movie are we gonna watch like? Who cares about that? Now that the benefit of that experience is not about the movie or the restaurant,

The benefit of that experience is they've gotten the message that we work through things we can get through, things we can have difficult conversations.

They make a difference. Yeah, and it reminds me of the, uh Was it a study that talked about girls that argue with their parents that why that's a good thing rather than just not talking about it was actually about teens and that the opposite of lying is not telling the truth.

The opposite of lying was arguing that if teens argued with their parents, it was a really, really good sign because that meant that those teams had a relationship with their parents.

They knew that they would have an influence, that the head of voice, that there's a possibility that they might sway their parents.

Otherwise, if they didn't argue, they would just lie and, like, go into ground and sneak around and do something.

So arguing when you're talking about teens is actually really, really good sign. I love that. I absolutely love that.

It is a good sign. It's it's transparency. It's getting a issues out in the open, and maybe we're not,

uh, perfect about are arguing. Maybe we don't use the right words. Maybe it gets really messy.

Maybe we cry and rage. And so it it looks ugly. But yet yet that the needs air coming out and our teens,

if we're gonna keep our team safe and prepare them to be independent adults, we need to be able to help them assert their needs.

So so just that experience of Even if if their rationale is in our minds very different than what we think is appropriate,

right? Um, yet that they're having that practice, an opportunity to work through it with us and negotiate their point of view and assert their needs.

And And we can bring to that some tools to make sure that those conversations are healthy on our side so that we're modeling good arguing skills with our with our teens,

for example. So how can we use reflective listening? In other words, while we we patiently listen to the argument that's coming at us,

how can we listen not only for thoughts but also for feelings? Maybe it's in the subtext, and we there are teams were not able to articulate what they're feeling,

but we can listen carefully and reflect back to them. I hear you're angry. I also hear maybe that you're feeling humiliated or rejected or shameful.

Let's talk about that. And, um, let's understand and unpack what's going on here because I think your anger may be masking some other really important feelings,

and we need to help you through that, um, so those those feelings can oh, are those conversations could be really helpful if parents take some constructive tool communication tools like reflective listening.

I've seen some families use talking sticks so that there's not interrupting so that you're passing the baton like in family problem solving.

That's a really wonderful thing to do. You can also set boundaries on cutting people off. That could be a bad habit that we get into and family life,

cutting off a a point or conversation because we're frustrated or were arguing to win. So how can you,

um, institute do overs so that you're sure that everyone really feels heard and feel safe in the conversation?

So I think if we're figuring out how as adults we can model good arguing skills, then then we're teaching in the process.

Even if it's a hard press like that, I was just gonna ask you some tools and it's funny,

you say, talking stick like that's something we used in preschool, classroom and E. That'd be great for our adolescence to.

It'd be good for me. You ever said it, even, Just not even in just arguments. But just sitting on the table like we noticed that were,

like, so excited to talk sometimes that we just chop each other off. I saw in the news that a Congress woman last year used it in Congress and it was very successful.

So yes, adults can use talking sticks to to great effect. I love that. And, um and so you talked about,

uh, talking sticks, Talked about listening for the thoughts and feelings, like doing the reflective listening. And there was one other one that you talked about the second one that you said it was a talking stick instituting do over.

So in other words, if you cut people off being aware of that and making sure that people have their voices truly heard and they get to speak their piece all the way through Yeah,

which goes hand in hand with the reflective listening Because you've got to be like, really the hearing with the subtext and hearing what they're saying to really recognize if someone's getting cut off you,

you know, they made it sound like that cut off or it may sound like they were done, but really hearing like was that really they get everything?

Well, who said what they wanted to say? Yeah, and what I like that you talked about in your book was not just role modeling these things,

which is great, but also making these explicit like maybe even write them out or talk of the family about what does it mean to fight fairly,

Um, so that it's obvious to everyone what we're trying to do. Yes. So I have a fighting fairly family pledge,

and it lists six things that you agreed not to do that that tend to creep into our arguments and also whittle away at our trust and can be destructive to our relationship.

So they're things like criticizing, blaming, um, giving the silent, silent treatment, stonewalling that kind of thing.

So there are using physical force. All these things are kind of more aggressive forms of communication. So the pledge,

you kind of agree not to do those things. But then there are also five things that you can agree to do,

for example, like owning your own feelings in this situation. I'm I'm really feeling angry. And here's why.

In allowing for everybody to own their own feelings in the situation, on not debating them but but letting everybody have their feelings and then reflecting on the reasons why and how people can get their needs met.

I think if we also kind of go into family conflicts or arguments and articulate the goal of working together in other words,

arguing to learn how how are we gonna to work through this together? Just setting that goal can make all the difference in how we come through it and hang in there and,

uh, even when it's messy work through it. I like the plant. That sounds sounds exciting. I'd love to see how can people find out more about the place?

Where is that in the book? Is that download? What's the best way for them to find out?

Both. So it's It's in the book and it's also free online, so I'll make sure you have the link to the pledge and It's written really plainly and simply so that you could easily go through it with your family.

And there's a place for everyone to add their signatures. Great. Is there, uh, do you have as we wrap up here,

Is there anything else that we haven't covered that you wanted to make sure you talked about? Or do you have a big ask for the audience here?

Yeah, we we have not talked about. We talked about Grace in the beginning. Um, I think the kind of thing that I would leave on would be gratitude that we get so many messages that are negative on a daily basis.

And our Children get so many messages that are negative through whether it's social media or they're getting, ah,

difficult feedback from a teacher or they're getting criticized on the playground, our Children here, a lot of negativity throughout the day.

And so I really feel like it's our job as parents too. Look at how we can balance that out with gratitude.

So how can we be sure that we are, uh, getting our daily dose with them of appreciating our lives,

appreciating the abundance in our lives, Thinking about the goodness of the people, the love that we share,

the food that we have the home that we have. You don't have to be a religious or spiritual person if,

in order to be grateful for your life and I it really is a mindset, I think that also helps contribute to our sense of anxiety every day and our ability to go to sleep at night.

So I guess I want to leave with that. How can you, as a leader of your household. Make sure that you are articulating grateful thoughts with your Children each day.

I love that. That's nice. Thank you. Um, and how could people find out more about you?

Your book? The Pledge. So, uh, my site is confidentparentsconfidentkids.org

The pledges on their information about the book is on there. And of course, the book is on Amazon and Barnes and Noble.

Awesome. We'll include a link in The speaker knows to this and the best way for them to continue following your work will be to sign up.

Yeah, sign up on my site. You have great material. That's just coming out all the time.

That's free and I would just encourage people thio get that. It's so we're in the parenting space. We see a lot of different people,

right, different things. And yours is the one that I read regularly. I've responded to you when you've written stuff that just really touches me and really has inspired me.

And so I just encourage other people to sign him for it. Really enjoy what you have to say.

Check out the book. It's fantastic for any age. And that's when things we talked about before we went live was how it spans all these different ages.

It's like, Ah, book that just continues to come off the bookshelf. And so thank you for taking the time,

not just talk to us here so much more than just fighting. You give, like a lot of really great suggestions for developmental levels and really practical tips and tricks.

And, um and we're going to give it to one of our neighbors who's just gonna have a baby in a couple months.

So we're really excited to get her started to get them. Both started with your work and thank you.

Thank you for the time here, but thank you for the book. Also thank you for everything that it takes to write a book and all that you've put into that.

And I know that it's not just the words, but you've done the pictures as well. And there's just a lot of you in that book.

So thank you for everything it took to make that available to the world.
And I encourage. I'm gonna go check that out.

Thanks for spending time with us here. And we look for to continue to
talk to you. Thank you so much.

Jason and Cecilia, you are outstanding. I so appreciate getting to dialogue
with you. It is a real highlight,

So thank you. Thank you, Take care. Bye.