

THE RESILIENT KID PODCAST

Season 2 – Episode 7

Connection To Our Kids

Hello, and welcome back to the Resilient Kid podcast with me, Ashley Costello, psychotherapist of over 25 years and counting. So today we're going to talk about connection and, more than connection, we're going to talk about belonging as well and the importance of both for our children. In my experience, the biggest foundation of resilience is built.

Purely on connection. There's lots of components as you've listened to these podcasts, you'll know that, but what I will say is that as human beings, we absolutely thrive on connection and I don't mean the, you know, LinkedIn, Facebook, Insta, connections, but real life, physical presence in our lives. And it's really, really important for our kids.

It has been well documented with research that actually, if we don't have human contact then we just simply don't survive. Research shows us that infants who are fed regularly, but don't receive that, you know, cuddle, that pick up of human contact, then they literally die. It's horrible, horrible to think about that, but actually it just shows you the importance of connection.

And it's not just the, you know, physical feeling of connection, but actually it really reweighs our brain as well. Lack of connection can have a real detrimental effect on our health, more than obesity, smoking and high blood pressure. And, you know, we talk a lot, don't we, about the older people in our society and being lonely and being on their own.

And actually, this is why if they haven't got those regular connections, then actually they, you know, it is detrimental to their physical and mental health without a doubt. So, what does research tell us? Well, research says children's physical brains show a reduction in the growth of their left hemisphere due to lack of social connection.

This means there's high risk of depression, anxiety and learning. It even has an impact on the parts of our brain that store learning and store memory. So it's really important that we look at those strong connections. Why? Is it difficult sometimes? Well, sometimes it wasn't modeled for us when we grew up.

You know, if you're of a similar generation to me, it was a time mothers went out to work. Fathers weren't necessarily helping around the house. So moms were trying to juggle both. Often we get busy, you know, trying to provide, money coming in, working, trying to provide the house, the holidays, the whole things.

And so sometimes we're not present. I know if I've got a particularly busy day, I will look at the end of the day and think, you know, how much did I actually speak to the kids today? Parenting is just a huge job and we often get overwhelmed and go on to autopilot just to survive. So, you know, don't kick yourself about it, it is what it is. And. The more aware we are, then easier it becomes to put that right. So, the other thing that I wanted to talk about, kind of right at the top of the show, was belonging as well. Because belonging is really important, and I have spoken about this before, but as kids hit puberty, as they hit those teen years. Everything in their DNA, like, really compels them to pull away from us as parents and identify, gravitate towards their peer group.

And it's been this way since cave time. It ensures the survival of humans. That said, we need to make sure they know they always have a safe place with us. You know, they will always belong with us, to us, however you want to say it, despite what happens with them, peer groups, those friendships that go wrong.

There is somebody called Amelia Mayer, and she gave a TEDx talk about the human need for belonging. If you, I'll put it in the show notes, if you get a chance to listen to the whole thing, absolutely do, it's brilliant. But she takes the concept of belonging one step further and says we need not to just that we belong, but that we are claimed by at least one person.

And it's fundamental for kids to feel safe and that they belong and that they learn and grow and thrive. It's one of the reasons why I always talk about kids doing chores or tasks or jobs in the home is because they need it. They're claimed by us. You know, that it's, we need you here. This is your place, this is where you belong. When we don't feel like that, or more importantly, when kids don't feel they belong, they will seek it out elsewhere. Often in places that we might not feel are

desirable or might not be a positive influence. It's why gangs gain members. It is why drugs or smoking, things like that are really popular.

Yes, teenage brain is not always developed enough for them to have the... Inhibitions or, should I say, they have like, you know, complete lack of inhibition sometimes and not developed enough to assess risk taking. That belonging is a real pull, real, real pull. So yeah, so really think about how we can foster that connection and that belonging for our kids.

So for me, claim them. Absolutely claim them. Make sure, without a shadow of a doubt, they know they belong to you. That they have a place in the family unit. They know whatever happens, you have their back. And this starts by listening to them. Listen without interruption. Listen without trying to jump in with your opinion.

Let them just offload. That is not saying, if they come home and tell you something big, that you are not going to have an opinion. You are not going to tell them off. There's not going to be a consequence. Of course, sometimes there has to be, but what I would say is open that communication. Keep it open.

If you jump at them straight away, then they are not going to feel comfortable when it comes time to talk to you about the big stuff, whether that is sex, whether that is I've tried drugs, whatever it is. So really pin your ears back, listen, give them eye contact and give them that inner uninterrupted, uninterrupted time where they feel heard and they feel seen.

Okay. Next one, commit to connection. Be mindful when we talk to our kids. It's not about, for me, I think Christmas is a really good example, or birthdays, where we give them really big, you know, we think, oh, you know, let's give them this, let's buy them the big presents, whether it's the iPhone or a console or whatever, and that, you know, and that is great, but actually spending time with them having experiences with them.

We started a couple of years ago, By kind of stopping the big presents. That's not that they don't get them. But for instance, I'll give you an example. My daughter was 16 this birthday, just gone in the summer. And we booked a weekend away. And it was just with her. It's probably the first time she's been on holiday with us two without her brother.

Since he was born 13 years ago, and she kind of, we explained it to him. He got a present. We explained to him that this is different, you know, she's had exams. This is a 16th when he's 16, we'll do exactly the same for him and take him away for a long weekend and stuff. And he had a great time with his godmother and his auntie. So he had a great time. He was fine. And actually. When we got there, we got away, and we was in the sea, kind of beautiful day, and she said, Oh, why didn't he come with us? And I said, we just wanted to give you this time to yourself, babe.

Just us two, and you, and having that time before you go off to college, and, and stuff. And I said, why are you missing him? And she said, well, he is really good fun, but yeah, he just got on my nerves as well. And she kind of appreciated both. You know, it was that typical sibling thing. But actually, for her actual 16, Yes, it cost us a bit of money, but it wasn't something that she could take away, but she'll not forget, she'll never forget that now, that we gave her that weekend, and you know, some of the things that she did, and just to have that time with her as well, where we're not working, we're not, our attention is not divided between the two of them.

I'm not suggesting That you do take them away all the time, but, you know, think about little things that you can do that is more of an experience than it is an actual physical present. And if you, if you don't believe me about this, what I would say is ask them what they got last Christmas. Ask them what they got for Christmas last year and then ask them what was the best day they've ever had out.

You know, and that could be eating fish and chips on a bench by the sea and it was cold. You know, but ask them, because you see what is indelible in their memory is the connection. If you go over to my website, I have kind of two websites. I have one that just talks about kind of the therapy I do and things like that.

But I also have like a platform, like it's a course platform, because I have courses on there for boosting confidence or managing anger, things like that. Raising a resilient kid. Things like that. On there is a couple of freebies. And one is Magic 10 Minutes. If you've got a primary kid, it's a really, really good exercise to do.

Really helps. It's in the resource section or if you've got the book. Scan it, it'll take you straight there. Scan the QR code with the camera and it'll take you straight there. Or the daily team challenge. Both of them are available free there and they just really help with that. And they take, well, the primary one takes 10 minutes.

It's literally what it says on there, 10 minutes a day. The daily teen one, it takes minutes, if not seconds, sometimes but it really boosts and we've got some lovely, lovely testimonials who have parents who've tried that out or teachers who've tried it out with their class, which is really cool as well.

So moving on to the next one, model good friendship skills. Talk about your friends, talk about the things you do for each other, even if it's just listening to each other. So I have got a group of friends who we adore, they adore the kids and it's a group of girls and they've got, you know, some of them have got partners, some of them are single mums, things like that.

But they are interested in my kids, if it's their birthday, they are here, if it's, you know, they've got exams, they text, how have you got on, things like that. It's so lovely, but it, the way we talk about it is like I will go away with them and we'll talk about I'll come back and they'll say, Oh, did you, you know, my kids say, did you have a good time?

And I'll say, Oh yeah, we did this, we did that, blah, blah. Or I might say, Oh, you know, Such and such is going through a difficult time. So, you know, I'm going to go over and just spend some time with them. Or they hear me talking on the phone with them, things like that. And I think it's really important that we talk about our friendships, good for good and for bad, you know, some, it might be appropriate to talk through some of the problems you might've had with friends and how you've solved them.

Or not, you know, sometimes it's around your kids seeing you say, do you know what? We're not friends anymore. We've kind of grown apart. We had a disagreement and we just, you know, it was just time for us to part ways. And that's okay. You know, it's good for them to see the good and the bad of friendships, but actually.

Talking about the friendship skills that you have and how you demonstrate that to your friends is really lovely and it gives them the permission to stop being friends with people who no longer have the same things in common, or maybe we're taking too much of your energy and it wasn't a mutual thing, things like that.

So absolutely model good friendship skills. Because that really not only gives them permission, but you, you literally are modeling for them to be able to do that in their own circle. Look out who is in their connection circle as well. So take an

interest in their friends, chat, invite them round. You know, it doesn't matter if it is in nursery or in college, chat about them.

Oh, how is such and such body getting on? Always talk with respect, though, about their friends. Try not to criticize because that won't end well, because they might fall out, you've said something negative and then the friend's again the next week and she's coming around for your tea. So yeah, be aware of that.

However, you know, talking, chatting about friends will provide opportunities to discuss the negative impacts of peer pressure and boundaries with them. Just like you talking about your friends. Talking to them and asking them to problem solve. Don't try and jump in with your opinion, but actually go, what are you going to do about that?

How do you feel about that? You know, really open ended questions, allowing them the control and so that there's no judgment there as well, because there's nothing worse than if they think you're judging their friends, they won't tell you anything about them. And actually having that we, our kind of house is a little bit where my, particularly my daughter's children tend to gather.

So exams, they've just had their exam results, they all came round here for breakfast afterwards. You know. It was really lovely. You know, they're, they're the ones prom. They got ready here. They stayed over here and that is something that I've tried to cultivate. And the reason being is I know where they are, which is fab.

I also get to know the parents when they're doing pick up and drop off, you know, just like they used to do at primary school. Because quite often now, because kids have got their own phone, you don't arrange those things. You might know the parents, but actually it's the kids themselves, the teens who are making those arrangements.

So it's a good way of getting to know them. But also it's really important for me that not just because I know where my kids are, but also that those other kids know that they I've got me in their corner. So if they need something, you know, quite often we'll give them a lift home, but like prom, I said, stay out as late as you want, as long as you all come home together, we'll come and get you, you know, so obviously that's a, don't usually say that was prom night, special occasion, but I kind of try and make their friends really welcome here so that, yeah, so they're

welcome and they've got another adult in their life, you know, and my kids are then happy, You know, I know where they are.

I know the fed, things like that. Also think about their connection circle. So not just their friends, but also, other adults, other parents around them, who else have you got around your child? If you was to put your child in the middle, what other adults would go around them? So for instance, if I was thinking about my eldest, I know they have their aunties, they have one of their uncles, which is quite, he's quite involved with them.

They have our friends from down south. My eldest would text them if they needed anything. Shout out to Tina and Tony from down south. Rugby coaches. She plays rugby. Rugby coaches would absolutely be there. Dance teacher. You know, is there somebody at school who they have a particular affinity with?

And I would always ask this question of any child. And I do this a lot in therapy. If you was upset at school, who would you go to? Now that could be school nurse, somebody in the school office, that could be their form tutor, it could be their favourite teacher, maths, art, whoever it is. Do you know who it is?

Do you know, did they know, like, if they were stuck, if they were either in trouble or they were upset, who would they want to go to? Because I think that's really, gives you A, a good indication, but also if anything happens at school, you've got that in with those. Yeah? I think anybody who... kind of lights up when they see your kid is a person in their connection circle, for sure.

You know, I've got friends who will often, call at the door or they'll, you know, be dropping something off and they'll always go, Hi, how are you? You know I've got a lovely friend called Sam. She often drops stuff off here. We'll be, you know, swapping things, things like that. They will volunteer, my kids volunteer for her sometimes when she's putting on community events.

But she always asks how they are, how's things going, what you up to, that she's interested. She lights up when they enter a room and that is really important to stay connected to those people in your kid's life. Because it's a valuable source when they're having a hard time to just lift them back up.

And actually, You know, so just think about putting your child in the middle of a circle and doing little lines to who have they got aunts, coaches, you know,

teachers, teaching assistants, family, friends, think about it and have a look at who they've got that surrounds them.

Because actually, I think for me, it helps with their, emotional regulation. It helps with their modeling of behavior, but to know that they have somebody in their corner is so important. So, so important. And, you know, it doesn't matter if you're a parent, a teacher, a TA, you work as a lunchtime supervisor, you're a rugby coach, you, you know, karate teacher, whatever it is, you as that one person can make a huge difference in the life of that child.

So don't underestimate, really please, do not underestimate the impact that you will have on a child's life. It only takes one significant person to have a really positive impact, irrespective of what their background is, irrespective of what their family life is or how they struggle, maybe at school, academically.

you could be that one person. So have a little think. It's not homework, but I would suggest doing it. Think about what your connections, your child's connections are. And if there's a gap, if you think actually there's not a lot of people, how can you improve that? Have a look how you can improve that.

Well, that was all about connection. I feel like that was a little bit of a fast run through there, but feel free, ask me any questions, you know, where you can get me, you can find me on Insta, you can find me on Facebook. You can comment under the podcasts and you can email me at ashley@theresilientkid.co.uk. I would love any questions. Any questions you send them through, I will answer on the podcast. And yeah, wait to see you next time. Check out theresilientacademy.co.uk. Yeah, that's what it's called, theresilientacademy.co.uk. You'll see all the freebies. If you've got the book, you can get it on Amazon or all good independent bookshops.

If you have a look, there's the book, by the way, if you're watching this rather than listening to it in the book, there is a QR code, which gives you loads of free resources, the teen challenge and the magic 10 minutes that I was just talking about. But also check out the courses there. I think there is a Raising Resilient Parents course on at the moment, and I think the offer is until the end of September, you get it half price, so check it out at theresilientacademy.co.uk take care everyone and speak to you soon.