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[00:00:00] **Ann:** Hey everyone. Welcome to Therapist Uncensored. I am sitting here with two of my favorite people in Austin, Texas. That's Kat Sherer and Elizabeth Sylvester, welcome to the show you two.

[00:00:20] **Kat:** Our pleasure. Thank you.

[00:00:21] **Ann:** And let me tell you, these are my two go-to people in Austin, Texas. When I am working with parents who have kids that are really struggling and they need some support, that is not my expertise. And when I think of the go-to people, it's the two of you because of the way that you are able to make such a difference, but there's the trick - you guys are always full. So what I love and the audience you are going love is that here we have them in the studio ready to bring their wisdom to you, and we get all of them for the next hour. And so I can't wait to just pick your brains. And I know those of you out there that are dealing with kids on any level are gonna gain so much. So I wanna start by talking about you just produced, you just published a book and I'm very excited about it. The title is Relationship-Based Treatment of Children and Their Parents, an Integrative Guide To Neurobiology, Attachment, Regulation, and Discipline. So that is a lot to unpack. Just that title alone. I love it. It's like at the heart of Therapist Uncensored. And so let's do that. Let's unpack the title. The four things that you're unpacking with neurobiology, attachment, regulation, and discipline, how do you integrate that in your work with parents and kids?

[00:01:46] **Kat:** We've really been working on that four from when we started working together several years ago, and we've come up with this understanding through writing together. And we think first neurobiology, that's the baseline that we work with as therapists. It's the baseline that parents work with children in their capacity, depending on their development and their ability to regulate. And so we start with neurobiology, just introducing that to parents. And then, that kind of runs through as we work. And so sometimes that'll pop up. And even in our book, we just introduce it a little bit and then it pops up all the way through because it really runs across everything. And then the next thing we think about is attachment. And that's a big base. So attachment relationship shapes the neurobiology, as and so you know, what is happening in a child's early life with their primary caregivers. And when we say parents, we mean whoever the caregiver is or caregivers are. And so that shapes their brain and their physiology. So the attachment relationship is key. And then we go to there's this whole other component in the area of psychology called emotion and emotion regulation. So how does emotional development happen across the lifespan and how does a parent help a child with emotion and learning to regulate? And then in that regulation process, you're also, the emotions are affecting the attach. And then it goes back to neurobiology. And then in the end we bring together discipline, which discipline and learning is how we think of it. And discipline is learning. And so as you're shaping and learning things, it's gonna happen best when the attachment is solid. And a lot about behavior work is around emotion regulation. And neurobiology states. So really these things, we've talked about it as a web. If you work over emotion regulation, you're also affecting attachment. And if you work in a strong, solid approach and supportive approach to discipline, you're also working on attachment and emotion regulation. They really tie.

[00:03:56] **Ann:** That's so hopeful. Isn't it often individuals that kind of hear about it or learn about attachment, it's a scary idea. It happens between the ages of zero and two. Once you have attachment, that's what predicts everything in the future. And that's really not proven to be true. I love the way you're talking about it, that attachment is impacted all along in how we integrate with the kids' emotions and our emotions and the learning. And I love how you describe discipline as learning, right? You don't often see the word attachment and discipline put together, right? Like it seems like attachment is about the cuddly love part, disciplines about let's set limits and you're integrating them.

[00:04:38] **Kat:** Yeah. We were talking with one of our friends who does research and attachment and she was saying, oh yeah, an attachment research you don't address a discipline right? It's not that discipline doesn't exist. We're not saying discipline shouldn't be used, we're saying that's not what we're studying. So they are different fields, but they do affect one another.

[00:04:59] **Elizabeth:** Now, we believe and have written about the fact that if your attachment relationship is sound, then discipline is easier. And if the attachment regulation is not attachment, the relationship isn't sound, the discipline is very tricky. It's much harder to thread that needle, but it also feeds backwards. If you can get your disciplinary relationship with a child down to where it's highly positive, there's lots of warmth and love in it. The limits are set firmly, but kindly. Without drama or dysregulation back to emotion, then that fuels healing in the attachment relationship or the building of a strong and positive attachment relationship. So it's really very circular. As Kat said, it's like a web. You tug any part and the other parts move or you can intervene at any of these levels. You can intervene at the attachment level, at the discipline and learning level, at the emotions and regulation level. And if you can make headway there in a family, it affects all the others.

[00:06:03] **Ann:** I love how y'all are integrating that and how you're speaking about that. And I find sometimes it's really easy to talk about different parenting styles, especially in one family, you might have one that feels like one parent that's very focused on discipline. And let's not spoil the child and things like that. And then the other might be,

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but let's really care, take that emotion. And sometimes they see themselves almost at odds with one another in their goals, but they each have the same goal, don't they? But it feels like they can feel in contrast, but you're saying something very different than that

[00:06:38] **Elizabeth:** I can tell by listening to you that you work with parents because that is so common. And what we see play out in our offices is one parent will say, this child is misbehaving, so we need to be tougher. And the other parent will say, oh, if you're gonna be that tough, someone's gotta be loving. I'm going to be more loving. And the other person is then saying, oh dear, you're not setting any limits. All you're doing is love. I have to be even tougher and more firm and more limit setting. And then the other person is, oh my God, our poor baby. How? This is just way too harsh. I have to be even more loving. And then parents end up distanced from each other and then with a lot of conflict between them because they're not able to come together. And the position that I take is that everybody brings something to the table. So can you learn from this parent that's good at firmness and clarity, that's good at structure, that's good at predictability. Can you take some of that, then can this other parent learn from the parent that is patient and fun and kind and takes some of that. And so you end up being less distanced when parents can learn to respect what each other brings to the table, and then you can end up being closer to what's ideal or children.

[00:07:58] **Kat:** Elizabeth and I also talk about it as the heart and work of parenting. And so the heart, the attachment, the warmth, the nurturing and building security. And then there's the other side also around setting limits, putting structure in life. Having boundaries is the work side of it. That's usually the more controversial side as well, right?

[00:08:24] **Elizabeth:** Especially tougher children or more intense children, benefit from high levels of both. Both heart high levels of heart and warm and fun in play, and high levels of structure and limit.

[00:08:37] **Ann:** And that's, can you say more about them? Because that's not always easy to do with a highly intense child. If you have a high intensity child, it activates your nervous system. If you have a child, when we say high intense, let's say a child that is very vocal or really highly emotionally expressive or maybe highly behaviorally acting out, it could be either right, like emotionally expressive or really willful it's really activating for the parent themselves to be able to do either to feel attached or to create some level of discipline. Unless, it's prone to almost wanting to shut it down or punish. So how do you promote that kind of self care as well as like, how do you get those two combined? What is the advice that you give to parents out there that are dealing with that kind of situation?

[00:09:22] **Kat:** So you're talking about two sides. One is what's going on with the child, that they're dysregulated in that way. And then you're also talking about the parent's dysregulation of the dysregulation. So an acting out child can trigger a parent, but also a parent who's dysregulated can dysregulate their child. And we can catch that from each other. We can catch stability and security through being close with someone who's stable. We can also catch that dysregulation or that can spread. So looking at, what's going on with the parents as well and what are they needing.

[00:09:59] **Ann:** That can be challenging for all of us. I'm having this visual image of me stomping up the stairs after my 13 year old daughter slammed the door in some self righteous way, and I'm just flooded and I can feel myself stomping up the stairs and I'm ready. And I remember literally slowing myself as I went up. But boy, like I can, I wanted to get up there and I was gonna show her. And having to remember that part of coming back to your own regulation is not the easiest thing to do, is it?

[00:10:28] **Elizabeth:** And we've all done that. A hundred percent of parents have become dysregulated because of a child. So it's not that there's some gold standard that you can just attain. Yeah. Some kind of zen position where your children don't affect you. Maybe someone can do that. I don't, I've not met that person. So it is about learning to regulate yourself and prioritizing your own regulation, never intervening. When you're dysregulated first you calm yourself, then you deal with the situation. And just not thinking that becoming dysregulated is a problem. Like it's a normal human condition to have feelings and to have feelings about the people you love the most. Of course. How more human can you be? But what happens is what accompanies that. Emotional dysregulation is the urge to do something powerful now. I've got to make this stop. I'm the parent here and you can't talk to me like that young man. That's where we misstep. It's not having feelings. It's letting the feelings drive the interaction.

[00:11:30] **Kat:** And that's where we're also in a fight or flight state. And so I think that can really, that's where the neurobiology information can be helpful to parents. And also for kids, you know that when you flip your lid where you're dysregulated and you've probably talked about that before on Therapist Uncensored when they're in that state, parents aren't going to be able to think very clearly. Then we're on some kind of old autopilot programming from our past. And children also can't just regulate because we tell them to. And so recognizing that it's an emotional state that then takes over our ability to engage with another person until we come back to a calm, steady state or a parasympathetic state where we're in the rest and digest.

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[00:12:17] **Ann:** That's a helpful reminder. I guess starting with your point earlier, starting with neurobiology, is that you can come back to the neurobiology as a reminder the whole time. When I'm stomping up the stairs, it's because I'm in flight. I'm not in flight actually, I'm in fight mode. And my adrenaline is going, I've got cortisol and I, like you said, Elizabeth, I'm feeling powerful too. I'm not feeling weak, even though that's really what's underneath. I'm feeling powerful and I'm going to go show her that she doesn't slam the door on me. And I love that reminder that it's neurobiology that's got me stomping at the stairs. It's not something for me to feel ashamed about and then I have to remember that's what's happening when she slammed the door. She's slamming the door because her biology is going nuts.

[00:13:06] **Elizabeth:** And that is a really critical insight that's important for us as parents to know, is if you know your child is in that dysregulated state, your child is not in a state where they're gonna listen to you kindly explain the error of their ways, that's true. Is not a state in which a child is gonna be receptive to you, explaining to them why they're wrong. Or explaining to them why they now have a consequence. None of that goes in very well when we're in a dysregulated state. When we're in that state, we're all very selfish. We're all in the I will survive state of mind, right? And no, we don't take to reasoning. And so that's not the right moment. Although it's the moment that we're really tempted to try and teach, it's actually not the moment at which best teaching occurs because the child is not in a position where they can learn. So when you ask what parents can do in those moments, actually very little. Your goal in that's a, where you're hot and the kids hot, is to try and simmer down. At least simmer yourself down so you're not adding fuel to the fire. Give the child space, expect the child will eventually reset maybe 10 minutes, maybe 45 minutes. It takes a while, and we don't get to pick how long it takes someone else to calm. And once the child is calmed down, then learning can occur and teaching can occur. So we really favor considering those hot moments as not teachable moments.

[00:14:35] **Kat:** A good reminder, we don't set a limit. We might still be setting a limit and reminding of the limit or if there's a consequence involved, but it's not the time to go into explanations.

[00:14:45] **Ann:** , I see what you're saying. The difference between teaching a teaching moment in a limit setting is very different. And so we can't actually have a teaching moment either. If our blood pressure is going through the roof, we think we can, we always think, oh my God, I know exactly what you need to hear right now. Bec I'm gonna tell you what you need to hear, but we can't teach either. It's, neither is happening. But cat, your points are well taken. You can't, you can limit the set. And then you bring in that attachment portion next, right? So we're talking about neurobiology, and I'm loving, I'm finding myself wanting to go through, based specifically on the subtitle of your book, fits the, obviously that's how you titled it, because it fits the steps of how they get integrated and in the order. And if my neurobiology is off, everything's gonna be off and we're not gonna be having those moments. The next one is attachment, right? So we've gone from understanding our neurobiology, to knowing what we can limit, but we're not gonna be able to teach. And then you jump into attachment. And something I really love that y'all talk about is the seven essentials you call the seven essential attachment needs. Can you say, can talk about that? Because I think that's really unique to your book and I think people can grow a lot from just that one section.

[00:16:00] **Elizabeth:** So just a little bit of attachment, is our attachment relationship performed in the very early years of life in the relationship that we as small growing people build with our caregivers. And that ends up being a template for life. And it predicts a lot of things. It predicts risk of substance abuse. It predicts the quality of that child's parenting of his or her children. It predicts the quality of intimate relationships and friendships. It predicts some aspects of employment success. It predicts a lot of things and not to terrify anybody because it can be adjusted later in life. It can improve and we can all earn a better form of attachment security than what we got in those first few years. But if we can get it right the first time through, how powerful. And a long lasting life of a child. So this list of attachment needs that we came up with are the things that are critical in order to form the best type of attachment relationship between caregiver and child, so that the child is wiring in their own nervous system capacities that will serve them across

[00:17:12] **Ann:** life. All right. I love it. So let's talk about that. Give us a list of the seven.

[00:17:20] **Kat:** So the first attachment that we have is safety and security. So the child can feel that they're safe from harm, that someone cares about them, that they're someone they can count on. And that's one thing we found in the research too that is powerful, is that just one person in, in, in actually an adult's life or a child's life can really make a difference.

[00:17:44] **Ann:** That's why teachers can be so important, right? Yes. Yeah,

[00:17:48] **Kat:** anyone who serves that role. So the first is safety and security. The second is that deeper connection of soothing or nurturing. Being there to calm a child or reg help a child regulate or just the warmth and availability. And then the third one is attunement. And that's the feeling seen by someone. That's the intimacy, that's emotional,

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where you feel heard and understood. So a child feels that they're valuable and that their parents recognize them. And then the next fourth one is reliability and consistency. So that a child again knows what is expected of them. Their parents are consistently there, they're reliable on how they respond, and that helps a child also relax cuz they know what's coming and what's available to them. And then the fifth one is support and encouragement. We all need some encouragement sometimes. That helps a child build resilience. If things aren't going well or if they're hitting a tough patch, parents support them through it and encourage them to rebuild or rebound through a difficult time. And then the sixth one is my favorite novelty play and fun. When we were building this list, we're also thinking about what are the emotional capacities through development, and what do parents bring to that? What do children bring to that? And we want children to have availability to all the emotions, and that includes play and fun and joy. And, being exposed to that early helps children get into that space. It also lights children up. It's how children, it's a part of how we attach to one another through fun and play. So that's one of our attachment needs. And the last one is the boundaries and structure. Having children know what the, what's in bounds, what's out of bounds, having a family have expectations or rules setting boundaries that protect one another, that honor one another. And so that is our last of the seven.

[00:20:00] **Ann:** sYeah. So it really highlights, you're saying all seven of these are really important sort of foundational markers for a child to feel attached and attuned to their parents or their caregivers, and then to have a sense of security built inside themselves.

[00:20:18] **Kat:** And self-worth.

[00:20:18] **Ann:** And what I love about that is as you were talking, we talked about the two parents. That one is I'm gonna set the boundaries, don't. And the other is oh, you're being too hard. And that back and forth dance, which is so often in different kinds of care taking strikes. In this list, both of them exist, right? Like one without the other, the care, the warmth and the support without the boundaries and the structures and the reliability. It seems like you have to have the balance of the both.

[00:20:44] **Elizabeth:** Absolutely. You can have authoritarian parents. They're all about the rules. . And it's not that they don't know anything. They just know part of the equation. And then you have the list of fair parents. They're all about love and they know something really important. But if you only have one of those parts, you don't have the complete picture that children need in order to be balanced. That's well said.

[00:21:10] **Kat:** And integrated across, across these different areas we're talking

[00:21:13] **Ann:** about. That's a great concept to kind of touch about right now, and that's the concept of integration. And that is because I imagine thinking about individuals that are getting, maybe on the fair side, the, ah, I don't want to hurt the child by setting a boundary that hurts their feelings or makes them think I don't love them. If I say no and they feel pain in that, they're not gonna feel loved. And I would imagine that's probably the site I can relate to, even though I'm talking about stomping up the stairs. I'm sure I actually relate more to if I'm gonna set this limit, That's gonna end up making the child have some kind of feeling that I don't want them to have. And the idea of integration is that there's something for me that's getting triggered in that, isn't it? It's like this idea of maybe some of these seven that wasn't as supported in my history that might be coming out of my parenting. Does that sound accurate to you guys?

[00:22:06] **Elizabeth:** Yeah. I think what we're talking about is the assumptions that we make that come from our own unexamined history or examined, but not fully metabolized history that leads us to assume saying no is going to be painful. Saying no will necessarily communicate rejection. Saying no is going to be harsh, but we can step back and call that into question. There are ways of saying no that don't include yelling, no. , you have to use harsh and cruel language when you say no. , it's possible to set a limit with kindness and without a big dose of parental dysregulation and anger, it's possible to just say, no, we're not gonna be hitting

[00:22:49] **Ann:** we're no, we're not gonna be hitting. And to feel that without the anxiety that might come, if it's not examined a while, if I'm not examining why it's so hard for me to say no,

[00:22:58] **Kat:** But I'd like to add something about when we're saying this, we're not saying we don't lose our temper because there's another piece of learning that happens in conflict. And so yeah, this is the ideal. This is what we wanna put forward when we're slipping. But there's another process, which is when as parents, we make mistakes or as therapists when we make mistakes, there's also learning in the repairing process. And us making mistakes, one, yes. We're not perfect. We do things wrong too, and it's okay. And in all intimate relationships, people are gonna sometimes step on each other's toes. And in building intimacy. We have to have room for that capacity to repair too. . Good

[00:23:42] **Elizabeth:** point. The thing about in our book is it doesn't do a child any good to be the only one who makes mistakes in a relationship. That ultimately we want children to know that everybody is human. Everyone's

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working out of this human nervous system that causes us impulsivity, causes us reactivity, and that when we make a mistake, it's only because we're like everybody else on the planet. And there are ways to repair. And it's okay to demonstrate to a child, yeah, I just made a mistake. I'm gonna stop making that mistake right now. What better role modeling can there be than to be a person who lives in intimacy with a child and allows the child to see humanity what it is to be a person.

[00:24:27] **Ann:** Yeah. No, that's really well said. And I also think if we can give ourselves permission to make mistakes, it keeps us from being in a constant state of defensive self, right? We can relax when we're defending ourselves about why we made the mistake. We can't really be in connection, can we? We've alright. I was yelling at you. I shouldn't have yelled at you. I'm sorry. But what I was doing it because you,

[00:24:49] **Elizabeth:** notice what you just did, your I'm sorry, was like half as loud.

[00:25:03] **Ann:** Yeah. And you're commenting on the nervous system is so accurate because that's, our body is gonna not, they're not, I always talk with couples is you're not, if the butt's coming, nobody hears anything beforehand. You might as well not have, I know I yelled but it's your nervous system. Getting back to neurobiology the nervous system just cuts it off. So the attachment is not gonna happen. The connection, the sensitivity, and whatever you're saying at that moment, is it's gonna no, I hear the butt. You're not sorry. That's not really,

[00:25:31] **Kat:** That's not a real attunement .

[00:25:35] **Ann:** That's so true. And then I guess if we also get on the other side, when we were talking about maybe the authoritarian parent needing to have the discipline, maybe the anxiety there being, if I don't have discipline, if I don't get in there right that moment and tell the person why I yelled, then they're gonna get away with it or they're not gonna understand. So there can be some anxiety. They need to have discipline.

[00:26:01] **Elizabeth:** And if I let that moment pass, you see us looking at each other because we spend a lot of time in our talks and in our work with our clients and in our writing while dealing with that. Because when you feel that drive, because you're dysregulated, my child just did something wrong, now I'm scared for her future. Now I'm angry because she crossed me. Now I'm sad because she's hurting her friends and ending up isolated. Your feelings are up, you're dysregulated. You feel pressure. I have got to address this right now. And I have to address it right now, pressuring us to try and teach in a moment that a child cannot learn. And so this notion of I'm letting the child get away with it, I call that out as false. Children are in childhood for 18 years. This is not the only second for teaching about hitting or about foul language or about lying. You have all the other 17 years and 364 days and 23 hours and 59 minutes in which to teach that lesson. And the time to teach that lesson is when it's going well. Because when your child is just to take, for example being mean to friends, when your child is not being mean to friends, your child is in an integrated brain state, they feel happy, they're able to access their higher functions. They're able to be in give and take. And when they're in that state saying, I noticed how kind you were to Sarah, she Flunked math and was feeling bad because you got an A and instead of lording it over her, you said, oh sh, this teacher's just hard. I can help you with your homework if you want. I figured out why, how I need to learn it and it's not from the teacher. I go to this website and that helps me. I'll show you the website. You showed kindness, you showed compassion. That's what it is to be a friend. This is how you make friends and keep friends. I see you doing it. That's the teachable

[00:28:06] **Ann:** moment. Wow. That's powerful, isn't it? Because when you see, when you're saying, oh, I have 300 whatever days to teach. The thing about lying or being mean, even as you were saying that, I imagine like how you have to hold your own feelings of the moment to not go into what we think is the teachable moment, which is really sounds like much more of just my own emotional regulation moment. If I have to go teach right that second, I'm actually trying to regulate my own fears, is what I hear you saying. Fear that you're gonna be mean or you're gonna be a liar if I don't stop it right now, I'm afraid these bad things for you are gonna happen, so I have to push forward.

[00:28:46] **Kat:** The interesting thing is when we allow ourselves to hold or to recover in a repair way, then it's actually a relief. Yes. Like it's actually emotionally a relief. Like me, I found that when I was working with Elizabeth on this and also raising teenagers, that it was really helpful to come back to this. Oh, I don't really have to do something about this right away. And that was really calming and actually very good in terms of results.

[00:29:19] **Ann:** It's so much more empowering, isn't it, to realize I can actually hold that moment and to hear you guys say, that is actually not only will you not be missing a prime moment, you're actually not helping and could even be hurting. And that when we learn to hold, that's actually the more loving thing to do for ourselves and for the child is what is. So coming back later and thinking about how much it takes of our own self as a parent though, to then be watching for all those moments where the child is not lying or the child is connecting to their friends in a positive way. So we really are turning our attention. We should be aware of all that rather than our attention being drawn to the time that they did that.

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[00:30:04] **Elizabeth:** Yes. We don't mean to suggest that this type of parenting is easy because it puts great demands on parents, but not great demands on discipline, which is where parents often get stressed if they try to control the child and they can't. And that feels like a very weighty demand if you go at it. The way we're proposing the demand is that you regulate yourself. that you do your own work and take care of your own business. That's hard. And then that you are alert and connected and observing your child all the time, not just when they catch their attention because something bad is happening. Notice them when they're doing well and go to the trouble to articulate it back to them. So it does take a lot of energy and a lot of attention, but what I posit is that we notice how much attention and energy we put in fighting, and if we just repurpose that energy and recycle it for other moments, it's not really more, it's just at different times and more effective.

[00:31:03] **Ann:** Wow. Very well said. I felt, I wish that my children are about, 15 years younger right now, so I can be taking all the things that you're teaching to heart. I guess as you think about the relationship based part and we're talking a lot about the relationship with the child and thinking of these seven essential needs and what the child gets in these needs and vice versa. I'm really thinking about the relationship that parent is having with themselves and the relationship that child is having with maybe with another parent, right? If my co-parent is out there being soft and I don't go and intervene right in that one moment, or if my other parent is there being I, when what I think is too harsh and disciplined, if I don't intervene in that one moment, then something bad is gonna happen. I am really working on the whole relationships that you're having with your child and whoever's in your life with these children. That's really what you're talking about.

[00:32:06] **Kat:** Yeah. The more we go into this, the more I like that we start with relationship based. Yeah. Because like you're describing, it's not just the parent and the child or the caregiver and the child, it's also the parents amongst each other. It's the parent within themselves, their mind, body connection, you could say, and also the child's connection to their own nervous system. And then there's the Therapist to the parent. So there's all these layers of relationship and so discipline, the reason it goes last is because it is the culmination of having this secure and reliable relationship where we know, where children know what's expected, where parents know what's expected, where things are set up ahead. And so discipline doesn't have to be breaking a relationship doesn't have to be more than a momentary disruption.

[00:32:58] **Ann:** That makes a lot of sense why it's the last one named. It's an essential one there. And the last one name you're not having discipline if you're not having connection and attachment and really touching in with that child's emotions. So I really love the order of that. It's like you really thought through this title very well. Thank you. Like I'm growing more and more attached to it as we speak. Let's talk about the discipline part. I love that it's last, we're talking about the regulation and then we get into the discipline. And you've mentioned several times the discipline is learning, right? We think of discipline as stopping negative behavior, consequences. Consequences, right? But what do you mean by the idea of discipline? I know we've touched on it, but let's spend a few minutes just unpacking discipline in and of itself.

[00:33:46] **Kat:** So we approach discipline as, if you look at the definition of discipline, it's about learning or it's about teaching. And that's how we approached it: how do you teach someone in what mental state can you teach? And how do you learn across time? .

[00:34:03] **Elizabeth:** So children need to learn to put limits on their own behavior. It's not okay to go through life with healthy, strong self-esteem and also thinking therefore, you can do anything you want. And assuming everyone else will take care of their own business while you go through life doing what you want. And people fear that they don't want a child who does that. But teaching us to restrain ourselves back to neurobiology is not easy because we all have self serving impulses. And so why am I not gonna drive whatever speed I want through cat's? Neighborhood, why not? It could be at a superficial level if I don't want a ticket. I suppose that can stop behavior. But what we're really going for is people who limit their behavior because it's not that hard for them because they have self-control and because they have compassion for others. And so having compassion for others comes from attachment. If your own attachment status is good, you have more ability to understand other people's feelings, right? And if your self-control is good, you have a better ability neurobiologically to predict the future, to know what outcomes might happen, and to put your breaks on yourself so you don't take yourself to an outcome that you don't want. That requires a lot of things. Number one, it requires brain maturity. Like humans aren't really able to do this to a gold star level until 20 in their mid to late twenties. So while we're waiting for the brain to mature, for us to be better at it, we're trying to figure out other ways of helping the immature brain to have some limits. And the quick and easy way is threats and punishment. If I think I'm gonna get hit, I might think twice about doing it, and we over rely on that. And we believe pretty firmly that children can put limits on their own behavior because they see themselves as great people who have great characteristics that they will embody by putting limits on themselves. By being kind instead of

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selfish, by showing courtesy instead of disrespect, by sharing instead of hoarding. If they see themselves as a person who's kind, who's generous, who's respectful, they will live out their own identity. And we believe that a big piece of discipline is helping children build this positive identity so they have a much deeper rooted motivation for being positive players on the planet.

[00:36:39] **Ann:** That makes a lot of sense. So you're taking if I'm doing, if I'm learning through fear-based, I think if I'm learning through, I'm gonna, some negative consequences is gonna happen to me and I'm gonna get hit, or I'm gonna get grant like or fear based. There's not a lot of self being integrated in that. It's a Pavlovian dog. I learned that if I touch this, I'll get shocked. I guess that's not the Pavlovian dog, but I get shocked or I get so but if I touch this, I'm gonna get shocked. I'm gonna learn not to touch that, or unless I'm gonna be, unless I think that the Buzz's off, right? So I'm gonna learn my exceptions and so I'm not really learning it about my own identity, I think is what I hear you saying. I'm not learning things about, I want to do these things, not because I might get punished, but because I'm integrating who I am as a whole person, as a kind, loving a person that can see things and see my friends.

[00:37:34] **Kat:** In a positive way, then you develop pride and self-worth from also being able to do things that are cooperative, that are pro-social. Yeah, , we can feel pride about that too. Especially if you've done something well and your parents say, wow, you were really thoughtful with your brother when he took your toy and you didn't just grab it away. That showed a lot of patience, that's also reinforcing, like Elizabeth was talking about, and it also allows that child to feel some pride in themselves so we're not just shooting down when something's wrong, but we're boosting up and noticing when things are going well.

[00:38:16] **Elizabeth:** Children themselves don't file that moment away necessarily as a success if we don't articulate it to them because you have a little five year old whose two year old brother grabbed the toy. The child chose not to hit or scream and went and got a different toy, and how is that child feeling? That child is feeling like I didn't get the toy I wanted. That child is feeling like I had to go play with something else because of my brother. That child's not filing away. Look at me being kind and showing self-control. Look at me exhibiting generosity. Look at me having the capacity to not scream at a little child. I showed empathy. Five year olds aren't thinking that. Not unless you tell them, I saw what you did. I saw you walk away. I saw your patience. I saw you find something else to do. You are an awesome big sister who knows kindness. Now the child's oh, huh, who knew? I guess I did show kindness. Yay me. , you've got to give it to the kid. Yeah, because that's the teachable moment. If you just watch and say, oh, she's so awesome inside your own private head, you're not taking advantage of what is a teachable moment.

[00:39:25] **Ann:** And you're taking the time to see that. How often do we not see that? And we see the time that they take the toy and whack their little brother. And then we're like, don't do that. You should know better. And I like what you're saying because all of a sudden my body calmed as you were speaking. And that was, oh, the child themselves is not walking over there feeling all these positive things. They're actually registering probably a little bit of loss and disappointment and they don't even know it. And so that stored up over a period of time certainly means that the toy's gonna get whacked pretty hard over a period. That's right. So I, being able to think about, oh wait, I did do that positive thing. It really could shift that moment. In that way, by being generous, it feels very good instead of losing. Cuz we struggle with that, don't we? We struggle with generosity as adults sometimes feeling like we're gonna be taken advantage of or it's gonna be somehow seen as weak. And having that really emphasized as a child, that generosity gets you positive. Experiences in your own body and around you can really imprint in the long run, which is y'all's whole premise in this book.

[00:40:34] **Elizabeth:** And it loops back to, as we were saying, all of this is interconnected. Is that an example of attunement when you say to his child, I see you let your brother keep that toy. I see you could have hit him and instead you went and found a different toy. So this style of discipline and teaching actually is attachment sound discipline.

[00:41:01] **Ann:** It covers it all. It covers all seven in a way, right? If we think about it it lets the child know that they're safe and secure cuz they're seen by the parent. Something gets taken away from them and yet they're still seen as important instead of only the little brother. , if I think about that, it's soothing. You just mentioned attunement.

[00:41:20] **Elizabeth:** Yeah. It shows boundaries. It is because it teaches, actually yanking that from your brother and hitting him is off limits. But you're not saying it when it happens.

[00:41:37] **Kat:** You're saying when it doesn't happen, which reinforces the child is following that boundary you've set and you can also recognize that the child feels angry. Yeah. That must have been hard, that feeling.

[00:41:45] **Ann:** I love y'all wrapping that into discipline because that is discipline, right? Because you are sending the message. You don't do that, but without waiting for her, for him or her to do it. You're sending the message we don't hit, but you're not doing it. You're sending it. Oh, that's so wonderful how you did that. Which is the same positive way of asserting those boundaries and limits.

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[00:42:03] **Kat:** And as a parent, it's also more fun. , honestly, it's more fun to say, wow, you did that really well, or, wow, you got started on your homework and you just got, we haven't even talked about it yet. You're showing a lot of maturity or whatever. That's just, that's also more joyful and pointing out. Let's talk about

[00:42:20] **Ann:** that. One of the, one of the seven, which I love is novelty and play. , and I think that is a very important part of parenting. Is, can you speak a little bit more why you did a little bit when you were talking about why you put novelty in play, but I know working sometimes with adults that when they're having novelty in play, they have a sense of guilt or shame. It's not uncommon. It's like I'm sitting there having joy, but that makes me anxious. Yeah. With themselves to have that joy. Yeah. Yeah. That's not an uncommon experience, I think, for adults. And so to include that in the seven essential plays is to say this is actually having novelty and play is a part of very secure development. Why do y'all see novelty so important? Why do you see novelty in play so important?

[00:43:07] **Elizabeth:** So we know that children, that's what they love. , you give a child five minutes and they'll take 15 if they're playing right? Children couldn't have fun with a paper cup. So life for children, they have a natural draw to play. And when we as adults live our lives with grim determination to check the next box, to cross the next and that is a part of adult life in our world today, we have so many things to do. Someone's gotta go to the grocery store. Someone really needs to clean the shower. I don't have any, my baby doesn't have any clean socks. There's stuff that needs to happen. You gotta go to work. You really need to comb your hair occasionally in life. And so we end up with this huge checklist that overcomes our ability to connect with children. And children are most open to connection when it's fun. And so if you can create fun with your child, you basically are telling them they're more important than folding the laundry. That's right. A good message. And you're meeting your children where they are. It's an example of attunement to go to what's meaningful for your child and connect with them there. Otherwise, we spend our entire day trying to get our children to connect with us around what we've decided is important, which might be toothbrushing, right? And so how imbalanced is it that we are not able to go to where they are, which is actually good for us if we just do it and instead insist that they join us in a life of grim determination to check the next box. So I would say that falls under attunement. Also, when children are having fun or having a novel experience that they enjoy or playing, their brains are integrated. That's why pre-K is all about play and we shouldn't be teaching letters to three year olds. It doesn't hurt if a child finds an E and wants to learn it's an E, but like the brain opens and learns through play. And a lot of the things children need to have a good life are things that are learned in play. It helps with social relationships. It helps with fine and gross motor coordination. It helps with regulation, physical regulation, and emotional regulation. So it's a critical need for children's development to have plenty of time to play and to not override it with our adult view of the importance of knowing your numbers in getting your laundry folded.

[00:45:31] **Kat:** Parents struggle with not having time or thinking they don't have time. But what I've found is when I ask them, When can you set 20, 30 minutes aside during the day? It's like they light up like, oh, am I able to do that? , and I think it can be a win-win to find those little windows. Of course, we can't just play all day and not have food on the table. But just finding windows where that's a part of the ingredient of life. ,

[00:45:57] **Ann:** I like that in the play being also at times, following their lead in the play, right? Not always, I think of parents whose yes, you can play, but come play doing what I'm doing. Let's go over here and let me teach you by mixing that Teach with play. I'm gonna teach you how to do this or that, and this is our play. And as y'all are speaking about just how creative the brains are and the integration that's happening in the games that they choose, and being able to follow them. And be at their level. How much you can gain from that in your connection with your child. And

[00:46:30] **Kat:** foster that creativity. And it also can feel really good. If you can let yourself go as an adult and just join, see where they take you.

[00:46:38] **Ann:** And feel the freedom in yourself. Let yourself play. We can give up the guilt for that 20 minutes and just really know and having that included in the seven essential aspects, it's really inherently saying actually it's so important to do it. It's not just, it's an essential element. You left it as an essential, not just a good thing.

[00:46:54] **Elizabeth:** , I have had parents who looked at the seven essential attachment needs and came into my office wanting to talk about them and wanting to talk about what they did and didn't receive from their own parents in their own childhood. Oh. And then what they are and are not giving to their own children. And often that's an opportunity to see how the parent is doing better than was done for them. And target areas where they can feel pride for what they have offered their children and also target areas for growth.

[00:47:24] **Ann:** Yeah. You said in the beginning it's, you're growing the whole time, right? As you focus on these seven essential elements at any point in the relationship with your child, you can continue to amplify those. I wonder if it's also interesting about what you didn't get, if you go through the seven yourself of, for the listeners go through the seven yourself and go, what were the ones that were valued in your family and that you feel happened naturally and one of the ones that you can recognize weren't there? Cuz it's probably a little bit informative about how you relate to

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your children, how you relate to your partner, yeah. And what might be something, still an area of growth for all of us. . We've covered so much. Is there anything that I haven't covered? This book is so wonderful and there's so much that obviously we could not cover the whole book today, but is there anything that you can think of before we close that you would hope that somebody might be able to get out of the book that's been very powerful or something you've really noted the parent as agent have changed. , do you wanna say a little bit about that?

[00:48:21] **Kat:** Why don't you, since it came to me, I'll introduce it, something different. Okay. One thing that we both do when someone brings a child in for treatment or comes in as a parent, is really do parent work. Because what we've found, and I think you have said some of this already, but just to reinforce that we really wanna help the parents be agents for positivity. And therapeutic development, if that's needed with their child. And so really to empower and work with the parents and they also are in a role to really make a difference because they're there all the time or they're there more of the time than we are. And so really working with the parent is a key part of change.

[00:49:06] **Elizabeth:** Now what we do is not that. And a lot of it can be done by parents and can be done actually better by parents who the child has bonded.

[00:49:19] **Ann:** So you primarily, I know from referring to you guys, you primarily only work with the parents, right? Is that somebody comes in with a child that they're really struggling with and they might have the idea of you taking the child and fixing them. Your goal is to, as you said, cat, have the parents be the agent of change, and you both primarily work with just the parents. Is that accurate?

[00:49:41] **Elizabeth:** So that's what Kat does. I require parents to do their own work before I will work with the child. So anyone who calls me, I try, I start with parenting work, whether the child is two or the child is 12. I do this parenting protocol and this parenting work first. Sometimes it is. 12 weeks. Sometimes it takes two years. Really depends on what the parent's dealing with. And when that work has been done, then we, then I look and see what's left. Sometimes it's nothing. The parents say Goodbye, thank you very much. Things are better. Sometimes the child does need their own work and at that point I will do play therapy or I will do talk therapy with an older child, or I will refer out to a specialist who has a special skill in something that this child needs, or to occupational therapy or look broader and see do we need a psychological assessment or a different school. But after the parenting work is complete, I do individual work with children and I feel that my individual work is more powerful because now I have the parents at. Who I know and know me and who I can communicate with and say, this is what we're working on in therapy. In order to support your child, I need you to point out when he's trying these skills at home. I need you to watch and point out the success he's having in the moment when he's doing some of the things he's trying to learn to do as a result of our individual efforts. So I think that when you front load the individual, the parenting work, the individual work becomes more powerful and more efficient.

[00:51:08] **Ann:** That makes all sense.

[00:51:09] **Kat:** And when I work with, and when I work with a parent, because I don't see children in my office anymore. So when I work with a parent and I do think child therapy is a next step, I always do try to refer to someone who I know will at least be in communication with that Therapist so that they're aligned.

[00:51:31] **Ann:** Oh, that's a good point. Yeah. If I'm out there listening and I think I would really like to get some parenting support similar to you guys' approach here, that's just so integrative. But for one, obviously I'm gonna. Highly recommend it. Again, your book, I think is just a, it's chock full of resources, so that will be in our show notes. For you to be able to track down really easily. How else would you recommend, if I really, if I'm in Minnesota and I really want to find a Therapist that kind of aligns with the integration of attachment neurobiology and the thoughts that y'all presented today about regulation and discipline, how would I go about finding somebody? What would you recommend?

[00:52:12] **Elizabeth:** That's why we wrote the book, I don't know who else is doing this. Hopefully we'll have an influence and there will be more people. One thing we rely on heavily in our book is some of the tenants of the Nurtured Heart approach and nurtured Heart approach. Trainers can teach a parenting model that's very closely aligned with what we do and that we draw from a lot. So finding a practitioner of the Nurtured Heart approach is a place to start. And I'm available to consult with any Therapist who wants to try and work like this, or who is working like this and would like to talk about it.

[00:52:46] **Kat:** Also, the interpersonal neurobiology community also are trained in all these areas that we're talking about attachment, neurobiology, emotion regulation, and so some with that kind of expertise also could be a good resource. Global like gains. The Global Association of Interpersonal Neurobiology studies has a referral list as well.

[00:53:07] **Ann:** All right, I love that. And asking questions, what do you know about attachment? And if you're gonna be working with somebody who's going to be working to help you with your child, what do you know about these kinds

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of things? And maybe interviewing them might also be a good idea seeking some of these questions that y'all brought to mind. And Elizabeth, when I asked that question, Kat had a thought. What did you have?

[00:53:32] **Elizabeth:** My thought was that I feel very strongly that any movement in the right direction is helpful to children and has a long lasting impact in the lives of children. And so for me, it's very important to communicate that parents don't have to be perfect. Children don't need perfect parents. We can continue to be better parents every day and have backslide days, but continue to go forward. And any movement that we make in the right direction benefits our children. And none of us are ever going to achieve perfection. So I don't want in any way for this to be a recipe for discouragement. This book lays out some ideals for us to work toward and that. The effect that you have, even by trying to make small changes is not to be discounted.

[00:54:36] **Ann:** Really love that. And I would say one thing about y'all's approaches is that they are so non pathologizing that your focus is so much on encouraging the bigger and better and just really becoming more comfortable with yourself and you're just not there to put labels and pathologize. It's very positive and encouraging. And as we can see that's just such a better way for us to learn. If it's better for us to learn through that way, it's obviously better for our kids to learn through that way. So I love that. All right, thank you guys for coming on the show. I really enjoyed it. And like I said, for anyone out there, I will have y'all's contact information. As you mentioned, if there's therapists out there and you wanna learn more from both of these wonderful professionals I will have their contact information in our show notes as well as their book. I'm going to name it again, it's Relationship Based, treatment of Children and their Parents, an Integrative Guide to Neurobiology, Attachment Regulation and Discipline by Elizabeth Sylvester and Cat Scharer.

[00:55:46] **Kat:** Great to be here with you, Ann. Thank you.

[00:55:48] **Ann:** Absolutely. Thank you for joining us today. If this information was helpful to you, please think about sending it on to somebody who might grow from it. Take a moment to rate and review us. That always helps other people find us. And I'm also going to throw out there that maybe at some point we'll have a Patreon reading group on this book. So I'm gonna talk to them after this and see if they're open at some point in the future. And it doesn't have to be you guys leading it, but it sounds like such a wonderful book that we could put a few of our patrons out there who are subscribers to our show. We have the opportunity to do reading groups and we have three or four of them going right now. Lovely opportunity for more learning. And so I'm gonna throw this one out there as an idea in our future to include. All right. Thank you so much for joining us and we'll see you around the bend.