



Optimizing sleep for children

Guest: Tosha Schore

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[00:00:10] Alex Howard

Welcome everyone to this interview where I'm talking with Tosha Schore about how to work with children around sleep.

It felt like we couldn't do a conference on sleep without talking about children because, of course, anyone who is a parent who has a child that's struggling with sleep, it can be enormously challenging.

And I think also you'll find in this interview that some of what we come to is also highly applicable to us as adults. One of the big themes throughout this conference and certainly comes to life in this interview as well, is often what's happening at night is a manifestation or representation of what is not being fully worked with during the day.

So just to give Tosha a bit of an introduction, Tosha Schore is on a mission to create a more peaceful world, one sweet boy at a time, particularly her business is around boys. This interview, I should say, though, is about boys and girls and so on.

By supporting you to care for yourself, connect with your boy deeply, set limits lovingly and play wildly. She brings a burst of energy and optimism to parenting and is an expert at simple solutions to what feel like overwhelmingly complicated problems.

Through her online community and courses, Tosha helps break the isolation of modern parenting and lifts your confidence so you're better equipped to face the challenges of raising young boys.

Tosha is the creator of all things Parenting Boys Peacefully, including her 10-day Reconnect, an online group experience shared by over 16,000 parents worldwide, the Playhouse Community and Out With Aggression.

She's also the co author of *Listen: Five Simple Tools to Meet Your Everyday Parenting Challenges*. And she's a trainer of hand in hand parenting and a frequent guest expert on podcasts and online and in person conferences.

So, welcome Tosha, it's great to have you here on the Sleep Super Conference.

Tosha Schore

Thank you, Alex, for inviting me. I'm really excited to be here.

[00:02:16] Alex Howard

So I think a good place to start this conversation is that I certainly know from my experience with our first child of having so many preconceived ideas and everyone seems to have an opinion on what should be happening, shouldn't be happening, when children should be sleeping, how long for, what the process is of helping them get to sleep, and it seems that just that alone can be pretty stress inducing for parents.

But I'm curious, from your perspective, is there a right way? Is there a wrong way? What expectations should or shouldn't parents have when it comes to children and sleep?

Tosha Schore

I love this question. I'm going to start off with a story because I've got three boys and I truly believe, and I've seen this first hand and with all the parents that I've worked with, that kids come to us sort of themselves. They're all different.

And my first child was, well I don't want to say a bad sleeper because I don't like to pin that title on him, but he struggled with sleep. He was the baby and the young one that I had to hold on to really tight. He'd be nursing, and I would literally be sticking my finger in, trying to get him off the breast away from me. Can I get him down?

And then I would slowly try to extricate myself. And the second I would take my last finger off his body, he would shake awake and start crying. So that was my first one. And then when my second child was born, he was such an easy sleeper that I was worried. I'm like, is there something wrong with this child?

I love telling the story because one day I said to my partner, I'm like, I have to just try something because this is crazy. I can't believe he sleeps so soundly. And so I held him just an inch, or a couple centimeters for you, off the mattress. And I just dropped him just this much to see if he would wake up. And he didn't.

Why do I tell this story? Because all kids are different. And adults too. I mean, sleep is complicated. There is no one right way for us to help children go to sleep because everyone is different. So the way that I had to learn to settle my older was very different from the way I ended up putting my middle one to sleep.

So one of the things that I really love to tell parents is figure this out for yourself. There is no expert out here. Not me. Not you, Alex, who can tell all you parents out there, this is the right way to do it. One of the exciting things about being a parent is that we get to learn a lot of different ways and just experiment one little thing after another.

And if it doesn't work, you go, oh, well, that didn't work, let's try something else. But trying to find one right way, I think just gets us frustrated and feeling bad about ourselves because we end up comparing ourselves with others.

Alex Howard

I often think as parents, there's a lot of excuses for one to tell themselves that they're failing and they're getting it wrong and they're not doing it right. And I guess this is particularly one of them, isn't

it, where it's easy for a parent to think, I'm doing something wrong because this is a challenge and this is a struggle.

[00:05:30]

And I guess part of what you're saying is taking that pressure off oneself to actually then be able to drop in and actually feel what's needed in that particular situation.

Tosha Schore

Yeah, and I think part of taking the pressure off of one another is actually really being honest with one another about what's going on behind closed doors. Because one thing that happens a lot is there's a lot of attention and pretending that things are going well. Oh, my baby sleeps through the night. My kid sleeps through the night.

And I remember getting so frustrated with that and finally just being like, well, what do you mean when you say my kid sleeps through the night? And when you ask that question, people have very different answers. And some babies or young kids do sleep very long nights, but another parent will tell you their child sleeps through the night if they get a three or four hour stretch because they read the book and that's what it means to sleep through the night.

So it helps for us to be honest with one another because that creates a wider array of acceptable scenarios, if you will.

Alex Howard

In a sense, what I'm hearing implicitly in what you're saying is that we also have to learn to trust our gut and our instincts to have, in a sense, the guidance of the pathways we're taking is not some preconceived logical idea, but it's actually responding to what's happening in that moment.

Tosha Schore

Yeah, absolutely. Parents come to me all the time and they're asking me questions like, well, my kid is five and he still sleeps with us. I really need to get him out of bed. He should be sleeping by himself. And I say, well, do you want him out of your bed? Is it problematic? No. Well then, why do you need to get him out of your bed?

Well, the pediatrician told me that he should be sleeping on his own or whatever it is, when in fact it doesn't matter. I have the great opportunity to live between cultures. My partner is from a different culture. We move between countries. And what that has allowed me to see is that even between cultures, there are very different rituals around sleep, expectations around sleep.

And so we get very stuck in whatever culture we're coming from and living in and we think that's the way things have to be. But in fact, your child might sleep with you till their 11, 12, 13. Your child might never sleep with you at all. Your child might sleep in the same room next to your bed or in their own room.

The bottom line is all these kids are going to turn out just fine. They're going to turn out fine. We get to figure out what works for us and not just, when we say works for us, not just for us, the kid and us. There are two of us here, at least.

[00:08:19] Alex Howard

And I think that's also part of the challenge because it strikes me that often what can happen to parents is that, in a sense, they will play out whatever's issues that probably already existed and they get played out in this situation.

So if someone's pattern is towards always placing everyone else's needs first, there's probably a chance that's going to happen with the child, or if someone has a strong sense of, I always have to have what I want, then that's what's going to play out. And there's something about, I guess, the relational element here of both sides of that being important.

Tosha Schore

Absolutely. I think most of us are either one or the other. Most of us will either fall into that place of getting furious with our child because they're not sleeping. We lose our you know what at night. We're trying to get them to go to sleep and we end up yelling and behaving in ways that we feel horrible about the next day.

Or we're the other way. We're like, oh, we're staying with them. We're doing three and four hour bedtime routines. Because they don't want us to leave. And we're not getting any time with a partner, if we have one, or to do our work stuff or just to relax, to wind down. Whatever it is. And then we have resentment building. We tend to be extreme about it.

And what I like to talk to parents about is finding their medium. Where's the balance here? Where can you feel good enough about it that you're not building resentment towards your child? Nor are you sort of backing yourself into corners where you're going to behave in ways that you feel badly about afterwards, but you're also taking your child's needs into consideration.

And I think one of the things that confuses parents is that we do this funny thing where we expect our kids to love the limits that we set for them. So we're like, hey, bedtime 09:00. And we want them to go, all right, mum, awesome. Thanks. That's really going to give me a good night's sleep and I'm going to be rested for school tomorrow. Thanks for pointing that out.

Alex Howard

It's funny as you're talking, I was just thinking about something that happened in our house on Sunday night. One of the things I've had to get used to as our kids have gotten older over the last few years is that when they were all super young, it was by like 07:30, generally the kids would be in bed and be asleep.

And we're like, all right. Grown up. Adult time. And then, of course, as the kids get older, they're around more and more into the evening. And then I noticed on Sunday night, it'd been a really amazing family weekend. Loads of contact time, loads of fun time together, loads of one on one time as well, with each of the kids.

And then it got to about 07:30. And in my mind, it was like, right, it's my time now. I've got a busy week. I want to go and do whatever. And then our middle daughter actually goes to bed later these days, so it wasn't her bedtime for an hour. And then suddenly I went from being this super fun and present and connected dad to just really grumpy and really irritable, really reactive.

[00:11:19]

And what I realized and I talked to my wife about it a few hours later was that I just had a rule, and it was completely my rule. It wasn't anyone else's rule. It wasn't like something written into the constitution of the UK. It was just I'd suddenly gone, I'm checked out, I'm done, and my rule has been broken.

And I guess that can be challenging sometimes, that trying to dance that balance between really giving of oneself, but also giving to oneself.

Tosha Schore

Absolutely. But I think the gift of that experience, Alex, is that you can look back and you can try to see, is there a pattern of that? Do you notice that at the end of the weekend, it tends to happen, or maybe it's every night that it tends to happen? And when we can look back and we can see our patterns of behavior, we can then strategize about how to shift that.

So there's nothing innately wrong about wanting to check out from family stuff at 07:30 Sunday night. The question is, can you build that into your family culture, your family constitution? Can you let your wife know that? Can you talk to her about whether or not she'd be willing to take over kid stuff at that point?

Because you would really like some time to get ready for your week. Or if we think about these things ahead of time, we can plan. And same thing with sleep. It's like, if we have a plan, then we're empowered, but if we're flying by the seat of our pants, that's when we check out, act out, et cetera.

Alex Howard

Yeah. And I guess that's also the danger of having rules that may be unconscious and not articulating them and not communicating them. And then it's almost the thing that can often happen in relationships, that we have a set of rules and we just assume that everyone else can mind read and everyone else has those shared ideas.

Tosha Schore

Yeah. And when we have kids, we often forget that they're human beings, full people as well and have opinions. We tend to want to power over them. And also, when they're young, we have these sleep rules and these bedtimes and whatnot, rituals and all that. And as they grow, we forget to reassess.

So an eight year old isn't a five year old. And even if you have kids at different ages, they don't necessarily need to go to bed at the same time, or in the same way. We forget that. So we also need to be flexible. You might decide, hey, Sunday nights are my time. You work it out with your family, the kids know it.

But then one week, one of your girls has a performance. Well, you want to go to the performance, presumably, so you decide, hey, I'm going to take some time Sunday morning instead to prep for my week so I can be free and not stressed out Sunday night and go to the performance.

[00:13:56]

We get to flex. We don't have to be rigid about our rules, if you will. But we do better when we plan ahead of time, when we notice where our behaviors as parents, where we struggle with our behaviors as parents and we can plan.

Alex Howard

What I'm also really hearing in what you're saying is the importance of that open dialogue. And particularly between whoever we're parenting with be that husband, wife, partner, our parents, whatever that support network is, that there's actually open dialogue and communication within that and that then there's a, for want of a less war metaphor, an allied front, in terms of how we're then working as a team.

Tosha Schore

Absolutely. And again, I just want to reiterate that we tend to not listen to the kids. We tend to poo poo their opinions about things, but we'll get more buy in if we can even just listen and consider, is there any part of what they're asking for, the extra 15 minutes later bedtime or whatever, is there any little bit of what they're asking for that we could feel good about giving them? They'll be a lot more buy in that way.

Alex Howard

Yeah. You said something in your notes, I'm actually going to read it because it really lines up with a big theme in the conference and I'd love to open it up a bit more.

You said that sleep challenges are normal for kids. Big feelings tend to bubble up to the surface of the night. And one of our big themes in this conference is that often what's happening at night is a manifestation or a representation of what's not being attended to during the day.

And I'd love for you to speak more to that, particularly in the context of kids when there's resistance to going to bed. Our eldest, for a number of years before we got real clarity on her neurodiversity, would go to bed and have a lot of anxiety, but she couldn't name it as anxiety. It was just not being able to sleep.

So I'd love to hear you speak a little bit about how what's happening and feelings not being spoken about or metabolized then can show up when it's time to sleep.

Tosha Schore

Yeah, absolutely. So the way that we work as humans is that as we move through the world, stuff happens to us. Like little nicks. So for a kid, that might look like they didn't get to sit next to their friend at lunch at school, or they were called on in class and they didn't know the answer, and they felt ashamed or embarrassed.

Or a parent was late to pick them up and they were scared standing alone outside of the school. I mean, a million things could happen and what happens is that if we don't have, or our children don't have, a way to release those feelings as they're collected, then they carry those feelings with them. They get stuck inside.

[00:16:51]

And we like to talk about our emotional backpack. You can imagine that, let's just imagine, there's no empty backpack, but let's just imagine they walk out the door in the morning with their empty emotional backpack and they go off to school or whatever, and all these things happen that we talked about, so their backpack starts to fill up with little hurts and disses and upsets and all these things.

And it gets heavier throughout the day if they're not able to release those feelings as they happen. And then they come home and then you put sauce on their spaghetti, Alex, which is just really not cool because they hate sauce on their spaghetti.

Alex Howard

It's even worse when you've got three kids that one that likes tomato sauce, one that doesn't, and one that wants pesto. You can really screw that up quickly.

Tosha Schore

Exactly right. So all these little things that aren't necessarily things that we think of as hurts or upsets, but things that were upsetting to them, and there can be big hurts too, there are big things that happen, there are bigger things that happen in our kids lives that contribute to the weight of this backpack.

Maybe there's a contentious divorce. Maybe there's a move to a new country. There's lots of things that can happen. Maybe there's a pandemic. And there's anxiety around that. Adults not knowing what's going on, all of these things.

So come night time, this backpack is weighing them down. And then we go, hey, sweetheart, time for bed. Love you. And then go into your room, close the door and they're just like, like you said, your daughter couldn't identify it as anxiety but when we stop doing, we start feeling.

I don't know about you, but I'll come clean. I'm all happy during the day. Then I lay my head on the pillow at night and it's like, oh my goodness, that all the worries that I wasn't worried about during the day come just pouring in. And this happens for our kids as well.

So I want to go back to what I was saying about if there's no place to release those feelings along the way because I know with the trauma work that you talk about, you talk a lot about somatic experiencing, these types of things. And this is just another way to look at a somatic release of feelings.

So if, for example, your child is scared because you were late to pick them up and maybe their school isn't in the greatest neighborhood and they're feeling uncomfortable, and then you get there and they get in the car, they might start crying as a release of that fear. And if we know that, if we can recognize that, we can maybe just put a hand on their thigh as they sit next to us in the car.

Or just say, I'm sorry. I'm sorry I'm late. If we're not aware of that, then we tend to do things like, oh, it's all right. Nothing would ever happen. I would never let anything happen to you. There's nothing to be scared of. We try to talk them out of the feelings or convince them that they should be feeling different.

[00:19:51]

That doesn't help. That keeps everything stuffed in the backpack. What we want is opportunities for the feelings to come out. And that's true of being shamed in class, even if it's inadvertent, it doesn't matter. I'm not saying that the teacher has bad intentions, but if, like I said before, a child's called on, they don't know the answer, they feel embarrassed. Those feelings are in there.

So feelings come out by crying, by sweating, by laughing, by shaking. Our body releases tension in all these ways. And the more we can support our children to release those feelings throughout the day, the less heavy that backpack is by the time they get to bedtime, and the easier bedtime is, and the more success we'll have with helping them sleep through the night.

Alex Howard

I really want to highlight something that you said around that kids may not necessarily be able to initially articulate what it is that they're feeling or why they're feeling it. And I was just thinking, I said to you before we started recording, I said, I'm writing this topic because one of our kids didn't go to bed until midnight last night, or didn't go to sleep till midnight last night.

Two of our kids are neurodiverse, and we think the reason for what was happening, although this wasn't obviously what my daughter was saying, was that she had just started back at school in a new class, and there's not a good line of communication yet with the new teacher around her needs.

So one of the things that she's been doing for the last few years is having ear defenders in the classroom, because the noise is really distracting, and it's too much for her, and that really helps her to zone in. And I said to her last night, have you been wearing your ear defenders? No, I've not been able to have my ear defenders.

So all she can experience is she's super wired and she can't sleep, and she's upset and she's frustrated, but there's a whole set of pieces to this jigsaw that are likely going on that are feeding into that.

And so the point, I guess, I want to go into more is how parents can help children to understand and to open up those places. Either if there's a shutdown through fear or there's just a not understanding what's happening. How can we start to encourage kids to open up and to be able to talk about what's going on?

Tosha Schore

Yeah. So the main way that we're going to do that, Alex, is by zipping it. We talk way too much, and so they don't have an opportunity to share. The other thing I would say is that we tend to be really speech heavy and talk heavy, especially those of us who are in helping fields. We want to talk about it.

Well, not every kid wants to talk about everything, and that might be true forever for that kid. I've got one kid who's like, TMI, dude, I'm your mom. I don't want to know all this stuff. I've got another kid who the rest of my family will say, oh, he never talks. And I'm like, no, he talks plenty. You don't listen. This is how you get close to this child is you stay in the same room for him, quiet, and don't ask questions, and then information comes.

[00:23:16]

So we need to understand that kids also communicate with us in different ways. And it's not just through their words. In fact, more often it's through their behaviors. And we need to basically understand that we need to learn how to decode their behaviors, not spend so much time trying to figure out the exact why of the challenge, but more like how to help.

Now, there are some situations like the one that you just referred to with your daughter, where she wears these headphones during the day at school and that helps her. That's great. That's something that you know. Sometimes there are really concrete things that we can do to help our children. But many times, we don't know. There's not something so concrete that we can do to help.

And especially in those situations, we want to stop talking and really, really listen to the behaviors and the upsets and those might come out as, no, I don't want to go to sleep. I'm not going to sleep. And I say, well, hey, sweet boy, it's bedtime. It's time for you to go. I'm not going to sleep. You're the worst mom ever. None of my friends have to go to sleep at this time.

That's another way of releasing. That's a somatic release of the feelings. We need to understand not to take that personally, recognize it for what it is. To be able to listen and write it out so that they can feel our presence again and feel our love and sense our closeness.

Because connection, that feeling of connection is what allows them to feel safe and will allow them to go to bed more easily and to sleep the night better. Did I answer your question?

Alex Howard

Yeah, you definitely did. And I think that's often one of the big challenges, isn't it? Because the times that our children most need our connection are often the times they behave in the least connection inviting way.

And that's part of I think the challenge is how to not to be triggered and to be able to stay present and to hear what they're really saying, which is I'm hurting or I'm angry or I'm afraid, as opposed to just responding to the behavior or the words.

Tosha Schore

Absolutely. And that goes back to what I talked about at the very beginning, about pretense. The more that we're honest about what's going on in our relationship with our children and the challenges that we're having and the challenges that they're having, the easier it's going to be for us to behave better.

And to be able to listen in those hard situations because we will be less quick to jump to that place of like, oh my God, what did I do to raise such a monster? Or how am I such a horrible parent? Or what did I do to deserve this? Or all those stories that we tell ourselves because we feel isolated and alone and like we're the only one. When in fact, if that were true, I wouldn't have a job, right?

Alex Howard

Very true.

[00:26:11] Tosha Schore

There's a lot of struggle happening out there.

Alex Howard

When it comes to, I'm particularly curious thinking about I guess we're talking about proactive things here in terms of building a different way of relating, really prioritizing the child's feelings and needs. And I think these are more medium to long term strategies. I'm also thinking in those moments of crisis where there is a real struggle with a child that's just refusing to go to bed or in bed and not able to sleep.

What are some of the things in those situations that may not necessarily be dealing with bigger, deeper issues that need a different approach, but what are some of the ways that we can be skillful and effective in those moments?

Tosha Schore

Okay, so there are lots of ways we can be skillful and effective. But I really do want to say that we have to do the pre-work. There is no magic pill. So I'm not going to sit here and lie and say, oh, if you in the moment press button number three, then everything's going to go smoothly.

You have to build a connection with your child throughout the day, throughout the week. They need to know that you've got their back, that you're their ally, that you're going to fight for them, sometimes despite their challenges and just despite their behavior.

You're the one who needs to be able to see what's going on underneath, or not necessarily what's going on, but that there's something gunking up their emotional system that's driving the behaviors and not label them because of their behaviors.

So I do have to put a plug in for that because we have to do that. Now, one of those things that we can do proactively but also in the heat of the moment is one on one time. And you mentioned that you got some great one on one time with each of your kids over the last weekend. That's amazing. So that's the pre-work. It didn't feel like work. It was probably super fun, right?

Alex Howard

It did. It involved taking one to go and see a singer songwriter we both love. Another one was watching the final Harry Potter film together. That's kind of what I meant, like, I had this great time and then I was like, now I'm done.

Tosha Schore

Exactly. But that kind of one on one time, that builds a strong connection between you and your girls. So we can do that ahead of time. But also if your child is struggling to go to sleep, if bedtime is a struggle, you could offer, so in our book *Listen: Five Simple Tools to Meet Your Everyday Parenting Challenges*, we teach a tool called special time.

And it's a specific type of one on one time. It's a great thing to do right before bed. So if your child is struggling, you might say, after you've created a culture where they know what special time is or

whatever you want to call it, you'll say, hey, you want to do five minutes of special time and then we'll do bedtime stuff? Or you want to do ten minutes? Doesn't have to be an hour.

[00:29:11]

It can be a really short period of time. But what it is, is you set a timer and you basically say, hey, we can do whatever you want. And it allows them to lead. It allows them to not feel that pressure of you trying to get them to do something, whatever your agenda is in that moment, and to oftentimes show you where things are hard.

So it forces you to zip it, because you just do whatever they say and whatever they want. They don't know what to do. You don't recommend something. You just say, well, hey, whatever, you figure it out. We got five whole minutes, so just tell me what you want me to do. And oftentimes, information will come out.

That's not why we do it, but oftentimes it's a nice little side effect. So offering one on one time is something you can do in the moment.

Another thing that works really well and is very counterintuitive to what parents generally learn about sleep, because we learn about ramping things down and getting things quiet and all that stuff, is rough and tumble play. Like big play. Because if you think about it, your child is going to sleep better if they feel connected.

They feel seen and loved and heard and connected to you and in that good place. And if you can think about a time when you had a big belly laugh with your kid or with a friend, like how close you felt to that person afterwards. Physical play elicits that. So we get the laughter, we get the sweating and we get that physical touch. And all of that helps a child feel good and connected.

And even though it sounds like, oh, I'm going to ramp them up, can really help get you out of that argument that you're in, move to a more fun place and allow them to go to sleep better. Now, I'm not going to lie, sometimes what happens is someone will get a little bumper, a scrape or something.

Alex Howard

You've been talking to my wife?

Tosha Schore

I have not. But I've talked to a lot of people's wives and a lot of people's husbands. I've been around the block.

Alex Howard

I've found the edges of this a few times, just to say.

Tosha Schore

Yeah, I'm sure you have. So I'm on your side here. So it's good to do that play. And yes, someone might stub their toe as you're playing chase around the house or hide and seek or whatever it is, but what happens, I'm not saying go create a situation where your child stubs their toe and gets hurt, but

what I am saying is don't not play and don't not be physical and rough and tumble because you're worried that that's going to happen.

[00:31:52]

If that happens, just see it as an opportunity because you remember that backpack we were talking about before, all that junk, that's stuffed in there? That stubbed toe is going to be an opportunity for the big tears and the big upsets to come out. And us as parents, we're sitting there going like, for real? It's not that big of a deal, really. It seems like your whole world is falling apart, but in fact, you just stubbed your toe.

Well, what's happening there is it's not really just the stubbed toe, it's all this stuff they've been carrying with them is getting a chance to be released, to come out. And if they have a loving parent there or a loving adult there who's able to just be quiet and listen and not try to jump in and fix everything because there's no emergency there, to just be present and not have to say anything at all even, then they can empty that backpack and feel better.

Sleep will go better. And when I say sleep will go better, I mean getting to sleep. But also, you got a kid who wets their bed. Play helps. I've had parents that I've worked with where the kid has been wetting their bed and we just started a huge pillow fight before bed every day. Like this was their ritual, huge pillow fights, laughter, all the stuff. Bed wetting went away. Same thing with night waking. So don't underestimate the power of play.

Alex Howard

It's also a great time for parents as well. One of the things that comes to mind, Tosha, is that sometimes one of the real struggles around sleep and bedtime with kids is that we can get into a battle of wills. And in a sense that's I imagine often a representation of a wider issue that probably needs its own attention.

But I'm curious about your thoughts of what can help with that, because it can sometimes almost become a flash point that can be really challenging.

Tosha Schore

Yes. So as the parents, we need to realize that we can't get anybody to do anything except by overpowering them. Like we can scare a child, we could terrify a child into doing something or physically overpowering them, overpower them because we're bigger.

I'm presuming that we don't want to be doing that because none of us feel good when we do those things. And so if we don't want to do that, then we need to realize that we have to be the one to step down, if you will. Now, that doesn't mean giving up the goal of getting your child to sleep, but it does mean giving up having to be right at that moment.

So again, offering the one on one time, stepping back, and then you can say, hey, you wanna do five minutes of special time and then we'll try this bed time thing again? Or the play. Or there's something that we write about in the book and that I learned from my mentor. She calls it the vigorous snuggle. And I love this because it's like you have a child who, let's say he's resisting bedtime. No, I'm not going to bed, like you said.

[00:35:15]

And instead of hooking with that child, we might say something like, do you know what happens to little boys who refuse to go to bed when their mothers tell them to? And you get the gleam in your eye and you're like, they get their elbows licked. And then you go for their elbows or something.

Now, obviously the age of your child and their personality is going to inform what sort of silly thing that you do. So that's on a 15 year old, not the elbow licking, but for little kids. So you want to be silly, essentially, what are you doing? You're using the power of laughter to heal and build connection. And you're pulling yourself out of that hook. So that's something that you can do. And then it tends to lighten the air of the room.

Alex Howard

I guess what you're really saying is that sometimes the trick is to diffuse it, not to inflate it. And I guess that comes back to this point about managing our own triggers because often what I think is happening in those situations is that we actually just want to be right and we actually just want to get our way. It isn't necessarily in service of the ultimate relationship.

Tosha Schore

Right. And I want to be clear that our goals, this is why it's important to think about it ahead of time, our goals matter. Like we talked about at the very beginning. We matter and our kid matters. Our kid needs sleep. We get that maybe their behavior is more challenging and they don't do so well in school or whatever if they don't get a good night's sleep.

It's important that they get a good night's sleep and it's important that we get time with our partner or whatever it is. All these things matter. But we need to plan ahead of time. We need to plan ahead of time so that we know what we want our evenings, our bedtime, let's say, to look like.

Oftentimes parents will come to me with struggles. I'll say, well, what do you want bedtime to look like? Well, let's start there because there's no one right way, like we said. So for me, I could say for me, bedtime is when I want to lay down with my kid. I want to read to him and I'm just going to lay there until he falls asleep. I love that. It's our sweet time together.

You might say, I want a quick bedtime. If I stay there, I fall asleep and then I lose my whole night, whatever. I want to have a different kind of bedtime. I want to read our stories in the living room or I want to do a pillow fight and a play thing and then I want to be able to say goodnight and leave the room.

We need to come up with what it is that we're going for, what are our goals? And then what we can do is learn how to simultaneously strengthen our connection through the one on one time and the play. And also set loving limits that allow our children to have feelings and release some of that stuff from the emotional backpack, so that they can gain the flexibility that they need to be able to move towards that scenario that we're going for whatever it is. Yours or mine or whatever anybody else's looks like. Does that make sense?

[00:38:15] Alex Howard

Totally. And also I'm mindful of time, but I guess it really comes back to the point that you made earlier around there are no right ways and taking the pressure off in the sense that we can have so many shoulds and musts, that actually that in of itself is getting in the way of connection, not supporting it.

Tosha Schore

Yeah. And we just want as much connection as possible. If your child is struggling, whether it be sleep or something else, you want to figure out how to get them more connection. In other words, you might feel like, well, I'm doing all this stuff to connect with them, but it's sort of like love languages. Maybe you're not speaking that same language. It's not landing.

We need to figure out how to get them to that place where Dan Siegel would say to feel felt. We need to get them there. Yeah. So it's a lot, but if we can just think flexibly about it and openly about it, and not try to be like anybody else or do it like anybody else and just get quiet with ourselves and think about, like I said, what do we want bedtime to look like? Or the night wakings or lack thereof? What's our end goal?

Then we can make a plan to get there. And that's totally doable. Sleep is interesting, like we have in US culture, and I think in UK culture as well, this idea that kids are supposed to be independent from a very early age. And the truth is that in most cultures around the world, kids don't sleep independently when they're so young.

They're not sleep trained or anything like that. They sleep cuddled up to their parent. I mean, I don't know about you, I'd rather sleep and cuddle up to my partner at night. There's something comforting about getting to cuddle up with somebody.

And so I work with a lot of parents whose kids are struggling with aggression and all sorts of challenging behaviors. And sometimes I will say to them, how would you feel about bringing that child into your bed? Let's do an experiment and see, if you sleep with him for a week, what happens to the behaviors.

Alex Howard

And it really goes back to what you were saying earlier about, we've got to find the way that it works for each child. And that takes, I guess, patience and encouragement sometimes.

And I'm mindful, Tosha, that there's so much more we can say here. For people that want to find out more about you and your work, what's the best place to go and what's some of what people can find?

Tosha Schore

Yeah. So my business is called Parenting Boys Peacefully. And I'm aware that this was a very general discussion about sleep here, but if you're looking at my website, you're going to notice it's very boy focused. Any child who identifies as a boy. I'm looking at how culture looks at boys and treats boys differently.

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And the mission of my business is to create a more peaceful world, one sweet boy at a time. And I essentially do that by helping parents to discipline, including helping them get their kids to sleep in a way that's based on connection rather than behaviorist models of discipline or consequences or punishment or anything like that.

Something that feels better to both of us. And the idea is that we create peace in our home and that ripples out into our communities, whatever those communities are, and ultimately out into the world, which I think we can all agree needs some help.

So, yeah, if you head over to parentingboyspeacefully.com, you will be able to learn all about me. And I do have a free 10-day Reconnect, which essentially walks you through how to start a practice of special time. The one on one time that we talked about here.

Alex Howard

That's awesome. Tosha, thank you so much. I've really enjoyed this conversation. I think it's such an important one. So thank you so much.

Tosha Schore

Thank you so much for having me. I loved it.