# 60a Michaeleen

**Speaker:** [00:00:00] Welcome to the Peaceful Parenting Podcast. I'm your host, Sarah Rosenzweig, mom of three young people, Peaceful Parenting Coach, and your cheerleader and guide on all things parenting. Each week, we'll cover the tools, strategies, and support you need to end the yelling and power struggles, and encourage your kids to listen and cooperate so that you can enjoy your family time.

**Speaker:** I'm happy to say we have a great relationship with our three kids. The teen years have been easy and joyful. Not because we're special unicorns, but because my kids were raised with peaceful parenting. I've also helped so many parents just like you stop struggling and enjoy their kids again. I'm excited to be here with you today and bring you the insight and information you need to make your parenting journey a little more peaceful.

**Speaker:** Let's dive into this week's conversation.

Hey, all welcome back to another episode of the peaceful parenting podcast. We are still in our Encore month of August. while, we're taking a little bit of time off. We thought we would share some of our favorite episodes from the past [00:01:00] three years of the peaceful parenting podcast. This one is right up there today.

We're talking with or revisiting the episode with Michaelene de clef, who is the author of the bestseller hunt gather parent.

I love the ideas and experiences that Michaelene shared in this. And I think there's so much that we can learn. From her and her experiences and the cultures that she shared with and studied

So let's revisit this wonderful interview.

**Sarah:** Michael Lean Clef is the author of the New York Times bestseller Hunt Gather Parent. The book describes a way of raising helpful and confident children, which moms and dads have turned to for millennia.

**Sarah:** It also explains how North American families can incorporate this approach into their busy lives. Michaeline and her daughter Rosie traveled to three different places in the world and visited and lived with a few different communities. To see how family life worked in those communities, she went to

the Yucatan Peninsula in Mexico, she went to the [00:02:00] Arctic in Nunavut, and she went to Tanzania in Africa.

**Sarah:** And the book was, is just a really wonderful, not only adventure story, but it's inspirational and also instructional. The thing that I found so interesting about this book and her adventures and the sort of recommendations that she makes for all of us parents out here is that there's so much in it that is like totally aligned with peaceful parenting.

**Sarah:** And as I was reading it, I was like, Oh, another thing we teach in peaceful parenting. It was really interesting and fun to read about the similarities between what we do as peaceful parents and more intuitive and older practices of parenting. McLean Duclef is also a global health correspondent for NPR Science Desk, where she reports about disease outbreaks and children's health.

**Sarah:** She has a doctorate in chemistry from the University of Berkeley, California, a master's degree in viticulture and anology from the University of California, Davis, and a bachelor's degree in biology from Caltech. She lives in Alpine, Texas with her husband, daughter, and her German shepherd, Savannah. I can't wait for [00:03:00] you to hear this conversation.

**Sarah:** So let's dive in and meet Mykalene. Hi, Mykalene. Welcome to the podcast. Hi, thank you for having me. Thank you. I'm so excited to have you on here. I really liked your book a lot. I really enjoyed reading it. It was not only really educational, but it was really entertaining. I loved all the stories.

**Michaeleen:** Oh, thank you so much. I'm glad it's, it was easy to read. That was one of the goals.

**Sarah:** It was very easy to read. Actually I listened to it on Audible, but you kept me company for quite a long number of hours while I was washing all the windows and putting up the screens in the fall, or taking down the screens in the fall.

**Sarah:** So yeah, that was great to listen to. What gave you the idea to do this book?

**Michaeleen:** I really didn't want to write this book. I really thought like, why would I write a parenting book? Because I'm not a parenting expert, but a lot of people asked me to write this book. I started reporting on parenting and other cultures in particular, Maya parenting for NPR where I work and the response to those stories were enormous.

**Michaeleen:** And then I wrote a piece [00:04:00] about some strategies, parenting strategies found up in the Arctic and Inuit communities. And that piece was like one of the most popular, most read pieces ever written at NPR. And after that piece came out, people were like asking me to write a book and I think what finally two things finally convinced me to do it.

**Michaeleen:** One is that the tools and the ideas that I was learning from these parents in Mexico and parents in northern Canada and the Arctic, they worked. So well with my kid and I have a very challenging child actually she's not really anymore But she was as a toddler basically nothing. I tried worked I mean I read books and science papers and blogs and I just felt like everything I did was making things worse And the ideas that came from these little tiny communities, very rural communities, were just like transformative in our busy San Francisco home.

**Michaeleen:** And I was like, these can probably really help a lot of American Canadian parents. And then the second thing that really convinced me was that I started [00:05:00] realizing through travels, but also through a lot of research, that The approach to parenting that you find in a lot of places, whether it be in rural Mexico, rural Canada, rural Tanzania, is very similar.

**Michaeleen:** So you can find a core four or five elements all around the world and in these very different places. And so it really speaks to something that seems to be working for a lot of parents in very different environments, but also likely has been around for thousands of years and is likely the way parents and children evolve to interact.

**Michaeleen:** So it's this. This book isn't about one specific way of parenting. I think it really is about a universal way of parenting that somehow we've forgotten about.

**Sarah:** Yeah. I liked how you talked about that book, Sleep Babies, where the person went back and looked at the history of parenting expert, quote experts.

**Sarah:** And really laid out how it was almost random just somebody's random idea of this is what we should do now. And, don't pick up your babies and don't, give them any affection. And then somehow

**Michaeleen:** sit the [00:06:00] baby down, as often as you can yeah. And it was, a lot of this stuff was written by people that sometimes weren't even parents, but a lot of them were men who, Had very little to do or experience

with parenting and interestingly they were written for founding hospitals or orphanages.

**Michaeleen:** So people that were taking care of like hundreds of babies, hundreds of children, and these little pamphlets got turned into books and then they've, You can trace back like a lot of our advice and the, what we do to these pamphlets, which is just incredible to me because they're not based on science and they're not really based on or experience.

**Michaeleen:** Yeah, exactly. Not based on

**Sarah:** experience of what works, which is what sort of what you went back to which was people who like, hadn't been influenced by these weird white guy pamphlets from the, 1800s or whatever. So I think that's a really, a nice way to sort of transition into talking about what you, I don't know who came up with the acronym, but the WEIRD parents, the Western educated, industrialized, rich, democratic countries, and where that sort [00:07:00] of nuclear family is the model.

**Sarah:** And you probably saw this article, but a couple of years ago, I saw an article in the Atlantic that was like, the nuclear family has been a failed experiment.

**Michaeleen:** Yes, we often talk about it as like the traditional family. But it's, it is anything but that, like there's no history to it. It's been around for like a hundred years at most.

**Michaeleen:** And you're right. It is like an experiment and for a lot of families, it fails. It makes it, makes your life, makes life really hard.

**Sarah:** Yeah. That isolation and also the no, no role models, which I see so much in my work as a parenting coach, a lot of people that I work with, they've never been around kids before.

**Sarah:** And so they have no idea what a typical four year old is like or a typical three year old or whatever because they just haven't been around kids. And some people say the first time I ever held a baby was my own child. It's just crazy, right? There's no,

**Michaeleen:** there's no training, right? Like I remember my husband and I spent all this time training for the birth.

**Michaeleen:** Like we went to classes and stuff. And after a week of being parents, he was like, why did we [00:08:00] spend all that time for something that is over in 24 hours, if you're like, and then we've got this baby and no one told us. how to, what to do about any of it. He's we should have spent all of the pregnancy, like training to be parents.

**Michaeleen:** And like 150 years

**Sarah:** ago, you would have had people around you who would be supporting you and showing you what to do and taking the baby so you could sleep and all of this stuff. So no wonder we've gotten so weird, right? Like we've gotten so far away from how children have been raised forever.

**Sarah:** Another thing I think that you pointed out really well that I want to talk more about in a minute is the sort of artifice of how we raise kids today. Like you, you had the story of somebody who grew up like working at their parents bakery and they were just part of the life, that this was a couple of generations ago.

**Sarah:** And then you contrasted that with spending the day at a indoor jungle gym, eating your 10 slice of pizza, right? Like the artifice of like kid's world. an adult world and how strange that is

**Michaeleen:** too. Yeah, I think so that the [00:09:00] bakery story is actually my father in law. So not that long ago.

**Michaeleen:** Okay. Like he his family is, are immigrants from Macedonia and they came to America and opened a bakery and yeah, like they lived above the bakery for a while. And so their whole life was just the bakery and like after schools and weekends and summer, he worked. In the bakery, or he helped with the bakery and played around it and spent his whole life, his whole childhood, like learning to be a baker and helping his family.

**Michaeleen:** And the contrast of that with what I was doing with Rosie, my little girl when she was two and three before I wrote the book was like, the weekends and after school were all these activities that were centered around her and for her only. And there were things I would never do if I didn't have her.

**Michaeleen:** And it's this very, this is very strange and very weird. You. You don't find this anywhere else in the world, really, and definitely not for very long. 50, 60 years ago, this wasn't happening in the U. S. And I think we parents do it because we think it's what's right, and it's the best thing for the kid.

**Michaeleen:** But it has [00:10:00] incredible repercussions on children's development and on your relationship with the child and their role in the household and in the family. And for Rosie, The, all these activities, which some people call child centered activities, really altered her behavior and made her really misbehave.

**Michaeleen:** We'd come home from them and then she'd just be a tyrant for an hour or two. I think while she was adjusting, and I think a lot of them were overstimulating for both of us and left us frazzled and stressed out. And so actually I, the first time I visited The Maya village. I realized that children don't need these activities at all.

**Michaeleen:** In fact, they do a lot better without them. And so I really started to scrap them like immediately. And it was one of the big for the first things I changed. And it took a while, took about six months to really stop doing them. But it improved our lives so much because all of a sudden we had our weekends back, like we.

**Michaeleen:** Just decided to do what we would do as an adult and bring Rosie with us, you know Maybe you need to make [00:11:00] some modifications, if it's hiking you can't hike as far, And you do have to make some adjustments, but the activity is something that my husband I wanted to do for ourselves and then we included Rosie and our lives got so much better and her behavior improved So much just from those, that one change.

**Michaeleen:** I love that so much. I

**Sarah:** was thinking, my kids are older. My youngest is 15, they're 15, 18 and 21. And so I was reflecting a lot on, my like early young motherhood as I was reading about yours. And I realized that consciously I, we didn't do a lot of those child centered things.

**Sarah:** And partly it was because we didn't have very much money. It's like cost a lot of money to go to the trampoline place and the science center and all of that stuff. And frankly, I was a little lazy.

**Sarah:** And we also live in a place that was like, it would have been a lot of effort and that's why I say lazy. Like even if we had the money, it would have been a lot of effort to get to those places and do those things. And I was just like, let's just hang out at home or go to the park. I spent a lot of time in the park.

**Sarah:** And so I was like patting myself on the back. I didn't even know that, but that's what we were [00:12:00] doing.

**Michaeleen:** It's interesting. People write me and say I knew this stuff, like there's a part of me that like really thought this way but nobody had ever confirmed it, which I really find fascinating.

**Michaeleen:** I think a lot of us, a lot of the advice in the book, a lot of parents feel like totally, because it's in our blood and in our genes, right? Because this is the way our grandparents were. Raised, right? Yeah. And our parents too, to a certain degree. And so I think it's interesting that you said that because I think that this book kind of confirms what a lot of people were doing, but they felt maybe bad or didn't know it was like the right way.

**Sarah:** If you, if everybody around you, if you're seeing this model of you're a good, parent if you're taking your kids to the, science center every weekend or whatever. I'm I'm sorry, science center. I don't mean to harp on you. I'm sure you want to go.

**Michaeleen:** Yeah. So play area. Yeah. Yeah.

**Michaeleen:** Yeah.

**Sarah:** But it's like you're, that's what the model of being a quote, good parent is. If you're doing, taking your kids to all these quote, enriching activities, my kids just played, they just played a lot. And they were, I wish I had involved them a little bit more in the ways that you talked about in the book.[00:13:00]

**Sarah:** doing household stuff, but, I certainly wasn't doing it while they were languishing around, with their child centered activities. Anyhow, so can you tell us a little bit about your TEAM acronym? And this is the things that you learned, I think, when you were doing your travels of a model that we can follow, inspirational model.

**Michaeleen:** I think there's two ways to think about it. So the first is through this acronym and they're basically four elements and I can add a fifth one. There's two A's that you could add. Okay. That you find everywhere. I've been traveling for my job for 10 years now. And before I wrote the book, I saw all these in many parts of the world.

**Michaeleen:** India, West Africa. Just everywhere I went, I saw them. I just wasn't really paying attention. But the first thing is what we've already talked

about. So T is for together. And this idea that like children are really made to do things together with their parents or siblings or a group of friends or neighbors just with somebody.

**Michaeleen:** And it doesn't mean like the person is instructing them and [00:14:00] teaching them. It's just really hanging out. So my grandfather treated me this way. Like my mom would drop me off at his house on the weekends and he would garden for hours, and I would just be there with him. And maybe he'd ask me to help, or he'd show me some things, but it was very easy, and we coexisted.

**Michaeleen:** In the U. S., we have this, we're always pushing kids to do things independently, and we have this like obsession with independence, even though we don't actually give our children independence. And I think it's really fighting this instinct of togetherness. And one, kids are much more likely to do things when you do them together.

**Michaeleen:** But two, they start to feel like they're part of this like bigger group, right? And they start to be motivated to cooperate with you and work together with you so that when you ask them to put on their shoes in the morning to leave for school, they just come because like they've been doing things with you since they were little or for months or years or whatever.

**Michaeleen:** And so T is for together and just trying to fight this urge to do things individually and do things as a team. So a really good example of this is making [00:15:00] beds. Like before this book, like I would say, Rosie, go make your bed. Or I'd say to my husband, it's your turn to do the dishes, right?

**Michaeleen:** It's your night. And now we do everything together. So we all make each other's beds. We all clean up after dinner. We all do the laundry together. And it takes away the conflict. A lot of the conflict, but an individualism of the chore and really teaches the child to cooperate and work together. I think it's missing.

**Michaeleen:** Like I didn't know, my parents never taught me to cooperate with them, with anybody.

**Sarah:** Throughout, throughout your book, as I was reading it, I was like, Oh, this is exactly what we teach in peaceful parenting, but it's just it's like a slightly different spin on it. But we talk about, one of the foundational principles of peaceful parenting is connection.

**Sarah:** And when you feel connected, connection, togetherness, I think we can call those pretty parallel ideas.

**Michaeleen:** I think together is required for the connection, right?

**Sarah:** When I talk about sharing space and how important that is, even if you're not interacting, especially with older kids, it's still really important to share space with them and coexisting, right?

**Sarah:** Just

**Michaeleen:** coexisting. We can just be in the same [00:16:00] room and do our own thing and not have to talk. And that's still like a way of connecting, right? And when your kids

**Sarah:** are, when your kids feel connected to you, they're more likely to cooperate with you. It's, I don't want that to feel like a tactic because it's more of a side benefit because connection in itself is important.

**Sarah:** But the side benefit of it is that when you say Hey, let's go get our shoes on, they are more likely to follow you because they feel connected to you. And we're hardwired to follow people that we feel connected to and the opposite. It's

**Michaeleen:** motivating, right? It's interesting. We had my husband and I had a conversation just yesterday.

**Michaeleen:** He was struggling with something with Rosie and I said, stop doing so much for her, I'm making this for her. I'm reading to her. And do more things with her

**Speaker 3:** than

**Michaeleen:** going and just bring her along. And he was a little skeptical. He's I don't know about that, Michael y. But then the next day, yesterday things were so much better.

**Michaeleen:** Oh, good. Anyway, it's a constant kind of, because it's the opposite of what we think. It is, yeah. Okay, so [00:17:00] that T is for togetherness. And then E, I think, is the hardest. But it's this idea of like encouraging. So E is for encourage versus forcing children. So we are really good at that. Forcing children to do things like either we tell them something to do, go put your shoes on, tie your shoes.

**Michaeleen:** This is a great example in the study where the dad says tie your shoes and then the kid ignores him. And he sits there and argues with him for eight minutes in front of this. The scientist about tying the shoes. So there's this kind of this need that if we say something to a child or we want the child to do something that we lose or we're bad parents if they don't do it.

**Speaker 3:** Yeah. And a lot of parents.

**Michaeleen:** Yeah, exactly. It ends up in these constant power struggles. And a lot of parents around the world take a very different perspective. It's like I'm gonna it. Encourage the proper behavior through like lots of different tools. There's like a bunch in the book. And over time, the child is going to slowly learn this skill or slowly start to learn the importance of the behavior that I'm trying to encourage.

**Michaeleen:** And what this does is a couple of things. One, it [00:18:00] gives the child. It's basically getting the child to figure out the right behavior, for them to think and experience the consequences of their behavior and figure it out, which is a much more long term effect on the child than like you just forcing them through bribes, punishments, yelling, anger.

**Michaeleen:** But second of all, it's creates much less conflict because every time we like tell a child something to do and force it on them, we're just asking for resistance. Either the child's going to resist and get angry or we're going to resist and get angry because they're not listening. And the last thing, which we'll get to in a second, is that this encouragement.

**Michaeleen:** Instead of forcing really allows the child to stay autonomous to stay have a sense of control of their life and their choices And autonomy is huge a huge important thing Which is the a of the team is autonomy and I actually think that a lot of parents we don't really see What autonomy looks like, what real autonomy looks like.

**Michaeleen:** I thought before writing this book that I was a [00:19:00] gave Rosie a lot of autonomy and I was a very Lisa fair parent who didn't boss her around. But when I actually saw what real autonomy looks like with a child, I was like, Oh my gosh, I'm totally bossy. I'm such a bossy pants. And so I really wanted to show in this book, like a way that you can try out autonomy and you, okay.

**Michaeleen:** And you can. You can say, you can figure out if you are giving the child autonomy and then if you're not, how can you do that? And what are the

consequences of that? How does that improve the relationship with the child? And also, how does the child's confidence and mental health improve when they are starting to have more of a autonomous life?

**Michaeleen:** The interesting thing about autonomy is that it, a lot of cross cultural psychologists will explain it's different than independence. Cause we just think that they're the same. So independence is like the child is disconnected and separate and just doing what they want. But autonomy has this element of, Thinking back to the group so the child is pretty free has a lot of freedom to do what they [00:20:00] want make their kind of Their choices and there's a not a lot of bossing around as I could talk about like we can actually count the number of instructions The child receives but the child must Be kind to the family members, to the group.

**Michaeleen:** They must share what they have, like possessions are very rare. And if they are, do you have a possession? They don't show it to the group. So for instance, in the Maya families, if a kid wants to play with a toy by himself, the parent will say, you have to go outside or you have to go away from the other children else you share.

**Michaeleen:** So everything is really shared. And then finally they have to be helpful. So they have to be constantly looking for ways to help the group. So this is really the core of this team parenting approach. It's like children have enormous amount of freedom and ability to choose where they go, what they do, but they're in this framework of a bigger group and they must share, they must be helpful and they're trained.

**Michaeleen:** They're trained very early to share, be helpful and be kind. So it's very it's not free range, laissez faire, the kids have [00:21:00] tons of freedom and they do whatever they want. And it's not like this helicopter micromanaging, it's, it really is like a mix.

**Sarah:** What strikes me is like independence is just I'm here on my own for myself, right?

**Sarah:** That's right. And autonomy is I'm within the bigger community, group, family team, but I get to make my own decisions about. My preferences or who I am or what I do.

**Michaeleen:** Yeah, exactly. So for instance, like on the weekends a lot, the schedule is set by me and my husband for Rosie, right? Like we do things and

the family goes, if there's a way that Rosie can stay with a neighbor or something, she can, we can figure that out.

**Michaeleen:** But in general, like the schedule is set by us, not by her. But then within those activities, she has a lot of room to do what she wants, right? So we spend a lot of time gardening right now because it's wonderful spring and I'm out there gardening for hours and she really, every now and then I ask her to help go grab something, go turn on the hose, like something, one or two commands an hour to keep her kind of helping and aware of what's [00:22:00] going on.

**Michaeleen:** But in general, she just plays, right? And she does what she has making her own version of the garden right now. And. She has this whole fairy lands. I don't know what she's doing most of the time, but if I ask for help, she's there to help. She's respectful of our plants, of the land, of the animals, right?

**Michaeleen:** So it's somewhat structured, but then within that bigger macro structure she has enormous freedom and we've trained her to be safe in the yard and she doesn't, she knows not to run onto the road with traffic, right? So there's. things that we've done so that she can have that freedom and still stay safe.

**Michaeleen:** But it's a very beautiful form of parenting because it's this mix, right? It's not one or the other. It's not helicoptering and micromanaging and it's not total free range, right? The child is really expected to keep, like you say, think back to the group and be part of this team.

**Sarah:** Yeah, I love that so much.

**Sarah:** I wanted to say one quick thing when you talked about encouragement. And commands. And I often say to my clients if you give a command, the [00:23:00] two choices are resist or obey and obey feels bad to most people. Because of that autonomy question, right? We, our autonomy is so important to us.

**Sarah:** And there's so much research that shows that when we have low control in our lives, that's when we start to have some mental health problems, challenges, depression, lack of drive and motivation. And so everyone needs to have that autonomy to be like healthy, really. That's

**Michaeleen:** It's, there's so much data showing like evolution wise, like autonomy is this like incredibly important thing for Homo sapiens, for our species.

**Michaeleen:** If you look at like modern day hunter gatherers, like on, Every continent that they still are, autonomy is a major value and a major cornerstone of their community. And so it really suggests this is like an ancient value for humans. And you're right. I think because of that, it's tied, without it, it's tied to all of these mental health problems and anxiety and stress and kids.

**Michaeleen:** [00:24:00] And a lot of psychologists think it's the one reason why we have such a big problem with anxiety and stress and kids is that. They don't have a sense of autonomy. Yeah. But again, I think it's we don't have role models for it. I think we don't, we're not accustomed to seeing children in autonomous states.

**Michaeleen:** And when we do, I think we miss it, to be honest, because it's easy. It's obvious. It's like the child just exists and there's not a lot of, talking and expressing and. In the book, I talk about there's studies that look at what is autonomy with a child? What does it look like?

**Michaeleen:** And it really is about the number of instructions that a parent gives the child, like per hour. And in many hunter gatherer communities, it's, we're talking about two or three verbal instructions, including like feedback, like praise and an hour, which is incredibly few compared to what I was doing before this.

**Michaeleen:** I've clocked myself at 120 or something per hour. But I started trying this like one per 20 minutes or two per hour and it totally changes the relationship between the parent [00:25:00] and the child and the resistance and the conflict in the relationship just plummet. And what you start realizing is that you're saying all this stuff to children that you don't like.

**Michaeleen:** You don't need to say it's completely useless. And the child has much more capabilities than you're giving the child. And when we go back to like, when we go to one or two, three commands per hour, the message we're sending to the child is you can do this. You are capable on your own. You are, you're a capable person.

**Michaeleen:** And I believe that you can do it versus the message. with 120 commands per hour is, you can't do this and you need me to tell you what to do

all the time. And over time, I think that seeds doubt and anxiety in the child. Am I doing it right?

**Sarah:** Also that just, I keep coming back to that resistance because I'm just thinking of like the simple example of, the difference between let's go put, it's time to go, let's go put our shoes on to, you need to put your shoes on now.

**Sarah:** And so when you give a command, like you need to put your shoes on now, it's Resist or obey, obey feels [00:26:00] bad. And so we're like almost creating that resistance by using our command language.

**Michaeleen:** The other thing about the commands is if you do only one or two an hour, a kid is much more likely to do those one or two things than if you've given them like 15 and then you ask them to put their shoes on, right?

**Michaeleen:** But there's a lot of other ways of getting kids to do things. There's questions like, like one thing I'll say to Rosie, which works amazing in the mornings is what would a big kid do next? And when it's time to put the shoes on, I say that, or time to get what would a big kid do next?

**Michaeleen:** And she sits there and you can see her. She's she like looks around and she thinks, oh, my shoes. So then it's the power is in her hands, right? The power to think and the agency comes from her and she wants to be a big kid. So but the other thing that's so interesting to me is the Maya community has, so they're not hunter gatherers, but they have their subsistence or agriculturalist farmers, but they have a lot of values that are similar to.

**Michaeleen:** hunter gatherer communities and autonomy is one of them. And [00:27:00] they think that it's okay if a person doesn't do things on the first time that you ask them. And they will actually, they have the rule of three where you can, you ask a person to do something and they don't do it. You wait like 10 minutes, like a very significant amount of time and you ask them again and there's no escalation in the asking.

**Michaeleen:** So it's not I already told you, it's put your shoes on. And Ernesto doesn't put his shoes on. Tim is put your shoes on. And it's, There's just this acceptance that people are autonomous creatures and they're not necessarily going to do everything you say the first time.

**Michaeleen:** So there's this patience to it that I really like, there's no reason to escalate it because we all take time and we all, We want to do things on our own. And one of the,

**Sarah:** one of the things you

**Michaeleen:** talked

**Sarah:** about when you, that you learned from the families in the Arctic was that our kids aren't trying to push our buttons or manipulate us, right?

**Sarah:** Which is, it is so huge. And it's something that I teach all the time. Like their expectations of the [00:28:00] kids was that they just haven't learned it yet. They're messy and. In terms of like their development. Yeah. Like they're just not fully formed humans yet. That's right. They haven't learned everything they need to learn.

**Sarah:** And so they don't get angry when you ask them to do something and they don't do it or if they're being, quote misbehaving or whatever. And we take things like I'll just say weird, a weird North American parents often take things so personally. It becomes like this is about me, right?

**Michaeleen:** So like

**Sarah:** one of our mantras in peaceful parenting is this is not about you.

**Michaeleen:** It's like a personal attack on you, right? Every, like a two year old is everything they do is like a personal attack on you. This shift in perspective is huge, was huge for me. Because Rosie would have a lot of tantrums, and she'd end up like hitting me and biting me, and so much anger towards her in it.

**Michaeleen:** It just created so much anger in me, because I thought she was like trying to manipulate me, like you said, push my buttons and push boundaries, right? We say that a lot, push boundaries. And there's this very kind of First of all, like nefarious [00:29:00] motivation that we put on them. Yeah. Like it's very nefarious, like anti social and mean on little tiny kids, like two, one, two year olds, and I said this to one of the moms up in the Arctic you don't ever get mad even if they're pushing your buttons.

**Michaeleen:** And she literally laughed at me. Laughed at me. She was like, she's two. She's not pushing your button. Yeah. Yeah. She was just like, that's the most ridiculous thing ever. And I started thinking about it and I was it ridiculous? Wait, what is the evidence that's true? That they are, they're pushing, there's no data to say this. And in fact, the data support something very different. The data support a very helpful little children, they're very, they really

want to help and really are very pro social and. If we view them in this way that they're trying, they really want to, but they just can't handle the situation.

**Michaeleen:** They're illogical. They're irrational creatures. Like you say, they don't have understanding. Then we, then instead of feeling all this anger for them, what it did, it was, it really helped me to start feeling empathy for her, that to swap out anger for empathy.

**Sarah:** Yeah [00:30:00] she's not giving you a hard time.

**Sarah:** She's having a hard time. That's one of our piece of parenting logic. Exactly. Exactly. She's

**Michaeleen:** trying. Yeah. Yeah. Exactly. And and the other thing that really helped me was to know that if I get angry at her, I'm just teaching her to get angry. This is a situation where you get angry. Whereas I, if I'm empathetic towards her and calm, I'm helping her find that reaction in herself.

**Michaeleen:** A hundred

**Sarah:** percent. Yeah. Yeah. Yeah. And I think it stems from do you believe that humans are inherently good, or do you believe that humans are inherently bad? And I remember when I was in teachers' college, they used to say catch them being good. And I was like, what? That's terrible.

**Sarah:** That suggests that like most of the time they're gonna be bad, but catch them being good in the little amount of time.

**Michaeleen:** But I think one of the things about that is. Look for the goodness there. Like for one of the things that I learned is once I started seeing Rosie as like a helpful creature, wanting to be helpful, trying to be helpful, I started seeing it.

**Michaeleen:** Whereas when I was coming at her as like this [00:31:00] mean, vicious child that wants to hit me and bite me, I was blind to her helpfulness. And there, there's these times, especially when she was younger, where I would just watch her and I would be like, Oh, she's actually really trying to help right now. It looks destructive and but she's, and once I started opening my eyes to it, I started seeing it everywhere.

**Michaeleen:** And I started realizing like, wow, she is actually really a helpful person. It's just that the way she helps isn't the way I would do it. Isn't the

obvious way. And one of the Maya parents even said they really want to help, but they don't know how, right? And that they're trying. I'll tell you a story that I love.

**Michaeleen:** This actually was after the book came out, this wonderful researcher, Annalika López Ferrer. She's, she works, On helping and helpful children, but she was talking about she's a Mexican American. She was talking about her two year old when they were doing the laundry and she said the little girl came over and just started balling up the clothes and then throwing them.

**Michaeleen:** And [00:32:00] she said, I think a lot of the European American or European ancestry parents, white parents would see this as like the child playing with the clothes, she said. But I see it as the child trying to Fold the clothes and I was just like, exactly right. And it probably was, the child was trying to fold the clothes.

**Michaeleen:** It's just, it looks crazy. Yeah. Cause she doesn't have manual dexterity yet. Yeah. Or this knowledge, and. And so when I was telling that story and one of the moms actually here in Texas said, after reading your book, I was watching my little 18 month old while I was folding the clothes and realizing that she was taking the clothes and putting them in different groups for the different people in the household.

**Michaeleen:** She was, yeah. And she was sorting them. And like she said, I would have never seen it or paid it. I would have thought she's just playing with the clothes, but because of, I've started trying to look, so I think my whole point of this is I think kids are really wanting to help, especially little ones, and we just don't see it because we don't think of them that [00:33:00] way.

**Michaeleen:** So I can just say for parents listening, assume positive

**Sarah:** intent.

**Michaeleen:** Yeah, exactly. Everything shifts. If you're unsure of it, especially when they can talk, ask them. So a couple months ago, Rosie came out, so she's six and she came out on the weekend and had these very fragile champagne glasses in her hands that I've had for 20 some years in them.

**Michaeleen:** And I was just she's like swinging them around, and like my instinct is to scream at her don't break those glasses. You're going to break the glasses. But I like stopped for a beat. And it bit my lip and I said, what are your plans for those glasses?

**Michaeleen:** Good for you. I know. It was very hard. I'll tell you that. But it was like this idea, right? Okay. She wants to help. She wants to be good. So let me, come at her that way and treat her that way. And she said in like the sweetest little voice I was going to make a special drink for you and dad at tonight for dinner.

**Michaeleen:** And you know what? She totally did. It was like this wonderful drink. She didn't break the glasses. And I just think to [00:34:00] myself, if I had yelled at her, we would have gotten in a big fight. She would have probably broken the glasses. There've been a lot of yelling and screaming. And really my belief in her of being this like bad child would have created this bad child, right?

**Michaeleen:** Because I'm not seeing her in her kindness, but because I stopped and just, had a fleeting moment of she wants to help. I treated her that way. And then that part of her came out, right? And it was really beautiful. And then it just reinforces in both of our heads wow, Rosie's a really helpful kid.

**Michaeleen:** Really kind. I

**Sarah:** love that. Tell us about the second. Is there two A's now? Autonomy was the first one. Oh yeah. So the other A is,

**Michaeleen:** we touched on, it's alloparenting. I really thought about making A alloparenting. So this is this idea that throughout human history, kids were brought up, but not by just the mom and the dad, but Aloe, meaning other parents too.

**Michaeleen:** And, typically a child is raised by about five people. Like we're talking about people that know and love them just as much as their biological parents [00:35:00] or their nuclear family. Kids need this, parents need this, and we can find them all over and we have them. We just need to value them and pay attention to them, but they can be relatives, but they can also be neighbors or other children are great Aloe parents.

**Michaeleen:** But. Just valuing them, looking for them, encouraging that there's relationships. There's data that shows that just one other, like really supportive person in a child's life has this, have all these repercussions on their mental health. And, but it also gives the parents a break. One of the moms in the Arctic told me like, cause I was with Rosie the whole time, like the first couple of days, like me and her, and one of the moms like ran out and was like, you're with her every day and you need a break.

**Michaeleen:** I'm going to, let me take her for you for a while. Because one of the moms said you may be tired of her, but she's also tired of you. I love, I remember that in

**Sarah:** your

**Michaeleen:** book. I love

**Sarah:** that.

**Michaeleen:** Yeah, I think kids do. They can misbehave because they're just tired of being around their moms and their dads all the time.

**Michaeleen:** Yeah, I'd love that. That's beautiful. All right. Tell us about M. So M is this idea of minimal interference. So I [00:36:00] think in a lot of North American parenting, we do a lot of maximal interference, right? We think it really is our responsibility. To find everything the child's doing wrong and fix it and also optimize their path in their life So if we're outside or with a group of people, you know this idea of every time the child does anything closely Unoptimal the parent steps in and says something and really shapes the path Which leads to this very bossy parenting approach and very stressful Like we're always trying to push the child to the next level as fast as we can get them to talk get them To run get them to you know learn math and reading as fast as possible.

**Michaeleen:** And it ends up in this kind of maximal parenting approach and around the world, you find the opposite. Actually parents show a lot of restraint and step back and watch the child. So they're not running off and letting the child do whatever they're watching the child from the kind of the sidelines and stepping in only minimally to support whatever the child's doing or help if they need it.

**Michaeleen:** [00:37:00] So it's a very like hands off approach, But you're using your eyes in minimally contributing to what the child's doing, guiding and supporting. And it's hard one. I think you have to read the book to really understand.

**Sarah:** I have a couple of metaphors that I think are helpful. One is Alison Gopnik has the car, the carpenter versus the gardener.

**Sarah:** And I think that's a really helpful one, right? We're the gardeners. We're just like letting them grow and, watering and providing sun and all that. We're

not building our children. And I think a lot of parents come at that maximum interference is I have to build them up. I have to create this child.

**Sarah:** And sand them, like even smooth them out, right? Yeah, totally. And make sure they don't get hurt and make sure they, it's we have to let kids take risks and, in healthy ways and learn things for themselves. You'd stomp in the puddle and get your sneakers wet, your feet are going to be wet all day.

**Sarah:** And maybe you don't care about that. Maybe that's fine. You don't care about having wet feet. We have to put our preferences aside sometimes, but [00:38:00] another metaphor that I came up with, which I use a lot, especially with when I'm encouraging parents to like, Let their older kids, especially be more autonomous.

**Sarah:** And is the tour de France, like the van goes alongside and that the, like the person in the bike race is actually like doing all the work and riding. And you're like, you're there like, okay, here's some snacks and some water and change of clothes. But we're just like the support vehicles where we're not, if you

**Michaeleen:** get a flat tire, we're there to help.

**Michaeleen:** Yeah.

**Sarah:** I love that. The minimum interference, minimal interference.

**Michaeleen:** The anthropologist Suzanne Gaskins, who actually lives in part time in the village that's in the book, she told me I love this metaphor. She says, if you think about when toddlers are learning to walk, babies are learning to walk, the American parent or the North American parent is like out in front holding their hands and pulling them.

**Michaeleen:** Come on walk, and holding on and pulling or pushing. And she says, the Maya parent is behind the child a few feet even. So the child thinks that they're walking. Doing it all by themselves. They have no [00:39:00] clue that the parent is doing anything, but she's watching and if the child falls She catches them, right?

**Michaeleen:** It's beautiful. No. Yeah, it's really beautiful It's the same as like they're by they're there watching and ready Yeah, the child really thinks they're doing it on their own and that's where that comes in beautiful confidence and

lack of stress and anxiety comes from because the child has built this like sense of I can do this even from a very young age.

**Sarah:** Yeah. A beautiful book. And I know it's a mutual friend of ours, Ned Johnson, a self driven child. He has a whole chapter. They Ned and William, they have a whole chapter on managing your parental anxiety. And I think that's where a lot of that comes from wanting to. Maximal interfere is that we get anxious, right?

**Sarah:** So we have to sit back, shut our mouths, sit on our hands and give ourselves some, compassion and self talk of it's going to be okay. They can handle this

**Michaeleen:** and, we're told. constantly to do the opposite, which I think is really hard, right? Like even my husband was saying, we need to read to Rosie for 15 [00:40:00] minutes every day.

**Michaeleen:** And I was like I was like, because that's what we're told. And it's like this idea of you don't, she's not, and I'm like, so we're constantly be told like to interfere, to maximally interfere and push. And so to really do it, I think sometimes we have to swim upstream in, in the river that we're in.

**Michaeleen:** Yeah. And that can be really hard, right? It is hard.

**Sarah:** I remember the pressure I felt when my kids were little because every parent was like, are you going to put them in soccer? Are you going to put them in hockey? Are you going to put them in this? And I was like, no but I I remember feeling a little judged because I wasn't putting my kids in all of these activities, yeah, like they're going to fall behind if they're not

**Michaeleen:** doing these things. Yeah. And I think what I tell myself, which helps me not do this is every time you put the kid in something, it's taking time away from some other skill, right? And so all of the putting the kids in all those activities takes away time from Rosie learning to cook and learning to do the garden and learning to interact with me and her father.

**Michaeleen:** And [00:41:00] be part of this team. And I, we have chosen that these are very valuable skills, and we want her to learn those just as much or even more than learning soccer.

**Sarah:** And maybe she'll play soccer at school and love it, and she'll come home and she'll say, Mom, can I join a soccer team? And you're going to be like, sure, of course you can join a soccer team.

**Michaeleen:** Exactly. And they're not mutually exclusive. Yeah. It's just that when we forget, like one mom emailed me and asked me is it more important for my child to learn violin or for them to learn to help take care of their younger siblings? And I was like, it depends on what you value and what you, what skill you want.

**Michaeleen:** But I also don't think they're mutually exclusive. Yeah. And what you're trying to do both, they

**Sarah:** want to learn violin.

**Michaeleen:** This is this is also Kind of forward, I think, to people is like that it's very child driven, right? So the Maya kids have a lot of activities. I would say a lot because one of the little girls told me I should really only do two or three because otherwise it's just too busy.

**Michaeleen:** No way. That's still a lot. I know. I know. It's plenty, right? But they're all child driven. So it's what you said. The child comes to the parent and says, I want to do this, help me figure out a [00:42:00] way that we can do this. And, that doesn't put too much burden on the family. And the parents really figure out a way that the child drives the train, right?

**Michaeleen:** So the child signs himself up, the child figures out ways of getting there, through support with the parent. It's not the parent chauffeuring kids around all day. It is like the kid wants to do it and if they want to do it, they figure out ways with the parents help to do it,

**Sarah:** or team.

**Sarah:** Yeah.

**Michaeleen:** Versus the child has to do this. It's in there. Else they're going to fall behind and

**Sarah:** I love this conversation so much and I so appreciate you coming on. And you told me before we started recording that Rosie's six and a half now. And can you imagine where you might have been if you hadn't barked on Oh my god.

**Sarah:** Because I could tell from reading. With my experience as a parenting coach, I'm like, Oh yeah, she has one of those kids that, these are my people. Like one of those kids, I call them more or extra.

**Michaeleen:** Yes, exactly. A lot. Incredibly competent kid. That just can do anything.

**Michaeleen:** And right. Yeah. More. I like that instead of like strong willed, I like more extra because in a lot of cultures, like [00:43:00] Rosie's enthusiasm would be seen as this Her strong will or persistence or spirited or whatever we say would be seen as like this incredible drive to help Yeah, right and this incredible need and want to participate and help and then that would be harnessed

**Speaker 3:** Right,

**Michaeleen:** and that was what I really had to learn.

**Michaeleen:** It's like how do I harness this? incredible amount of energy, incredible amount of moreness.

**Sarah:** Yeah. It's funny. I just had this jolt of a thought. Like I often, when I'm coaching parents, I'm often like, look, all of the things that are going to make your kid an amazing, successful, happy adult, all of the traits that they have make it a lot harder to parent them when they're little.

**Sarah:** Yes. But I think that's in our culture.

**Speaker 3:** That's what I was just going to say,

**Sarah:** I think that's culturally specific in terms of those traits are seen as difficult and annoying for children the way that our mainstream culture raises children.

**Michaeleen:** I think that's exactly right. I think that's exactly right.

**Michaeleen:** And and I think the things that we do actually make it much worse.

**Michaeleen:** That [00:44:00] it just antagonizes it. And again, like the perception of it, right? This is hard. This is a hard child. You're creating a hard

child, right? And yeah, it's very culturally specific. And I've never thought of that question of like, where we would be right now.

**Michaeleen:** I can't even imagine. It's funny because my husband About six months into writing the book he started like saying like we can't go back my queen we can never go back to because it was just really like a struggle day in day out an hour after hour with her and I mean it was Incredibly my Our fault.

**Michaeleen:** Like we just really didn't know how to handle her. And after we were up in the Arctic, the last day, Elizabeth to give me out the interpreter and one of the main moms that's in that section, she said to me, she's you really know how to handle her better now. Yeah. And it was only two weeks. Like it wasn't like, a long parenting.

**Michaeleen:** It really is amazing what those women taught me up there and the men too. The dads too were really pivotable, pivotal, really changed [00:45:00] the way I treated Rosie and had these incredible repercussions so that when we went to Tanzania after that trip, like things got, she was so good. And she became this incredible traveler and our relationship improved so much really just from these two weeks.

**Michaeleen:** What it seemed like to me and reading the book was that

**Sarah:** when you, that time you spent in the Arctic changed your mindset.

**Michaeleen:** It did. And that perspective of like her motivations, and it also made me realize that I was coming at tantrums and her misbehavior like in completely the wrong way. So I was coming at it with a lot of energy.

**Michaeleen:** Like even if it was, really well intended and pleasant and positive are you okay? What's wrong? Can I help you? It was still this incredible intensity, right? And what Elizabeth and the other moms up there and dads who were doing was like, They, the opposite, they were coming at, they weren't leaving her and ignoring her, but they were coming at her with this incredible calmness, right?

**Michaeleen:** Yeah, just very slow motion. Quiet voice.

**Sarah:** You know what they were doing? I've been doing some [00:46:00] like kind of professional development about learning about the nervous system and that's what they were doing is that they were like bringing their calm of their

nervous system to the child, which is what we need to do because our nervous systems are always.

**Sarah:** Yeah. It's talking to each other's nervous systems. And when you bring energy, your child will be, their nervous system will be reacting to that energy. Interesting. And they can't calm down.

**Michaeleen:** So our nervous systems like communicate with each other. It's called noception.

**Sarah:** Yeah. So our nervous systems are always looking for cues of safety or danger with in our environment, within our bodies and inter, with each other.

**Sarah:** Personally. And so parents like angry energy would be a cue of danger for a child whose nervous system is already hijacked, right? Because they're upset. And so that's gonna just escalate it. But if your nervous system is bringing cues of safety of calm and compassion, then that helps the child can like literally borrow your calm to calm themselves down.

**Michaeleen:** Yeah, because it's interesting even when I'm not angry, or wasn't angry, it was just the still high energy. It was still just [00:47:00] this like intensity because I wanted her to stop and but the crazy thing is once I learned this technique of like just being calm, it took a while. It took me a couple months of really to do it regularly, but even just like right after the trip, like Rosie's tantrums, like totally almost went away completely.

**Michaeleen:** It was amazing how, how it trained her to do it herself, which I was very surprised by. This wasn't just like a one off. It was like a long term change in her. That's so interesting. I want to do a story about it because it really aligns with what I saw, like everywhere.

**Michaeleen:** The parents just stayed, no matter what was happening, like what chaos was in front of them, it was just this incredible calmness and stillness. And you could see by the time the kids were five or six, they had that already. And

**Sarah:** a great person to talk to. She was a guest on my podcast a little while ago is Mona Delahook.

**Sarah:** She has a book that just came out a couple of months ago called Brain Body Parenting where she talks all about the nervous system and where it comes in with parenting [00:48:00] using it. Polyvagal theory is the nervous

system theory that she's working from that a lot of people use in therapeutic settings, but also really helpful in parenting.

**Michaeleen:** Cool. One of the big differences. I saw between what we think of like positive parenting and what's in the book is you don't need to use words. Like you really don't, you don't need to say I know you're upset right now. I know this is you really don't at all. Like you can just be, in fact, like for Rosie, it works way better if I'm just quiet, or I just, I ask her a simple question to or I touch her, and that for her, like all these words cause I was, Like using all these words, it like, it just, they just, it stimulated her like so much more than just being there.

**Sarah:** It's about learning your child's nervous system and what is soothing to them and to some kids words might be, your empathetic words might be soothing to them and to other kids just Ramps them up even further, and you just have to be quiet.

**Michaeleen:** Yeah, I just think that we're taught to fix everything with words.

**Michaeleen:** Yeah. And I feel like [00:49:00] a lot of, even with my marriage and stuff let's talk about it. Let's like, and I think that there's just times when We need to be quiet, and that actually being quiet can like, or touch, right? There's a lot more touch I saw, like in many communities, like parents use touch as this way of encouraging right behavior, calming kids down and so it's one of the big things I think I learned is like, Okay, words are great, but a lot of times you don't need them at all and they, I think they can make things worse sometimes.

**Sarah:** Yeah, I hear you. I could talk to you all day, but let's wrap this up with the question that I ask all my podcast guests, which is, if you could go back in time to six and a half years ago, what advice would you give your younger parent self?

**Michaeleen:** I wish I would have broadened my view of parenting advice earlier, like the first year, it was like I got all my parenting advice from the main sources, Western science, books, Western books, blogs.

**Michaeleen:** And I think if I broadened that view and gotten advice from, more diverse cultures, I think our lives would have been easier, much quicker. [00:50:00] And it's one of the reasons why I wrote the book is let's see a broader view of what good parenting is and the tools that really do work with a lot of kids.

**Sarah:** I love that. Thank you. I'm so glad that you wrote this book, and I'm so glad that you did these travels and had these experience, experiences and got to share them with us. So thank you.

**Michaeleen:** Thank you. Thank you so much for having me. It's been really a pleasure. A pleasure and also really informative.

**Michaeleen:** I'm glad that I can also be informative

**Sarah:** for you, that makes me feel happy.

**Speaker 2:** Thanks for listening to this week's episode. I hope you found this conversation insightful and exactly what you needed in this moment. Be sure to subscribe to the show on your favorite podcast platform and leave us a rating and review on Apple Podcasts. Remember that I'm rooting for you. I see you out there showing up for your kids and doing the best you can.

**Speaker 2:** Sending hugs over the airwaves today. Hang in there. You've got this.