

Episode 18 Transcript

The Power of Compassion in Parenting: Nurture Yourself, Your Partner, and Your Children [Cultivating Compassion in Parenthood Series] | Episode 18

Hi there! If this is your first time here, welcome to the Parenthood and Relationship podcast. I'm your host Markella Kaplani, a psychologist, a Parenthood and Relationship coach, and a parent myself. Together we explore the transformative journey of Parenthood and its profound impact on our relationship with ourselves, our partners, and our children, so that we can be present and show up as we envision without having to do more.

Let's get into today's episode!

Welcome, everyone, to This special series designed to keep you company in the months of August that I'll be away. On the one hand, August is a month that a lot of us are going on vacation, and so I didn't want to overwhelm you, but at the same time, if you've been following me so far, and if you've been keeping your journal, we have come quite far together.

We've done a lot of work, and I wouldn't want to drop it altogether.

So, today, we're going to dive into the first episode of Cultivating Compassion in Parenthood; nurturing yourself, your partner, and your children.

This series is all about understanding compassion in the context of parenthood; exploring how compassion can transform the way that we relate to ourselves, to our partners, and our children.

I wanted the focus to be on compassion because that is what is at the basis of everything that we say and do here.

So let's get comfortable, grab a cup of coffee or tea, and chat.

You know, I'll never forget the moment I truly realized the power of compassion in parenting. I was having one of those days where, you know, nothing seemed to be

going right. My son was cranky. I was cranky. I was running on fumes. It probably started with me. And then out of nowhere, my little one comes up and hugs my leg and says,

"Mommy, are you grumpy today?" And I turned to him and I say, "You know what? I am. I'm sorry. I was a bit snappy with you earlier."

And with such great understanding and compassion in his eyes, he turns to me and says,

"That's okay. I forgive you. But why?"

It was such a simple act of kindness, and it was so caring, even the "but why;" it wasn't at all judgmental. He was caringly asking me to understand what was wrong, and it made me pause and think about how much we all need a little bit of compassion, especially in the chaotic world of parenting.

Let's start with the basics though.

What exactly is compassion? At its core, compassion is about recognizing someone else's suffering and feeling motivated to help alleviate it. It's not about just feeling empathy. Empathy is part of it, but it's not just that. It's also about taking action to support and comfort others.

Compassion involves understanding and kindness. It's the difference between seeing someone struggle and saying, Oh, that must be so hard for you. And actually also stepping in to offer help.

In the context of parenthood, this means being attuned to the needs and struggles of our family members and responding with patience and love.

But it's not just that. Let's go a layer deeper. Compassion is also about connection. It's about realizing that we're all in this together. That everyone struggles and that we can support each other through those struggles. It's about seeing the humanity in each other, especially in our children and our partners.

Now, why am I bringing compassion into parenthood? Why is compassion so important in the realm of parenthood? Well, it's got a profound impact on our mental health and well being. When we practice compassion, we create a nurturing environment where we

as parents and as partners, as well as in the way that we relate to our children, we feel valued. and understood. Compassion also strengthens our relationships when we approach other people with kindness and with understanding that fosters a sense of security and trust. This makes it easier to navigate the inevitable challenges of parenting, the inevitable arguments and disagreements and tensions that are going to be there.

you know, a lot of times, when parents or couples come to me concerned about their relationship with their partner or the way that their relationship with their children is going, a lot of what it comes down to has to do with a lack of trust in the intention of the other person.

So if it's been a while that My partner has been critical.

Then even if they try really hard to convince me otherwise, even if they're really making a true effort and they're not being critical, anything they say is filtered through that fear of mine that this is still going on, that they're still criticizing me and maybe they're not doing it so obviously, or maybe they're not doing it at all, obviously, but I believe deep inside that that is how they're thinking. And so what it comes down to is how can we rebuild the trust that the intention is good.

The same thing could happen with children. So I'm going to bring an example from children that I worked with on an emotional and academic setting as a special educator. Sometimes, in our best intention to help them not feel bad about something, we might lie or we might, uh, over-congratulate on things that are very simple and, you know, children are very smart and intuitive and they understand that if you are clapping and cheering just because they cleaned their room, when it is something that they know is expected of them and of kids their age, they're going to understand that you're overcompensating for something. They're going to start to believe that your expectations of them are really low.

So, In the future, when they might seem like they are down and you might try to lift them up, you might be being completely honest and transparent with your feelings. They may no longer trust that this is how you feel.

They may think, she's my mom, he's my dad. The reason why they're saying all these kinds of things is because they are my parents. They've done this before. They tell me all these nice things, but I deserve only half of them.

And so again, in this example, we see that there is a filter, I no longer feel secure. I no longer trust that this is what's truly happening.

Part of responding with compassion, therefore, is also being authentic and true to what is actually happening. Not invalidating someone's feelings in that moment, but rather, sitting with them and finding ways to help them deal with it, if that's what they want.

Compassion can diffuse tension, it can build resilience, and it can create a more harmonious home environment overall, where we all trust one another for our intention to be there to support and not to minimize or not to ignore or not to judge and criticize.

Let's talk about some real life examples. So, imagine you're having a tough day and your partner notices. Instead of brushing it off, compassion would be that they sit down with you, they listen to your frustrations, there's no judgment whatsoever, and they offer to take some of your tasks so that you can have a break.

That is compassion. Maybe your issue is not that you're overworked, but the fact that they're offering to take over some of the practical stuff that you've got on your plate so that you can have a moment to sit with yourself, to relax, to take a breath, that is compassion.

Or consider a situation with your child. They're struggling with homework. They're getting really frustrated with themselves and with the activity. Instead of getting impatient, you sit down with them. You offer gentle guidance and you remind them that it's okay to make mistakes. It's okay to find things difficult.

You reassure them that you're there to help them through it. That is compassion.

Another example could be if your teenager is going through a really tough time at school in terms of peer pressure or academic stress or just general challenges of growing up and developing into their full grown up adult identity instead of dismissing their feelings or offering quick solutions. Compassion is taking time to listen, to validate, to let them know that you're there no matter what.

This kind of compassionate support can make a huge difference in their ability to cope with stress and to build resilience and to trust in you. Now, let's get into some practical

tips for developing compassion in everyday life because We all have the intention of being compassionate, and we all have the capacity.

If you haven't been as compassionate as you would want, there's nothing wrong with you. You are able to be compassionate, but there are things that get in the way.

The number one thing, is past trauma that has led us to be very critical of ourselves. And so when we can't be compassionate with ourselves, we cannot really show up as truly compassionate for anyone else, as much as we may try, and as much as we may be able to get away with it .

So, Are there things that we can do? Of course there are.

There are things that we can do that can prime us to be more able to bring forth the compassion that we want to lead with. One is, of course, gratitude journaling. You can take a few minutes each day to write things down that you're grateful for. This will help you shift your focus from stress to appreciation. And that in itself will foster a more compassionate mindset.

Then, there's mindfulness. When we practice being present in the moment- it can be something like as simple as taking a few deep breaths- we notice the sensations around us. We let go of distractions. And so we become more attuned to our needs, and to the needs of others.

And now going into compassion for others. When your partner or child is talking to you, give them your full attention, put away distractions, make eye contact, and really listen to what they're saying.

Small gestures can make a big difference as well. Whether it's leaving a note of encouragement for your partner, or spending some extra time with your child, these acts show that you care. Compassion can be particularly important and powerful in times of conflict.

When a disagreement arises, it's very easy to get defensive, to be reactive, but approaching conflicts with a compassionate mindset can truly just transform the outcome. Instead of focusing on winning the argument, which is. the natural and

automatic response that many of us will have initially, we are going to get much better results if we try to understand the other person's perspective and to find common ground. For example, if you and your partner are arguing about household responsibilities, take a step back and consider their point of view.

Maybe they're feeling overwhelmed at work, or perhaps they're dealing with their own stressors. Now, while you may still need and want more help, acknowledging their struggles and expressing your feelings without blaming them, it can help them lower their defenses, and then you can work together to find a solution that works best for both of you.

I know it may seem counterintuitive. If your partner is complaining that they are so overwhelmed with work that when they come at home, they can't contribute and they think it's absurd that you are even asking them to do extra stuff at home because they have been at work all day and they tell you about all the stress that they go through both practically and psychologically.

It might seem counterintuitive to be compassionate and to be understanding and to not judge them. It might seem like if you look at them with contempt or even speak to them with judgment and imply that they're lazy or they're weak or come forward with all the things you have to deal with and you just suck it up and you do it, so why don't they? It might almost seem like, okay, if I get them angry enough, they'll want to prove themselves and so I'll use this method.

It might seem like if you offer them understanding that they will feel even more okay to relinquish their responsibility of showing up at home and helping. But it's actually the other way around, even though it doesn't seem so. If I am feeling so overwhelmed, and then I am met with lack of understanding, I am going to be resentful and resentment is one of those emotions that depletes my energy.

And so I'm not going to call it negative because I'm not a fan of calling emotions positive or negative. All emotions are alerts and they tell us something. But resentment is one of those that will put my mind into very high alert and so will deplete all my energy. And when you're asking me to do extra work to help you, but I'm feeling resentment because of the way that you asked me, because of the way that you made me feel, even though I may want to help you because I love you or because I want you to just shush,

I will probably not be able to do it. Maybe I'll do it today, but I'm not going to do it tomorrow. I don't have the energy, I don't have the capacity, and frankly, I don't have the will because that wasn't very nice, the way that I felt in this situation. What compassion will do there instead is that it will help me

lower my defenses. I will feel okay in this conversation. I will probably even feel held in this conversation when I see you being able to understand the stress and the overwhelm. When I don't feel judged. And I feel like you are embracing me in this. This type of emotion is the kind that will give me more energy and it will lower my defenses. We humans mirror each other's feelings.

And so when you were able to give me compassion, when you're able to understand me and my pain, I am doing the same for you very subconsciously. I am going to be able to see your pain as well now. Now I'm not feeling any resentment. I am not being defensive. I am not trying to prove that I have it worse.

Now I'm feeling, "wow. They get me."

And by the law of reciprocity, I am bound to want to do the same for you. I'm going to be able to look at you and say, " they really understand and they put themselves in my shoes.

What about them? Wow, they're right. It is a lot that they're carrying. Okay, how can we find a middle ground? How can I pick up something, that yes, will add to the things that I do and already overwhelm me, but it will give me a sense of purpose and meaning because I want to help you. And so it will fulfill me in a different way.

But I do want to go back before we finish this episode to self compassion. Parenting is really hard work and it's easy to be your own worst critic. However, It is crucial to treat yourself with the same kindness and understanding that you try to offer to others that you do offer to others. When you make a mistake or you feel like you're falling short, remind yourself that you're human and that it's okay to have bad days.

Celebrate your efforts, your achievements, no matter how small they may seem. Remember that you're doing an incredible job, even if it doesn't feel like it.

Take your journal and write down something that you did today that was a proud parenting moment or something that was compassionate toward yourself or someone else.

So that you can start to notice those positive and beautiful things that happen throughout the day.

Our brain has the tendency, it's its natural tendency, to focus on the negatives. Retrain it so that it can start to focus on the positives as well.

To wrap up, Compassion is a powerful tool that can transform our relationships and our experience of parenthood.

By practicing compassion toward ourselves, toward others, we create a nurturing, supportive environment where everyone can thrive.

Next time, we're going to take an even deeper dive into self compassion and how we can be compassionate toward ourselves as parents. As I say, a lot of times, being a parent is a journey and every step we take towards compassion makes that journey just a little bit easier and a lot more fulfilling.

Thank you so much for joining me today. If you've enjoyed this episode, please share it with other parents who might benefit from it. And don't forget to tune in to our next episode on practicing self compassion. Until then, take care and be kind to yourself.

You're doing an amazing job.