

## Ep #15: Shitty Advice I Gave You as a Pediatrician



Full Episode Transcript

With Your Host

Melissa Parsons

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Hey, this is Melissa Parsons, and you are listening to the *Your Favorite You Podcast*. I'm a certified life coach with an advanced certification in deep dive coaching. The purpose of this podcast is to help brilliant women like you with beautiful brains create the life you've been dreaming of with intention.

Oh hi. Welcome back to *Your Favorite You* episode number 15. What? So fun to put this out for you guys every week. Thank you to everyone who's been listening and sharing with your friends. It really means the world to me. So thank you from the bottom of my heart.

I would love it if, now that you've listened to several episodes and have a feel for what the podcast is like, I would love it if you would take a minute or two to review the podcast on Apple Podcasts. It is pretty easy to do, and it helps other people find the podcast and will help keep me and *Your Favorite You* in the top 2% globally, which I think is so fun.

Okay, on to what we're talking about today. If you are just listening to the podcast for the first time, I am Melissa Parsons. I am a pediatrician turned life coach, and I was a pediatrician for 22 years prior to retiring in 2021 to pursue coaching as a full-time career.

I have been coaching women to become their favorite versions of themselves since 2020. I have learned so much since becoming a coach about trauma, about how connection is a human imperative, about how much our early growth and development affects who we are as people and who we become.

So, if I was your pediatrician in the past and you're listening to this, hi, thanks for being here. Tell the kids I said hi. But you know that I was a straight shooter as a physician. I typically did not mince words. I tried to share best practices in terms of child rearing, knowing that these sometimes changed over time, and I definitely tried to practice evidence-based medicine when dealing with your child's physical and mental health.

I was definitely not afraid to admit when I was in over my head. I wasn't afraid to call one of my colleagues who was in specialty practice or one of

## **Ep #15: Shitty Advice I Gave You as a Pediatrician**

my colleagues in the office. One of my partners in for a second or a third set of eyes if the problem we were facing was not immediately clear. I was also quite opinionated about how to do a lot of the things that had nothing to do with the actual medical care of your kiddos.

Things like dealing with behavior issues, feeding your child, and sleep training your child. So, this episode is about what I would tell you to do differently if I was still your pediatrician today. Some of these things will be vastly different from what I told you in the office, and have likely not done any irreparable harm, but I do want you to know that my stance on several of these things has changed as I have learned from other coaches, from parenting experts and from psychologists.

So, let's dive in. This first one is going to piss some people off. So, let's just go there. We're talking about sleep training. When I was in practice, I was a huge advocate of the cry it out method. And while it worked very well for so many of my families, some of them really struggled with it, I would not be such a staunch advocate for it anymore.

I've learned that although your baby does not have any explicit memory of crying for hours, so when they're seven they don't remember. Or when they're 12, they don't remember crying for hours. They may have the ability to have a felt sense or implicit memory of not having their need to be picked up by a loving caregiver met.

I recognize that many of the exhausted parents who I was also taking care of as a pediatrician, I recognize how their lives were saved by letting the baby cry and getting better sleep. And this is a case where you have to keep in mind the physical and mental health of the parent who's likely exhausted and balance it with the need, the physical touch needs of the infant.

I would now help parents get creative to try to find the middle ground between getting adequate sleep for themselves while at the same time not allowing their baby to cry for hours at a time. I just would not have such a hard-line approach to this anymore, and I want to applaud the parents who could not or would not abide by this method.

## Ep #15: Shitty Advice I Gave You as a Pediatrician

That I was preaching for following their own inner knowing that this was not something that they could subscribe to. I would continue to make the argument that parents can connect with their child during the waking hours of the day to help form a secure attachment with their baby while still allowing them to fuss and self-sooth for shorter periods of time to help them learn to fall asleep on their own.

And I certainly would not proudly share the fact that Jon and I let Jack cry for four and a half hours one night while we were sleep training him, even though it worked pretty well to get him to sleep through the night.

Okay. I know I just rocked your world with that one. Onto the next big thing that I would actually do more of ...

If I sensed that a parent was struggling with anxiety, or depression, or perfectionism, or comparing themselves to other perfect parents on Instagram. Spoiler alert, they don't exist. I would have spoken up much more about the parents seeking help for themselves to manage their nervous system.

Your child's body remembers what it cannot yet articulate. These memories are encoded as the implicit memories I spoke of just now when I was talking about sleep training. So be mindful of your mood, your actions of taking care of yourself during pregnancy and in the early years of your child's life. It would've been more insistent that parents take care of their own needs first to heal their wounds.

Will Joel Friedman is a PhD psychologist. He's been a PhD psychologist for nearly as long as I've been alive. He said in a recent article that he wrote about the greatest gift you can give your child, not to mention the greatest gift you can give yourself. He said, "simply put, the greatest gift any parent can bestow upon their children is to be a happy, fulfilled, whole person in their own right."

Think about that. I'm going to repeat it. "Simply put, the greatest gift any parent can bestow upon their children is to be a happy, fulfilled, whole person in their own right."

## Ep #15: Shitty Advice I Gave You as a Pediatrician

Laura Markham is another PhD psychologist that I've been following for at least the past 10 years. You might recognize her name if you were my patient, because I recommended her book and her website, [ahaparenting.com](http://ahaparenting.com) to so many parents in practice.

She wrote an article in Psychology Today, back about five years ago and started the article with this quote from the Father Guide. It states, "it's as if my children are awakening in me repressed, hurts and fears that I don't wish to feel. It's far easier to detach, fix, coerce, manage, or abandon than it is to simply be present."

However, if I'm not willing to own my fears and emotions, my children must continue to act them out on my behalf. While at times it's a tough pill to swallow, the more I accept the above to be true, the more harmony and joy fills our family. So, our kids are actually put here to awaken our repressed hurts and fears.

They're there to help us not detach, to not try to fix them or us necessarily, to not try to coerce or manage them into being something that we can handle and certainly to not abandon ship.

So, the key is to try to heal ourselves enough so that we can be present with ourselves and our big emotions and with our kids and their big emotions.

And knowing that if we're not willing to own our fears and emotions, our kids are going to be a mirror and they're going to act out. So much so that it shows us what it is we need to heal, and then once we accept that and do the work of healing, the more harmony and joy can fill your life and fill your family's life.

So, I'm not suggesting that you go out and have children to try to figure out what you need to heal. That would be asinine and unfair, really to all parties involved. But I am suggesting that you use what comes up for you when you're parenting your kids as touchpoints or as a guide to what still needs healed inside of you?

## Ep #15: Shitty Advice I Gave You as a Pediatrician

And then with the help of a therapist or a coach, me, if you choose, you get to work at healing yourself. It sounds scary, but it is the best work you can do and such a gift to give to yourself and to your kids. Okay, onto the next thing I would do far fewer workups on chronic headache and chronic abdominal pain.

Knowing what I know now about how linked these two problems are to anxiety, I would do far for your workups, and as soon as I started the workup, if I felt it was necessary, I would also immediately suggest that the child and maybe sometimes the entire family, depending on the situation, start seeking care from either a therapist or a coach, or maybe both.

Again, depending on the situation, I definitely did this some when I was in practice, but I assure you I would do it even more now. And when parents said to me like they used to when I suggested this in the past as part of the healing process, you mean it's all in her or his head? I would say "no, no, no."

The brain and the belly and the entire body are linked together in this beautiful concert to try to keep us safe, and when we don't feel safe, for whatever reason, the body will start to keep the score and it will manifest in so many ways. Belly pain, diarrhea, constipation, chronic headaches, panic attacks, obsessive thoughts, sometimes compulsive behaviors. It's fascinating the kids and the adults that deal with these similar issues that I just gave you some examples of above, are not making anything up for attention.

The body is just trying to clue us in to get them the help that they need, and it will get louder and louder until we take action to solve the problem.

Okay, another example of something where I would take the complete opposite approach and give you less shitty advice. I would not tell parents that they need to be on the same page in order to raise their children. Well, this is coupled with not needing to make anything fair amongst siblings. Mom and dad both have different personalities, or mom and mom or dad and dad, whatever combination. You know, I don't care. And I think it's all beautiful.

## Ep #15: Shitty Advice I Gave You as a Pediatrician

So, both parents have different personalities. Different ways of dealing with things, different levels of tolerance for behavior, and if you have more than one child, each one of them is different too. Believe me when I tell you that mine are vastly different and I love them both for their differences, and Jon and I are similar in some ways and different in others.

So why would we expect to always be on the same page about much of anything? But this is what I used to counsel parents in the office to do. It went something like, “you guys need to be on the same page. If Paisley gets one answer from you and another answer from her dad, she will be confused. And if Corbin sees you as the softie and dad is the disciplinarian, he's going to manipulate the situation to get what he wants.”

I'm sorry if I ever gave you this bullshit. You get to have a relationship with each of your children that is different from their other parent's relationship with them. You get to have one relationship with your first child that is different from your relationship with your second or third or seventh.

It's not confusing. It's also okay for you to be lenient on some things and strict on others. You can definitely set up boundaries when they're young to keep them, but you really have very little control over them once they can wipe their own butts. Most of us are looking for connection with our kids, which actually feels so much better than control.

And like I stated earlier, if you have done, or are doing the work to heal your old wounds and traumas, we all have them. Whether we like it or not, this will go so much better for you.

Okay, onto the next thing ... I would tell parents to watch the stories that they are telling themselves about themselves. I would also tell them to watch the stories they are telling their children about their children, meaning watch which stories you tell Nick about Nick.

The stories that we tell ourselves about ourselves become our beliefs. Many of the stories that we tell our children about them at a young age become their core belief. The best example for this that I saw in the office



## **Ep #15: Shitty Advice I Gave You as a Pediatrician**

time and time again was the parent who was thinking that their child should talk to me immediately upon asking the child a question.

If the child didn't respond, the parent would say something like, he's shy, or she's my shy one. I'm not knocking the parents because they were likely dealing with their discomfort about a story that they were likely told growing up. Something like, be respectful when an adult talks to you and answer so they can hear you. Or a thought like, "I must be respectful to adults at all times."

If we refer to our kiddo as shy or the shy one, they will take on that moniker and that personality trait, even if they're not shy. So, watch the stories you tell, he's my wild one, or she's the smart one, or you are so disrespectful.

Over time, if the kiddos hear this enough, it becomes one of their core beliefs they have about themselves, and likely it will become the subconscious way that they act, kind of like a self-fulfilling prophecy. The good news is that part of my job now is helping adults discover their core beliefs about themselves. Figuring out where these beliefs came from and deciding if this is something that they still want to continue to believe about themselves. So, all is not lost people.

And if you're feeling shame right now about offering your child beliefs about themselves that you don't want them to have, it's okay. Feel some compassion for yourself and now that you know better, you can try to do better. That's what this life is all about. Okay, the next thing I used to ask kids every time they came in for their well visit, what they wanted to do when they grew up. What they wanted to be.

I wouldn't ask this question anymore. It doesn't matter. And it perpetuates the idea that our worth is based in what we do in the world. I want to blow that out of the water. So instead, I would ask them who they want to be. I would put much less emphasis on the what and put way more emphasis on the who, the who is all that matters.



## **Ep #15: Shitty Advice I Gave You as a Pediatrician**

Okay, we're almost done with the things I would do differently as your pediatrician. Only two more things, but I reserve the right to add to this list as brilliant ideas come to me.

The next topic is tantrums. I would normalize tantrums even more than I did in the office. I would tell parents that kids having their tantrums and showing all of their emotions actually have it right, that I am constantly trying to get the adult women that I take care of now as their coach to show their emotions and to feel their emotions instead of keeping them all inside.

I would point out that all behavior that our kids display is just a bid for connection, and that connection is the key to having fewer epic hours long tantrums. I apologize again for telling you in the office to ignore your child's tantrums. That was fucked up advice. You might be having a tantrum right now listening to.

I know I had a tantrum when I realized how many of you I had given this terrible advice to in the past. Our job as parents is not to make the tantrum stop. Our job is to handle all of our big emotions that come up when our child is having the tantrum.

Our job is to sit with them or be with them when they're happening and say, I know where you are right now, and I am with you. I know where you are right now, and I am with you. You say, I know where you are right now because it's true. You do know what it feels like to be sad, angry, disappointed, exhausted, confused. You do know and you say, I am with you, so that your child does not feel alone or abandoned in the midst of having these big feelings.

We want our kids to know that we can handle whatever comes up, that we will keep them safe, that we can stay with them and take deep breaths ourselves and show them love and empathy and compassion, and give ourselves love and empathy and compassion for all that gets brought up, and us as the child has the tantrum.

Now, I know a lot of you are thinking, "what the fuck, Melissa? I do not have time for that." I'm telling you, you don't have time not to try this. Try it for a

## Ep #15: Shitty Advice I Gave You as a Pediatrician

few weeks or a few months and watch the tantrums dissipate for them and for you. You're welcome. The final thing that I would like to share with you at this point is the best news ever.

According to research, in order to have a healthy relationship with your kids, you only need to get it right with them about 33% of the time. The other 67% is what we call rupture and repair. We fuck it up, we realize it, and if we're healed enough, we apologize and repair. This makes our relationship with our kids even stronger.

Did you hear me? We only have to get it right, including all the stuff I just now in this podcast, about a third of the time, the other two thirds of the time, we're going to mess it up and everyone is still going to be okay if we take the time to repair it. The repair does not have to be immediate. It can happen even years later.

Just like I told Jack that I got it wrong when I told him, "Parsons, do extra credit," we will link to that episode in the show notes. A future episode is going to be about all the things I did in my practice that I would double down on now, so you have that to look forward to.

The first thing I can think of that I'll share right now is that you are doing a great job as a parent. You are doing a great job as a parent and as a human. I'll say it one more time. You are doing a great job as a human.

Thank you so much for coming back here week after week. We just crossed 5,000 downloads of *Your Favorite You*, and the wee hours of the morning today, and I'm so grateful to all of you out there listening.

See you next week.

If you like what you're hearing so far, and you think others would benefit from *Your Favorite You*, it would be epic if you could take a couple of minutes to rate and review the podcast. Ratings and reviews are the best way to make a podcast discoverable. I'd love it if you'd give me your honest opinion, especially if you adore me, and of course, a five-star review would be fantastic.

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## **Ep #15: Shitty Advice I Gave You as a Pediatrician**

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Thank you for listening to this week's episode of Your Favorite You.

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I, so look forward to meeting you.