Anglicare - ParentZone Pods

Transcript of series 1

Episode 1: Family meetings

Laurie Arrowsmith 0:09

Welcome to ParentZone Pods at Anglicare Victoria, we've been working with parents to support their experience for over 20 years. Parenting is the toughest and most important job you'll ever have. Hi, I'm Lorie and with me as Anita

Anita Weber

Hi Laurie!

Laurie Arrowsmith

And we appear in group facilitators at ParentZone. We're recording at the Packenham ParentZone hub. And today we've got lots of birds outside so you might hear them through the episode. This podcast reflects our work with parents and the many conversations we've had over the years.

ParentZone acknowledges and pays our respect to the traditional custodians of this land we are recording on today, both the Wurundjeri and the Bunwoorong people of the Kulin nations. We also pay our respects to elder's past, present, and future.

In this episode, we're going to talk about family meetings and problem solving and how we can use family meetings to connect with our family in a positive way.

Anita Weber 1:07

So Laurie, I've never had a family meeting, can you tell me more about them?

Laurie Arrowsmith 1:11

We usually have family meetings once a week, possibly once a fortnight. And it's really just an opportunity for everybody in the family to get their voice heard. You know, there's different things that we talk about during the week that perhaps have upset certain members of the family, that we really want to get solutions for. We also use it for fun, so that we can come together and connect and do things together.

Anita Weber 1:34

Oh, wow. So, who brings the issues to the meeting?

Laurie Arrowsmith 1:37

So all of us have an equal voice. And we all have an opportunity to bring any issues or concerns that we have. For instance, last week, my little nine year old was upset because she couldn't find any food to feed her guinea pigs, because nobody was putting it on the shelf that she could reach. So she hadn't even told anyone this but was even just a small thing like that, that she had a space to be able to open up. Or my 12 year old who was saying that she was having regular fights with some of her friends at school. And she wanted to know what my husband and I thought about that, and what she could say in response. So it just made it a bit of a format for us to be able to discuss things.

Anita Weber 2:13

So you only get together to discuss those issues.

Laurie Arrowsmith 2:16

So we use this as a special connecting moment. So what I do is we have movies on that night as well. And we get takeaway. So what we actually do, okay, tonight's our family meeting night, let's get together and discuss things that we need to discuss. Let's talk about our family holiday coming up. And perhaps what we want to do, because different people want to do different things. And then also, let's eat our takeaway and watch a movie together afterwards. So it's a nice positive experience for everybody.

Anita Weber 2:43

And it sounds like you've got this well established routine. How do we go about starting that?

Laurie Arrowsmith 2:47

Yeah, good question. So I guess it can be challenging depending on how you phrase it to your children. Because if you've been in a pattern of it's always been us that tell them what to do, then we want to flip it to say we all have equal say in this family, we all want to be able to have the opportunity to bring things up when they're bugging us. You know, certain things that mom or dad might be doing that are bugging us. So it's kind of in your delivery of how you talk about it. So let's get together as a family and discuss these issues. We even write them down. So my daughter will say, okay, this is the sort of thing that's been, you know, maybe upsetting me or something I'm looking forward to be write them down.

Anita Weber 3:25

So you have like an agenda? Is that something that's contributed to during the week or on the fridge or something, in a prominent place?

Laurie Arrowsmith 3:33

We have a whiteboard on the wall. And I mean, obviously, we can bring things up whenever they like, but if it's something they feel can wait to the meeting, then they'll put it up on the board.

Anita Weber 3:40

I was gonna ask about that. You don't only talk about them at the meetings but throughout the week anyway. But yeah, this is a more formalized process. Back to how you set that up. How did your kids react when you initiated it?

Laurie Arrowsmith 3:52

They're a bit apprehensive at first, because they didn't really know what to expect. But once we made it very clear that what they had to say was really important, and that we wanted to get solutions for them, then it became a really positive thing. So I think it's really important that when we set it up, we have to let them know that this is an opportunity for us to work things out together to get your needs met, to get our needs met, to come to solutions together.

Anita Weber 4:15

Yeah. So what kind of topics do you talk about?

Laurie Arrowsmith 4:18

We often talk about, funnily enough, my daughter's fight a lot. There's a lot of sibling rivalry going on at the moment. So they like to come together with us and work it out in a forum where it's not just the two of them, where it's Mum and Dad as well. Okay, these are the sort of things that might be upsetting you like for instance, my nine year old keeps harassing my 12 year old and knocking on her door constantly when she's watching the show, because she wants her attention. But because her sister so much older than her, she doesn't want to play those those games so, so we sit down and we work it out. Okay, so what's my 12 year olds needs? Her needs are that she wants to sit and talk to her friends on the phone. My nine year olds needs that she wants some sort of connection with her sister. Okay, cool. So then how do we work through that? So then we might sit down and say that the 12 year old, are there any other ways that we can spend some time with your sister that you find enjoyable as well? So it just kind of opens up that communication and that problem solving.

Anita Weber 5:13

So as a parent, do you feel like you're giving up some of the power that we have.

Laurie Arrowsmith 5:17

So this is very much a power with approach. It's about all of us getting our needs met, not just us as parents. I think sometimes when we have this power over approach, we sort of get our own needs met and don't think also about our children. So it's more about power with, how can we work together? So I don't believe we're giving up power, we're just working more as a team.

Anita Weber 5:37

Yeah. sharing the responsibility and sharing the the solution making. That's right. Because obviously, you guys are there as parents, have you found that it's lead to them solving some of those problems and issues on their own?

Laurie Arrowsmith 5:49

Definitely, yes. So because they've been, they've learned sort of the process that we go through, then they often I can hear them in the TV room negotiating and talking through the issues better than they would have done if we hadn't had that sort of sort of more formal format.

Anita Weber 6:05

Yeah. So initially, you're helping them to understand that their voice is heard being heard, and their needs are being met. And now you're sort of moved on to them strategizing with you in regards to having those needs met on their own, and then taking responsibility for their own issues. And helping devise solutions with you.

Laurie Arrowsmith 6:25

Absolutely. So it has that real knock on effect.

Anita Weber 6:28

So if we were to get to the nitty gritty, take me through an actual meeting, what might occur?

Laurie Arrowsmith 6:34

Okay, so we'll sit down, and we'll go through what's on the whiteboard. And we'll ask if anybody's got anything to add to that. We've actually got a family meetings book that we write, and we will go through every single thing on that agenda, you know, and we'll discuss it in detail. And we'll wait until everybody's happy with that solution. If they're not, we might need to spend time to re address it in the next meeting, or the next day,

Anita Weber 6:59

Take a step back, how do you come to a solution?

Laurie Arrowsmith 7:02

So what we'll do is we'll say, Okay, so, 12 year old, what unmet needs are you having, so what's not working for you? And she'll say whatever that is, and then we'll ask your nine year old, what's not working for you? And then we'll brainstorm. So the four of us will talk about, okay, what can we do to help? And then we actually write down on a list all of our ideas, then we revisit those ideas, and we go, okay, is this one going to work? And some might say, Oh, no, that's, that's definitely not going to work for me. And so we go through them in detail and make sure that they're acceptable to everybody,

Anita Weber 7:35

Or what if they're not?

Laurie Arrowsmith 7:37

And often they're not often they are not.

Anita Weber 7:39

I'd see it been really hard to get four people to agree.

Laurie Arrowsmith 7:43

Absolutely, it can be. So sometimes that will mean we need to spend a bit more time on it. Or we try a few different strategies and say, Look, this isn't set in stone, maybe we can come back in a week and revisit it and see if it's worked or not?

Anita Weber 7:55

Yeah, so you try out a solution. And if it's not working for everybody then start again.

Laurie Arrowsmith 8:00

And to let them know that it's not set in stone, so they don't think oh, no, if I if I say yes to this, then you know, it's gonna be like this forever. No, if it's not working for you, you let us know.

Anita Weber 8:08

Come back and let us know that. Yeah. Great. What else do you do? What else?

Laurie Arrowsmith 8:12

Yeah, so we talk about things like, you know, what are we going to have for dinner for the week? For instance? That's something that we talk about. ,

Anita Weber 8:18

I'd love that every week. I'd love some help making all that planning decision and then the ingredients. Actually, I know of a mum that once recommended that they put a notice board on, you know, what meals do you want? And what ingredients do you need for teenagers? Oh, that works really well.

Laurie Arrowsmith 8:34

Yeah, yeah, that's a great idea. So with my children, we all eat different things. So we've all got different needs in that respect. Let's say one person chooses Monday, Tuesday, the next person, whatever it might be, and if one child will say, Yeah, I like that, but I don't want tomatoes on mine, you know, so we can vary it slightly, but at least we come up with a plan for that next week. I think it makes it so much easier, because often mealtimes are a struggle for parents, children will often turn up their nose to meals, but if they've been agreed beforehand, and we've made a little bit of, you know, changes perhaps if need be, it can really help.

Anita Weber 9:08

Oh, definitely. And yeah, just catering to everyone's preferences, knowing that they're going to be heard and knowing that, okay, I'll put up with the yucky meal tonight because my favorite's tomorrow night, you know, and knowing that you get that consideration. Yeah, that's a really good thing.

Laurie Arrowsmith 9:25

And the other thing we might talk about, as you know, any upcoming holidays that we've got, you know, you know, what do we want to do? Obviously, different people have different things that they want to do, you know, let's put them all down on the paper. Let's see how much they cost. Let's see what's feasible, what's not, you know, things like that. So it's really getting the children part of those decisions.

Anita Weber 9:43

And being more aware of those constraints as well. You know, as parents we often want to give our kids the world but we actually are constrained by finances and time. And other commitments, you know, and sort of providing them with the bigger picture.

Laurie Arrowsmith 9:57

And I think it's really good for them to know that. Yes, I'd love to do that too but we just don't have the money to do that. Let's think of something else that fits within our budget that we can do.

Anita Weber 10:04

So what are the benefits for your children have you found since initiating the family meetings?

Laurie Arrowsmith 10:09

Well, the benefits are that they definitely feel like they're part of the decision making process and our family. So they take more responsibility. Even things like we discussed chores for the week, you know, so for instance, when someone hasn't done a chore, then I can just say, Oh, look, remember that this week, you chose to unstack the dishwasher. So it's those gentle reminders instead of the nagging. And so those sorts of things have helped, as you said before, they've then carried it into their day to day lives, that they've learned this problem solving together. They can carry it on into school with their friends. So that's also a benefit, but also just to feel part of that family unit. And to know that they are important, too, and that their needs are also important as well as ours.

Anita Weber 10:49

Sounds fantastic. Have there been any disadvantages, do you think?

Laurie Arrowsmith 10:53

Sometimes time-wise, we can't always meet every week, you know, sometimes it might be something on. And I do find if we've slipped a couple of weeks that the conflict can start to rise again. Because we haven't been able to had a chance to talk about those things that have been irritating us perhaps. So sometimes, in setting them up, we think i Everything's fine, and we kind of let them slip, and then things can start to happen again. So I think it's really important that they're quite consistent. And they don't have to do every week, but whatever suits you and your family.

Anita Weber 11:22

Yeah. So finding that time and making sure that you are committed to it.

Laurie Arrowsmith 11:27

And we're not distracted. Yeah, there's no phones, there's no technology, we're committed to each other.

Anita Weber 11:34

They're actually sitting down and paying attention to each other.

Laurie Arrowsmith 11:37

That's right. And often we don't give our children enough of that, you know, to sit down with them their eye contact, really listen to what they have to say. And I think this is a really good format to do that.

Anita Weber 11:47

I can see the benefits for them is that sense of being heard that sense of being known and recognized.

Laurie Arrowsmith 11:53

Yeah. And that sometimes we're not going to be able to find a solution straightaway, there might be bigger. But you know, we've started that process. And we're not going to forget about it.

Anita Weber 12:00

Do you find when I'm in a parenting group, and we talk about decision making with kids, and often the way we approach things with our kids is that we might decide for them or, you know, when we're listening to their problems that we might actually come up with a solution in our head and try to impose that on them. Do you find using their family meetings, techniques, that you're more in a conversation or thing and that the children will actually come up with more solutions?

Laurie Arrowsmith 12:24

Yeah, absolutely. Giving them the opportunity to do so. And you might make that mistake and come up with a solution. But then they can come back to and say, No, I don't want to do that. You know, and so there's that they can be heard at that stage.

Anita Weber 12:36

Yeah. So I can say that it's been a really good benefit as well.

Laurie Arrowsmith 12:39

Absolutely. I think it's also a good forum for exploring what's important in the family like family values. Yeah, I think that's really important as well. So an our family a really big value was of ours is that real connection, time together, that space to be able to be a family to chill out to have fun together. That's really important for us.

Anita Weber 12:59

Yeah. Another thing that comes with values is we often we teach our children our values, but when they're teenagers, they start to choose their own. So how are you starting to see that with your 12 year old, she has very different values from you?

Laurie Arrowsmith 13:12

She's really starting to come up with things herself that are important to her that I don't necessarily value. But again, this is such a great forum for talking through those, you know, so just because I valued something doesn't mean that she's necessarily going to, so actually hearing her and understanding her.

Anita Weber 13:28

So one of the benefits is not only that they feel connected and feel like they belong to a group of people that share similar values and similar feelings. Is that as individuals, yeah, they're also seen and heard, and recognized for being who they are.

Laurie Arrowsmith 13:43

That's right. And that there's no judgement. We talk about it.

Anita Weber 13:45

Yeah, that's awesome.

Laurie Arrowsmith 13:47

In this episode, we've talked about family meetings and how they might be useful. So if you think they could work in your home, give it a try. See how you go. If you feel this is hitting home for you, and you'd like to have more information about the groups that we run at ParentZone, Google Anglicare ParentZone for more information, or check the show notes where you are listening now.

Episode 2: Dealing with anxiety

Laurie-lee Arrowsmith 0:09

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Anita Weber 0:24

Hi Laurie!

Laurie-lee Arrowsmith 0:24

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In this episode, we're going to be talking about anxiety and how we help our children manage and understand their fears and worries, or discuss where their anxiety is a bad thing. And how as parents, we can tune into their anxiety and what we can do to really help our children manage these anxious feelings. So Anita being a parent of two quite anxious children myself, I do struggle a lot with this and how to understand them and what to do to help them.

Anita Weber 1:26

Yeah anxiety is one of our most popular parenting topics. And usually parents are actually asking how do I stop my child from being afraid? How do I stop them, and get them to where they need to go off to school or bed usually, you know, they, school refusal or coming out and not going to bed on time. But it demonstrates that parents actually feel really uncomfortable with anxiety and uncomfortable with the feelings expressed by their children. And sometimes they just struggled to understand those fears, and just want help.

Laurie-lee Arrowsmith 1:56

Yeah, and I think for me, it's also a case of wanting to shut down that anxiety, because I'm not wanting them to feel that anxiety. So I try and shut it down. But I'm wondering, is anxiety a bad thing?

Anita Weber 2:08

Well, no. Anxiety is really normal, relatively predictable. And children experience it in different ways. But there's actually a general guide as children experience fears, at different ages and stages of development.

Laurie-lee Arrowsmith 2:21

And what are those common fears?

Anita Weber 2:23

Well, toddlers might feel loud noises, strangers or being separated from the parents. Preschoolers, they start to develop their imagination, so it's imaginary creatures, such as ghosts and monsters with a generalized expression of fear of the dark.

Laurie-lee Arrowsmith 2:38

Yeah, and interesting, you should say that because my daughter comes out most nights I will put her to bed and she will come out constantly throughout the night.

Anita Weber 2:45

It's a bit of the chicken or the egg. Is the difficulty sleeping causing the anxiety? Or is the anxiety causing the difficulty sleeping? But it's a really big problem. School aged children's fees are more realistic and include illness death, failing, they're developing their intelligence. So they're developing those experiences as well. So the experience of anxiety is more realistic.

Laurie-lee Arrowsmith 3:06

And what about the teen years? My daughter's about to become a teen, what have I got in store for me?

Anita Weber 3:10

Yeah, teens start to experience more social anxiety, fear of being bullied or being excluded socially, as well as that growing awareness of world issues and the impacts of things like climate change, and, you know, may join rallies and start to actually demonstrate that in more healthier ways.

Laurie-lee Arrowsmith 3:29

Yeah. And it's interesting, you said about the fear of failing because I know that's a huge one for my children. It's almost like a perfectionism that they just don't want to fail and anything that they do, which causes them a lot of anxiety. Is that quite a common scenario?

Anita Weber 3:43

Yeah, perfectionism is a sign of one of those strategies for anxious people in that they're actually avoiding failing as an attempt to avoid failure. And quite often, you know, they might revisit the work, they'll spend more time doing it, trying to get it perfect so that they don't fail. One of the things we often forget to talk about is the behaviors as well as what they're thinking but children may come to us seeking lots of reassurance they might be having temper tantrums, they might be lashing out at their brothers and sisters. But most of all, I think that is that negative thinking or catastrophizing, the situation that they facing, their interpretation of the events is quite wrong. They look for the dangers rather than the benefits.

Laurie-lee Arrowsmith 4:25

And can you give me an example of that?

Anita Weber 4:26

Well, something like maybe Mum's coming home late from work, one child might be thinking, well Mum's been in an accident and getting really anxious and get really worried and, and really afraid, extremely afraid of what's happening to Mum. Whereas another child might be thinking, well, Mum stopped off at the supermarket on the way home I wonder if she's going to bring me a treat, and there'll be really excited about Mum not being home on time. It's that same event, and it's unknown. Neither child knows what Mum's doing, but their interpretation or their self talk is actually leading to very different emotional outcomes and feelings.

Laurie-lee Arrowsmith 5:04

Right. Okay, so how do we help our children with that catastrophising?

Anita Weber 5:09

We sit down with them, and we talk to them about those fears. And when we try to get them to think more realistically, we might ask them curiosity questions such as, is that really gonna happen? Or what happened last time? Bring their thinking back to reality and what the probability of something happening or occurring actually is.

Laurie-lee Arrowsmith 5:28

I like that. So what's more likely to happen versus what they're actually thinking?

Anita Weber 5:32

Yeah. How often has Mum being like home from home from work? And what has actually occurred at those those times? Has she just been stuck in traffic? You know, what other things or what evidence is there, that she's been in an accident?

Laurie-lee Arrowsmith 5:46

Makes total sense to me. So what you're saying then, in terms of anxiety is a combination of sort of the temperament of the child? Is that right? And then versus how the parent responds to that?

Anita Weber 5:57

Yeah. A lot of parents, and we all tend to do that, because anxiety makes us feel uncomfortable dealing with their child's fees makes us feel uncomfortable, we might actually just say, Well, look, no, there's nothing to be afraid of go to bed. Or we might get angry and frustrated. Because you know, this happens night after night after night. And we just don't have a solution. But I think you know, if we actually teach our children how to manage that feeling, like all feelings, anxiety comes and goes, we can sit and feel we can talk to our child about what it feels like in their body, we can talk to our child about what strategies we can employ to reduce that feeling in our body. And we can ask them what their solution is, what do they see as something different? So your daughter who is struggling to separate at night - What's her solution to the problem?

Laurie-lee Arrowsmith 6:46

Yeah, well, exactly. And I'm thinking that because she will often come out at nighttime and constantly come out throughout the night, and I usually just put it back to bed. But I'm thinking there must be something deeper going on for her that's causing this. So yes, I'm going to start asking her these curiosity questions that you're talking about. And really getting to the point like, what is it that's making you worried? Is it that you haven't spent enough time with me today? Or is there something deeper?

Anita Weber 7:10

And look, even if it works, even if that first option works, that you've sent her back to bed, and she's fallen asleep. The fear hasn't gone away. It's still there. And it'll still present itself the next night. You haven't successfully gotten rid of it.

Laurie-lee Arrowsmith 7:23

Yes. And well, I like what you said about how anxiety does pass. And it's not something that stays forever. And I think that's really important, because often we label our children as anxious children, but they're just having an anxious moment moment, aren't they? Yep, definitely. So how was parents? Can we tune into the anxiety and our children? What are the signs and symptoms we need to look for?

Anita Weber 7:46

Every child's experience is different, I'm sure as parents we're the experts in regards to our child's behavior. So I'll throw that back to you. What is the evidence? What are the signs that you see in your anxious daughters?

Laurie-lee Arrowsmith 7:56

Yeah, good question. So with my little nine year old, I think the biggest sign for her would be a sore stomach. So often, she will complain of pains in her tummy. She's not unwell or anything like that. So it's clearly coming from a place of she's worried about something.

Anita Weber 8:11

Yeah, really common as well, as you know, headaches, trouble relaxing, sleeping, or breathing difficulties. They might even hyperventilate, if they're really afraid.

Laurie-lee Arrowsmith 8:20

Yes. Yep. Another common one I see with my children. Yeah. And what can we do as parents and for our listeners to help our children manage these anxious feelings?

Anita Weber 8:28

First of all, we need to actually just sit down, relax, and talk to our children about that, help them relax, and talk to their children about their fears. We need to find out from their perspective, what they're afraid of, you know, we might be assuming that it's a fear of being separated from us at bedtime, but it may actually be a fear of the dark. We actually need to speak to our children about those fears. And that's a very difficult thing for parents to do to actually sit with those feelings that make us so uncomfortable.

Laurie-lee Arrowsmith 8:58

It is isn't it? And it's like peeling back the onion a little bit like getting to the core problem.

Anita Weber 9:02

Yeah, yeah. Instead of thinking, well, if I ask them about this, are they going to be remembering it and their behavior is going to get worse? Am I attempting fate by opening up that conversation. And I don't believe you we are I think we actually kind of work out and problem solve with our children, how to get over those particular fears.

Laurie-lee Arrowsmith 9:21

Because as you said before, it's not something we want to avoid. It's a genuine emotion. It's just that it's how we express and what we do with it.

Anita Weber 9:28

Exactly. Right. Yep.

Laurie-lee Arrowsmith 9:30

So we've talked a lot about those developmental fears that our children can have, but what if it's more than that?

Anita Weber 9:36

So we have talked about those generalized anxieties and childhood fears that relate to development. But if you feel like your child has got extreme anxieties, and that is actually interfering with their normal life, we'd recommend that you'd speak to your GP or seek some supports from parent line, reach out or headspace.

Laurie-lee Arrowsmith 9:58

So I know we've touched on some strategies about how we can help our children when they are having these anxious feelings. Have you got any other strategies to suggest?

Anita Weber 10:07

Look, reassurance is probably the most used parental response. And that's great if it works. And it does work to some extent, but sometimes we find that we over assure, and if our kids are relying on our reassurance to actually do things, then we're actually need to find something better. And we might want to empower our children. For instance, if they're afraid of the dark, and afraid of monsters, for instance, if we empower them to give them control of the light, because quite often, a lot of us might let them go to sleep with a light on, then we'll turn it off when they're asleep. But if they wake up in the middle of the night, and we've gone to bed, the first thing they're going to do is come straight to us. And that's the behavior that we don't want to see. So if we empower them, give them a torch and talk to them about using that and how to shine lights on corners of the room that might be scaring them, then they're in control of that fear, then they know that they've got something that they can actually do. And it's also a clue for them to use their own strategies, rather than than relying on us. Sometimes to as parents, we help them avoid the situation that creates the anxiety because we don't want to deal with the behaviors.

Laurie-lee Arrowsmith 11:17

I'm guilty of that, yes.

Anita Weber 11:20

Sometimes, but what we should be doing is talking through them, showing them the strategies or teaching them strategies to help them calm themselves down. And as I said earlier, you know that more realistic thinking, you know, what's the worst thing that's going to happen? And is that so intolerable?

Laurie-lee Arrowsmith 11:37

Yes. So would you be able to help me with my daughter then? So I don't, she doesn't like sports. She's terrified of the ball, so she won't do, so usually, I pull her out. So I'm not empowering her. How do you think I could go about doing that?

Anita Weber 11:50

Well, I'd talk to the school about the kind of rolls that she might be able to do in that maybe she can look after the equipment, maybe she can be engaged in a different way if she's too afraid to join the court. Baby steps, teaching her little bits of tolerance before she's able to cope with that. And that's how we build resilience. You know, it's that sense that we can do something that we can actually achieve things on our own. And that knowledge and with those experiences, our confidence grows.

Laurie-lee Arrowsmith 12:17

So in this episode, we've discussed childhood anxiety and what it looks like in our children. We've talked about whether it's a bad thing, and how as parents, we can tune into that anxiety and really help them get through it. If you feel this is hitting home for you, and you'd like to have more information about the groups that we run at ParentZone, Google Anglicare ParentZone. For more information, or check the show notes where you are listening now.

## Episode 3: Sibling Rivalry

Laurie-lee Arrowsmith 0:00

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Hi Laurie.

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Laurie-lee Arrowsmith 0:52

In this podcast, we're going to be looking at sibling rivalry, because fights between siblings is a hot topic for parents, and certainly is in my home. Common issues that I find not sharing, hitting one another, being jealous of one another. So trying to get the parents attention over the other child. And also things like dobbing on each other, or not even wanting to be in the same room as the other sibling, you know, because I looked at them wrong, or whatever it might be. As a parent, there are some days where I am absolutely at the end of my rope with this. So what can I do? And Anita, can you help me?

Anita Weber 1:28

First of all, I think, you know, just take a breath. As parents, we often want to take responsibility for the problems in our families and for how our children behave. But first of all, we actually need to remain really calm, take a deep breath before you attempt to negotiate or navigate the conflict. And you know, make sure that you are actually not triggered so that you can think clearly and approach the situation from a problem solving angle, rather than taking on the responsibility and overriding or ordering the kids how to behave.

Laurie-lee Arrowsmith 2:02

Yeah, and I think that is a really important part, especially with me and my family is that I do get triggered straightaway. I hear that fighting and I already have my backup.

Anita Weber 2:12

Possibly because of the way that sibling fights were handled by our own parents. There's some really common parenting techniques that are still talked about a lot today. So you know, making children share. If they don't share as a parent, we come in and take it away. Obviously, you can't share this today. So nobody's going to play with it. And we put up on the fridge. Those kinds of strategies, they actually reduce the ability for our kids to sort these problems out for themselves, they then lean towards that they need us to interfere every time because we haven't helped them build the skills that they need to navigate the conflict for themselves.

Laurie-lee Arrowsmith 2:51

Yes, hence why they came running to us, you know, yelling, trying to get in there first.

Anita Weber 2:55

So as the parents, we actually need to sort of create a plan for how we're going to address it, without us being the umpire. What usually happens when we walk in the room is they'll both compete for our attention to tell us what the other person has done wrong. And, you know, if there's a clear difference between the children age difference, for instance, we always expect the older to take more responsibility, the youngest might be expressing that they've been hurt, and they gain our sympathy quicker, you know, our children have learned how to navigate that attention from us. So they've created a situation where they know how we're going to approach it. And generally, it's the one with the most dramatic story wins.

Laurie-lee Arrowsmith 3:40

So it becomes a pattern is that what you're saying?

Anita Weber 3:42

It does become a pattern. And it's not fair because both children need our attention. Both children need us to help them build the skills to navigate it. Both children have feelings about it and quite typically, we only hear one side, or we side with one child over the other. And what we're actually doing is building resentment between our children. So we're actually helping the situation to recur.

Laurie-lee Arrowsmith 4:07

So for instance, I'll go into my daughter's bedroom where they've been playing and things have, you know, gone south. How do I do this? So how do I go and not take sides? What are the sort of the key things that I need to keep in mind?

Anita Weber 4:19

First thing I might do is just stand close by and listen, see and hear what's actually happening before you go in and get these accounts from each child. So just, you know, stay close, you know, maybe you don't want to be seen just yet. But listen and see what's happening. Find out what's happening for yourself so that you don't get the stories and people creating the more dramatic story and then go in and address the feelings between the two kids. Because quite often they're getting carried away with what they might be feeling about the situation. And they're not thinking clearly they're not navigating the situation really well because, you know, they might think it's unfair or they want something that jealous, they're bored or frustrated. Whatever they're feeling, it's it's getting in the way of that relationship.

Laurie-lee Arrowsmith 5:04

Okay, so I go in there and I address their feelings. So do I ask them questions? What's the next step?

Anita Weber 5:10

You might ask them questions, you know, or you can tell them what you observed, describe what you're seeing, describe what you're hearing. So letting them know that you're actually aware of the problem. And your point of view is this, you're taking the emotion out of it. For them, you're saying, Well, I actually, I've heard that this was happening. Or I can sense that you're feeling this way, letting them know that you actually acknowledging their feelings, and you understand where they're coming from, they don't need to give you the full explanation. But what you're seeing is a problem between the two of them, that you're actually not involved in that. And you don't want to be involved in that. Because if you do, then you become the arbitrator every single time.

Laurie-lee Arrowsmith 5:54

But what if say, forinstance, my daughter has hurt the other child and, and really, really hurt her?

Anita Weber 5:59

Now you've got two children that have actually been, they're overwhelmed with big feelings. one's been hurt. And is upset. The other one is perhaps overwhelmed with whatever she's feeling. So she's lashed out. So you've actually got two children that need your help, navigating their emotions. So you don't tell one off and ignore their feelings and then tend to the one that's hurt. And I would make the decision that the one who's lashed out is probably the one that needs your attention the most. They haven't got the skill that they needed to explain to their new sibling, what was going on for them, that they've just lashed out instead. So you know, you might separate them first, give them both equal sympathy and empathy initially, and then say, let's sort that out. And let's listen to them both, you might sooth them, calm them down. Doing so is not giving them permission to behave in the way that they have it's letting them know that you care about how they feel, you're going to get to that problem, which is hitting later on, you're actually just going to calm them down first, so that you know, you can navigate and talk to them about what's happening.

Laurie-lee Arrowsmith 7:03

And I guess it would build resentment over time, if you are sort of constantly taking one child side. And if it happens to be the youngest. And we do hear that a lot, don't we, that you're the youngest that the the eldest will often say oh they got away with everything. So it's trying to stop that resentment from building up, which would make that rivalry worse, wouldn't it?

Anita Weber 7:23

Yeah, it does. It does make it worse. But the other side of it is, if you've got a child that gets overwhelmed frequently and lashes out, and you always tell them off about that, those feelings that they're feeling those overwhelm where they feel like they can't control it, you're also telling them what they're doing is wrong, that they're bad. And they feel even worse. Yeah so if you never address that, every single time, they feel like they'll never win an argument, they never get their point across that you'll never listen to them, because you're addressing their behavior, not their feelings.

Laurie-lee Arrowsmith 7:55

All right, so say I've done that I've gone in, and I've sort of address both of their feelings and sort of understood where they're coming from, is the next step to start trying to build these skills that they don't have,

Anita Weber 8:06

The very first step would be helping them repair their relationship. And that's the start of that skill building. As humans, we all make mistakes, we all make challenges, and sometimes not always, in the best way. Children, they need to learn those skills. And we overestimate how much they learn by observing. Sometimes they actually need some explicit teaching. And we actually need to guide them with that. So you know, they've been upset, we've soothed them, they calm down. Now, we actually need each child to let each other know how they felt about it. And then we also need to show our children how they can say sorry, not just the words, because we often make our kids say sorry, when they don't feel it. And we also make a child accept an apology when they don't feel it. So once again, it's another thing that breeds resentment. So yeah, we actually need to show them how can they make it up to them? If the toys been broken, how can they repair the toy? Or are they going to make a plan to save up their pocket money to replace the toy? Or if feelings are hurt, how can they show their remorse for that situation? Can they be engaged to soothe the hurt child. You know, like, I wouldn't be going in forcing apologies or forcing me to accept apologies, because that once again, increases the resentment. And sometimes we leave it at that as parents we go, oh, they said, sorry now, so that's over. It's not over. The feelings haven't been addressed, the resentments still there. And it's going to happen again and again. And the perpetrator may continue to hit and lash out because all they have to do is say sorry, without acknowledging the feelings of anyone else in the family. So we actually need to sit down and make a plan for how we're going to address that. And how are we going to teach the children the skills that they need not only to navigate that situation, but to prevent it from happening in the first place?

Laurie-lee Arrowsmith 9:55

And I'm guessing that because often kids get very upset, you know, and that takes and quite a long time to calm down, that we're probably going to sit with that for a little while first before we jump into that sort of helping them with the skills and the problem solving. Because from my experience, I know if I tried to do that way too soon, it just wouldn't work.

Anita Weber 10:14

Yeah, don't do things straightaway, give them time to calm down, give them both time to calm down. It's no good. If one's Calm down, and the other one hasn't yet. They both need to actually be calm. If they think that it's too overwhelming, if we teach them that it's okay that we can sit with them that we can help them soothe. And then after that, when everyone's calm, we might come to the table we might have a family meeting about the situation and air the grievances, and then problem solve together as a family.

Laurie-lee Arrowsmith 10:44

Exactly. And I guess the other question I had was around the behavior that they have potentially done is not really acceptable the feelings are. But say, for instance, she has scratched her sister head with sister, would it be a good idea to say, we go and we empathize. We show that we understand their feelings, but then we say something along the lines of, and it's not okay to hit.

Anita Weber 11:07

Yeah. So you know, there's, there's a few things happening there, we need to separate the child from the behavior as well. So the child's not a bad person, because they lash out and scratch or hit. They're just overwhelmed with their emotion. So we need to one separate the child from the behavior, they're not always the one that hits. We also need to separate the feelings, the emotions behind the behavior. So you know, if we just address the behavior, we're not dealing with any of the other things, the child feels bad, but if we just address the feelings, the behavior may return because there's no limits or boundaries or rules set in that regard. So there's no guidance provided in regards to how we behave when we feel a certain way. And so that's a really important aspect of it. So yeah, it's okay to feel the way that you do. And when you do feel that way, instead of hitiing, we can do this this and this. Once again, it's those skill building, providing opportunities to do things in a different way. Look, children won't explore that, unless we as parents have given them that guidance, we've actually said, there's a better way to express that there's a better way to do that.

Laurie-lee Arrowsmith 12:11

Yeah, would you like to tell your sister how you're feeling?

Anita Weber 12:15

And you know, you provide that opportunity, you practice it on a regular basis, so then it becomes a part of what happens, we need to sort of set up a system for our children to learn and grow and develop their skills in that regard.

Laurie-lee Arrowsmith 12:29

Alright, so my daughters are pretty good at sharing for the most part, but there are certain things that they refuse to share with each other. And that can cause lots of issues, you know, fighting pulling things off one another screaming, what are your thoughts about how I can approach this?

Anita Weber 12:46

I mean, I just think, why do we make children share things? It's a really tricky subject, because there is a huge expectation that children are taught to share. And they're taught to suck up the feelings about that sharing, you know, they approach other children expecting them to share.

Laurie-lee Arrowsmith 13:04

And we tell them all the time, don't we sharing is caring!

Anita Weber 13:09

The messages adults that we send to our kids, and that's, I guess, it's the first level of cooperation that we expect to see. But we ignore all of the resentment that comes with that. Sharing is not actually caring. How often do children see adults sharing their things? Not often, I don't think I'm sorry. But if the neighbour came over to my house and said he wanted to borrow my car, the answer would be no, you know, it doesn't mean I care any less about their needs, or what's going on to them. It's just, it's my car, there's not an expectation that adults share. So you know, children who have special things, they may have saved up their pocket money to buy it, they may have received it as a birthday present after it was on their wish list for months. It's something they really cherish and love. You know, we don't expect our kids to give away their Huggies or the toys that they take to bed, but we ask them to share everything else. As parents, we can actually give them some boundaries around sharing, and we can teach them what that's like to be responsible for their own things. We might have a child that typically breaks things and we might have another one that looks after them so well.

Laurie-lee Arrowsmith 14:16

Oh, yeah, that's in my house.

Anita Weber 14:21

The one that really cares about the things is afraid that the other one's going to break it. They don't want to share that item. They've got feelings about it. If we force that, and then it's broken. There's no way for them to go to talk about those feelings because we told them to do that. We expected them to do that. We ordered them to do that. They don't feel like they're going to get sympathy from us in that regard. So we're closing off that avenue for support and for them to feel like their feelings matter. And the other child that's you know, broken it, they're not invested in that item like the other person is. They just want to play with it. You know, they just want what their siblings got a bit of jealousy there maybe. And if we, if we don't teach them that they also need to have ownership of their own things, you know, maybe they don't care so much. Maybe they are really generous, you know, maybe that's just part of the nature. And that's part of who they are. But that doesn't mean we actually have to force our other child into that, you know, framework. They are who they are, and we need to accept their boundaries. And if we don't, we're teaching them their boundaries don't matter.

Laurie-lee Arrowsmith 15:32

So what about when my children are getting along? Because I don't focus on that very often.

Anita Weber 15:36

I'm sure you don't, a lot of parents, don't we feel like we're going to jinx it if we interrupt.

Laurie-lee Arrowsmith 15:41

Oh yeah. So it's like, okay, walking on eggshells don't say anything they're getting along.

Anita Weber 15:46

Yeah. Part of skill building with our children is actually letting them know that we noticed that they're using those skills that were that we see that they're doing it right, they need the feedback, they need positive feedback that they're getting it right, and they're doing the right thing. So when we do see them cooperating when we do hear them problem solving together, and working out a way to solve the conflict, we actually need to let them know we noticed, you know, they're getting along and we enjoy it.

Laurie-lee Arrowsmith 16:13

And are they noticing it, too, you know, are they actually noticing the difference?

Anita Weber 16:17

When things are going really well, as I said, we don't want to jinx it, but we actually need to let them know that we notice it. So let them know that we appreciate the efforts that they're going to cooperate. And that we notice that they're building those skills and that ability to wait their turn to share.

Laurie-lee Arrowsmith 16:33

In this podcast, we looked at sibling rivalry, and the issues that surround it for parents and children alike. We looked at how we can sort of enter the situation in a calm state. So, how we regulate ourselves first, and then how we don't take sides. We just tell them what we observe. We deal with their feelings, each child separately without becoming the referee. And then the next step is how we slowly teach them over time to build those skills so that they can do the stuff themselves. So the problem solving. If you feel this is hitting home for you, and you'd like to have more information about the groups that we run at parents own Google Anglicare parents zone for more information, or check the show notes where you are listening now.

Transcribed by https://otter.ai

## Episode 4: Getting our children to listen

Laurie-lee Arrowsmith 0:09

Welcome to ParentZone Pods at Anglicare Victoria, we've been working with parents to support their experience for over 20 years. Parenting is the toughest and most important job you'll ever have. Hi, I'm Laurie. And with me is Anita.

Anita Weber 0:24

Hi Laurie!

Laurie-lee Arrowsmith 0:25

And we appear in group facilitators at ParentZone. This podcast reflects our work with parents and the many conversations we have had over the years.

Laurie-lee Arrowsmith 0:34

ParentZone acknowledge and pay our respect to the traditional custodians of this land we are recording on today, both the Wurundjeri and the Boon wurrung people of the Kulin nations, we also pay our respects to elder's past, present, and future.

Laurie-lee Arrowsmith 0:52

In this episode, we're going to be talking about how we can get our child to listen to us. Many parents come to us frustrated because their children do not listen to them. And what they're really asking us is "How do I get my child to listen to me when I want them to do something?" Of course, there is the possibility that there may be something wrong with their hearing. But if they can hear you open a lolly bag, or breaking off a piece of chocolate from another room, it is safe to assume they can hear quite well. So we're going to be talking about a few different things today to help parents really get their children to listen to them. The first thing is how do we give our children clear instructions so that they can follow what we're trying to say? Then we're going to talk about how we can get our children to cooperate with us. And thirdly, how can we use assertive communication without resorting to yelling at our children, which we often end up doing when they haven't listened to us. So, Anita, how do we actually get our children to listen to us?

Anita Weber 1:53

Well, I'm going to start Laurie with, do we actually make it easy for them to listen to us? You know, the responsibility and challenges of parenting can be overwhelming. We're always trying to get our children to do things that we want them to do. We're concerned about how they behave, and making sure that they behave in ways that are acceptable to us and to society. And you know, a lot of the time our kids don't actually care about the things that we care about. So it seems like we're always in conflict. We seem to be telling them what to do, stopping them from doing what they want, and ignoring their feelings about it all the time.

Laurie-lee Arrowsmith 2:29

And I guess we do this without even realising it, don't we? We're kind of running on autopilot. We've got our own agenda that we need to, you know, we got to get through shopping, we've got to get through everything in the day, we probably don't sit back to actually think, what are the children's needs and wants at the stage? Which is hard.

Anita Weber 2:44

No, no we don't. We're so busy that we've got so many things to do that we just need to get them done and we need our kids to comply.

Laurie-lee Arrowsmith 2:51

Yes. So how do we actually give clear instructions to our children?

Anita Weber 2:55

the first thing we need to do is make sure we've got their full attention. Get close to them, don't yell across the room, you know, make eye contact, perhaps touch them to get their attention away from what they're looking at. You know, look for the signs, if they're engrossed in an activity, wait until they're not so, not so engrossed. Wait until they're ready. Make sure that they're actually looking at you, when you give the instruction or ask the questions, you know, you really need to start with the basics, which is making sure you've got their attention. And if you feel that they haven't heard you, instead of repeating yourself, go back and make sure you've got their full attention.

Laurie-lee Arrowsmith 3:36

Yeah, that's such a simple thing. But such a good thing to do isn't it? Actually go to the room, get down to their level, try to get their attention in some way - touch their arm, look at them in the eyes. Because I think you're right, and I'm guilty of this myself, I will, you know, scream across the room, "Dinner's ready!" You know, and expect them to come straightaway, but I don't know what they've been doing in their rooms. And it's quite easy for them to ignore me at that stage.

Anita Weber 4:02

And part of it too, is you know, like if we yell frequently, it loses its power. It's not an attention getter, because they know that they can ignore it because it's not, you know, like, it's not an urgent thing. If they hear it all the time.

Laurie-lee Arrowsmith 4:16

I guess they're waiting for that third yell and then like, Okay, now Mum means business I need to come out instead of, we really what we want is for them to listen the first time around. Alright, so once you've got their full attention, what's the next step?

Anita Weber 4:28

So when you're giving the instructions, use a warm tone of voice you know, you don't want your children to be thinking that they're in trouble, they've done something wrong, they're not going to meet your expectations. So you know, be warm, inviting, friendly, positive. If our children think they are going to get into trouble or are in trouble, then they lose that ability to listen clearly. And the next step is to make sure that those instructions are really clear and understood well. So ask your child to repeat them back to you. Make sure they understand what you expect of them.

Laurie-lee Arrowsmith 5:03

Yeah, and I guess that makes a lot of sense in terms of, if it's a three year old as well, isn't it because they might need a lot of very explicit instructions, and maybe one or two steps.

Anita Weber 5:13

With a younger child, if they've not done what you're asking them to do before, or if it's, you know, still relatively new, you need to sit down and show them you need to do with them. I even recommend doing it with kids, you know, doing what you want them to do with them. Right up even teen years, it's also a good opportunity to actually build connections and build on your relationship together. Kids often talk to you more when they're, when they're absorbed in an activity with you. So it's a good opportunity to see. But if we barking waters, and we're sending them off to do things, that they then have to meet our expectations, it doesn't make it easy for the kids. And so yeah, they tend to ignore us.

Laurie-lee Arrowsmith 5:55

Yeah and I like what you said at the start about how we don't actually know what they're doing. They could be in the middle of something. And we're sort of saying stop, and I as an adult, I really dislike it when people do that to me. So it's like, how do we make it so that it's not a horrible thing for them to stop, giving them the time? We're saying it in a gentle way, as you said, using that warm voice. Making sure it's a clear instruction, perhaps giving them an extra 5, 10 minutes if that's what they require, before they come out if that's what we're asking of them. Yeah. Okay, and what next? What other tips have you got?

Anita Weber 6:28

Invite their cooperation. And what I mean by that is, is to actually ask them to help you and give them choices. You're setting a boundary, you're saying, look, the dishes need to be done, you and I are going to do them? Do you want to wash? Or do you want to dry, you're setting an expectation that the task will be done, you're actually inviting them to do it with you. And you're allowing them the power of the choice. So you're actually meeting their needs, as well as your own, because you'll get the task done. And they've actually had some agency in doing that.

Laurie-lee Arrowsmith 7:01

Yeah, that's brilliant. And it's such a small thing. But it would make such a big difference, I think.

Anita Weber 7:05

It does. And the difference is in the relationship, the differences in the cooperation, the level of cooperation. And you know, your child hasn't left resenting you because you're getting them to do something that you're not willing to do.

Laurie-lee Arrowsmith 7:18

Okay. Now, I know, you mentioned before the that we can tell them what they can do or not what they can't do, can you tell us a little bit about that as well.

Anita Weber 7:25

As I mentioned before, there's so many demands, and parenting can be really overwhelming at times. So we always resort to what we think is the easiest, which is to you know, I'm going to order and you're going to follow. And in many cases, our kids, it doesn't work that way. And it actually ends up taking a lot longer. But if we actually tell kids what they can do in a positive way, or what we expect of them, making it very clear, they can meet our expectations, rather than disappoint us. And that is a huge difference in regards to our relationship and how children feel about themselves, as well as building their self esteem and confidence.

Laurie-lee Arrowsmith 8:04

Yeah, good point. So some examples could be, you know, 'walk with me' instead of 'don't run'.

Anita Weber 8:09

Yeah, you know, and for times where we are worried about their concerns, and we do often back orders, like when we're going for a walk and they're getting too close to the road, or we're off to the park and they ran off. Or we're at the shopping center where it's really crowded, we start resorting to worries, it's because of our fears, that something will happen to them. So we can actually change that around and actually give them the responsibility. We can actually say, 'Look, we're going to the park today. And I need to know that you're safe. Usually I yell at you. But today we're going to try something different, today I want you to look out for me. If you can't see me, I can't see you. And I don't know that you're safe.' I've done that with some kids at a park and he worked brilliantly.

Laurie-lee Arrowsmith 8:54

Fantastic. Because you're giving them the power, aren't you?

Anita Weber 8:57

Yeah, yeah. You know, it's your responsibility to make sure that you're doing the right thing, not my responsibility to make sure you're in the right thing.

Laurie-lee Arrowsmith 9:05

Yeah, it shifts it.

Anita Weber 9:06

It's a subtle difference. Yeah, it's a subtle difference, but it means that we're building the skills of our children. So yeah, and when our children do do what we asked them to do, we need to let them know that we notice, we need to let them know that we appreciate what they're doing. Providing them feedback, helps them know that they're doing the right thing helps them make those decisions for themselves and builds once again, that really positive relationship that we want to have with them.

Laurie-lee Arrowsmith 9:33

Yeah, awesome. And actually the other day, my daughter unstacked the dishwasher without me asking, which was amazing. And yes, that was an opportunity for me to say, 'Oh, well, you know, thank you so much. That makes my life so much easier when I get up and the dishes are already taken care of.'

Anita Weber 9:48

It's really heartwarming, you know, when they do things just to please us without being asked. It's just, it's just beautiful. And then we know we've done our job well.

Laurie-lee Arrowsmith 9:58

So what are the reasons do you why children don't listen to us?

Anita Weber 10:03

Well, I think we need to try to see the situations more from our children's viewpoint, if we only consider the impact of their behavior on us when they're ignoring us, we're ignoring the impact that we have on them when we backorders. And we interrupt what they're doing. How often do you see and adults stop and drop everything they're doing because we've asked them to, you know, it doesn't happen very often. Because we often say, 'Are you busy? Can I interrupt?' We choose not to use those words with our kids, because we want them to do what we want them to do. But it's really important, it shows consideration and respect for them. And it also models the behavior we want them to take on. So you know, we want them to show us respect, we want them to stop and listen to us when we ask them to, and we first need to acknowledge that they are busy too, and they have busy lives as well. So taking some time to actually understand their point of view, or even just accept their feelings - that they are frustrated and disappointed when they have to stop what they're doing.

Laurie-lee Arrowsmith 11:05

Yes, and this is quite a common one when it comes to technology, isn't it? Time to get off the iPad now. So how do we help parents with that?

Anita Weber 11:13

Sometimes, you know, we make that demand, we might have even been trying all sorts of strategies with the technology, we've spoken to loads of people, and they've said, well, perhaps give them a warning, it's a transition problem. So warn them in 10 minutes time, you need to get off of the technology. But that's really just giving them 10 extra minutes or you know, depending on where you are. And then you know, we tell them off at that time, but then we give them an extra 10 minutes. So now they're up to 20 minutes, that boundary's becoming really negotiable now, so they're ignoring us because they are gonna see how far they can push us. So we need to be clearer, what we want is not for us to be yelling at them to get them off, and for them to just comply in the end. But what we want is for them to acknowledge and understand that there are limits, and that they actually need to follow those limits, not for us to take on the responsibility and remind them of them constantly. So that's the frustrating part for us. But as parents, one of the things that I always did with my son was ask him, how long is it going to take for him to finish is the same for TV. How long has your television program got to go? They've been watching it for 20 minutes, they don't want to lose the last 10. They'd been playing a game, they might be online with other people. So it's tied up with their social situation. They've got friends, they don't want to let down. How long will it take? Give me an estimate of how long it will take? Then I'll go off and plan dinner and then I'll go off and say, hey, it's nearly dinnertime, are you nearly finished? Getting their cooperation or even another thing I saw recently, I heard a parent told me what they do is ask questions about the game, they find an opportunity to ask questions, what are you doing? How, you know, curiosity questions, what are you doing? And they use that time to connect, and you know, they're connecting. And before long the parents join the child in playing the game. They're feeling good together, they're doing something together. And then oh, well, the game's over. It's time to go and do this now. To acknowledge the feelings of our kids, you know, they are disappointed when they have to give up what they love doing to do something less desirable.

Laurie-lee Arrowsmith 13:18

Yes, that's right. Like the dishes.

Anita Weber 13:21

Yeah. And to do that, we don't want to do that. We're trying to offload it onto our kids.

Laurie-lee Arrowsmith 13:26

That's right. But it's the expectation, isn't it, that we think that they should be obeying us, but it's getting back into their world and realizing they've got things going on to that they wanted to?

Anita Weber 13:35

Exactly right. And you know, they are going to feel disappointed. It's, it's perfectly acceptable to feel disappointed if you are disappointed. It's perfectly acceptable to be frustrated if you can't get the time required to complete an activity. I mentioned before ask first how long it will be before they are finished. Seek their agreement to fulfill your task as soon as it's over without a fuss. So it's okay. Yeah, you can play for another 10 minutes. But I need you to agree that you're going to do this straightaway. Perhaps set a timer so then it's not you reminding them at the end. It's the timer saying, well, it's time's up. And then you just remind them of the agreement, not of what they're supposed to be doing, but that they agreed to what you asked. And acknowledge their feelings. Just you know, yeah, I know. It's disappointing me. I know, it's frustrating. But you know, this is really important to me. Just because you're giving them empathy and sympathizing with how they are feeling doesn't mean you're actually going to change that boundary or that limit. It's okay to agree with them. Yeah, it is disappointing, but you're not changing your mind and they know it. Because you set that boundary and you got to keep it. Probably the most important thing is as the adult you actually need to remain calm.

Laurie-lee Arrowsmith 14:49

Which does the challenge a lot of the time, isn't it?

Anita Weber 14:51

You know, we get really angry when we want or we think our children are disobeying us or when we think that they're ignoring us. We get triggered and we then lose our ability to think clearly and to plan and to hear, or even just to see what our children are going through. And you know, that's not pleasant for anyone. And that adds to the reason why kids don't follow through, they might feel that they don't meet our expectations, they might feel that all we do is yell at them anyway. So why try hard? So yeah, we need to do it in a different way.

Laurie-lee Arrowsmith 15:25

You mentioned before about being a role model for our children in terms of how we listen, how do we go about doing that?

Anita Weber 15:33

Well, as you said, you know, we actually need to be the example that we want to set for them. So we actually need to give them our full attention when they come to us. So does that mean dropping everything? No, it just means I need five minutes, I'm busy doing this first. So you know, you set that boundary for yourself, as much as you allow your children's ad set that boundary for them, I won't be able to give my full attention to you until I finished this. And it'll take me about five minutes. So practice doing that. And when you do give them your attention, when you do give them the time, you actually need to put those devices aside as well. Parents can be just as involved in their social media accounts and phones as children can be. So set that aside, your child's not going to take up too much of your time, you can get back to that later. But you actually need to give them your full attention. You need to be facing them, your whole body language needs to be showing that I'm open to this discussion. And I am willing to talk to you right now. And be non-judgmental and accepting. They can tell us that they hate us or that they're angry with us, we can deal with that, you know, we;'re the adults remain calm, non judgmental, that's how they feel, they need to be able to express that. And that feeling as all emotions will pass. Because we know in the long run, they actually do love us. So you know, we can ignore some of those things. But we actually, you know, acknowledge their anger in that moment, acknowledge what they're experiencing in that moment, and work with them to overcome those feelings, to sit with those feelings, except those feelings, and problem solve them way out of their challenges. So they need our help. That's why they're angry because they're frustrated or afraid, or they just don't know what they need to do. And they don't want you to back orders at them or tell them off. They just need you to listen. And as parents, one of the trickiest things that we have to do is to actually stop and listen, because quite often we actually hear their problem, we solve it in our heads, we want to jump straight in and tell them what to do. Kids don't want to hear that. In fact, sometimes they've actually come up with their own little solutions in their heads, as they've told us, you know, it's the same as when we go and talk to our friends, we vent. And at the same time, we're venting the solution comes to us and we go, Oh, I think I could do this, what do you think, and we get the advice of our friends. But with our kids, we don't wait for that to happen, we actually jump in and tell them what to do. And they don't, you know, they don't want to hear that they're not going to follow that advice, because it doesn't meet with their own agenda or their own thoughts and feelings on the topic. And they need that opportunity. We need to be more of their guide in that respect, we need to actually hear what they have to say and build up their skills, their ways of thinking about those things.

Laurie-lee Arrowsmith 18:22

Okay, now, the last part that we're going to talk about was how we actually assertively communicate with our child. What of the either the steps or the tips you can give parents for this?

Anita Weber 18:35

So if we are giving instructions, and we find that, you know, we're doing all the other things, we've made sure that we've got their eye contact, we've made sure they're we've got their attention before they give the instructions, we've actually simplified the instructions so that they can follow them. And that's according to your own child's needs. We've actually provided them with ample opportunities to cooperate with us and to do those things. Instead of resorting to yelling, we actually need to let them know the impact of they're not complying is having on us. So we might tell them, you know, it's really disappointing when nobody comes to the dinner table after I've cooked the meal. It's really disappointing when I go to the laundry to do the washing on my day off and the washings not in the laundry basket. I want you to do this. I want you to do this, because it'll help me. Be assertive, set those limits. You're not saying you know, you have to do this, you're just saying this is how it impacts on me. This is what I want to have happen instead. It's about me how I feel about it, and what can be done to change the situation.

Laurie-lee Arrowsmith 19:40

So an example that you used as I you know, I get really disappointed when the washing isn't here for me to do. What I would like is for the washing to be here, you know, every Friday night or whatever it is.

Anita Weber 19:51

Yep, give a time limit. So it's free. Like you don't have to do it every day, although that would be very much appreciated. You've got a timeline. I know you've got your own things to do, you're busy. But this is important as well.

Laurie-lee Arrowsmith 20:06

So in today's podcast, we've looked at how we can get our children to listen to us. We've talked about how we can role model listening ourselves, and how in order to gain their attention, we kind of need to get down to their level and in their space and a warm way. We give them clear instructions. And then we remain positive and calm ourselves to make sure that that limit is still being set we want to send assertive eye me ssages but make sure that we do this in a respectful way. If you feel this is hitting home for you, and you'd like to have more information about the groups that we ran at parents own Google Anglicare Parentszone for more information, or check the show notes where you are listening now.

Transcribed by https://otter.ai

## Episode 5: How to stop yelling at your kids

Laurie Arrowsmith 0:09

Welcome to ParentZone Pods at Anglicare Victoria. We've been working with parents to support their experience for over 20 years. Parenting is the toughest and most important job you'll ever have. Hi, I'm Laurie. And with me is Anita.

Anita Weber 0:24

Hi Laurie

Laurie Arrowsmith 0:25

And we are parent group facilitators at ParentZone. We're recording at the Pakenham ParentZone Hub. And today we've got lots of birds outside so you might hear them through the episode. This podcast reflects our work with parents and the many conversations we have had over the years.

Parents Zone acknowledge and pay our respect to the traditional custodians of this land we are recording on today, both the Wurundjeri and the Bunwoorong people of the Kulin Nations. We also pay our respects to elder's past, present, and future.

In this episode, we're going to talk about how we can stop yelling at our kids. We'll find out what drives our parental anger, how we can recognize and identify those triggers, and discover strategies to reduce frustration and the friction in our home. So Anita, parents often tell us when they come to our parenting courses, that they want to stop yelling or screaming at their children. They want to be able to control their anger and find better ways to communicate with their children. I'd like to know is anger good or bad do you think?

Anita Weber 1:30

Well, anger is one of the most misunderstood emotions, anger is normal and useful. And it can be energizing. It can also result in positive actions towards change. So if we feel really strongly about an issue, we might join a group and attend a demonstration or a rally to bring about social change. Or if we were playing sport, anger can provide us with additional strength and accuracy. It can also lead to greater persistence with a frustrating activity. And for those who like to avoid conflict, sometimes anger can actually provide the energy to be more assertive.

Laurie Arrowsmith 2:04

So there's definitely benefits to anger. So we're not saying that anger is something to be avoided.

Anita Weber 2:08

No

Laurie Arrowsmith 2:08

It's just how we use that anger. Is that right?

Anita Weber 2:11

Exactly. So anger is often seen as uncontrollable, and it's linked to violence and aggression. Because quite often, that's the behavior that's exhibited by people who are angry. But that's not the only result from anger.

Laurie Arrowsmith 2:26

Okay, so the real issue is not in the feeling, but how we behave or express that feeling.

Anita Weber 2:31

Yeah. And the problem that we have when we're yelling, we yell when we're angry is that it actually increases the chance that our children will misbehave.

Laurie Arrowsmith 2:38

Yes. And I know a lot of parents do say that it's gotten to the point where the kids will only actually do anything once they've yelled, so it's gotten to the stage where they have to yell in order to get anything done.

Anita Weber 2:48

That's identifying that communication issue, you know, that parents are their only really serious when they're angry. And that loses the ability to get the child's attention when you really need to.

Laurie Arrowsmith 2:59

Absolutely. What are some of the physical signs that we get when we're feeling angry?

Anita Weber 3:05

Recently, I had an experience of anger myself. And I came home from work expecting my son to answer the door like he normally does. We had this ritual, when I get home that we connect, and I had my arm full of shopping, and I'm knocking on the door and he wasn't responding. And I just got angrier and angrier, because I imagined that he was sitting there and ignoring me

Laurie Arrowsmith 3:26

Twiddling his thumbs ignoring you.

Anita Weber 3:28

Yeah, absolutely ignoring me. And it was my thinking that was faulty. Because eventually when I calmed down and put my shopping down and had a look at my phone, he'd actually want me in advance that he wasn't going to be home when I got home. And instead of actually being really inconsiderate, and ignoring me, is actually being quite considerate. He let me know, in advance. And I'd missed it. I could tell I was angry because my fists were clenched. And you know, my banging on the door was getting louder, and you know, more pounding rather than knocking. So knowing that I was feeling angry, that I was talking to myself in a negative way about what was happening. My jaw was really tight. I was getting hot. I was feeling really like I was burning. Whilst everyone experiences in a different way, those probably the most common feeling a bit warm, hot, having, I guess, a bit more strength and a bit more energy.

Laurie Arrowsmith 4:24

Yeah. And I definitely get that clenched jaw happening as well. Yeah, and the fast walking.

Anita Weber 4:29

Yeah, that's a really good way to calm down is to to use that energy, maybe go for a run or exercise and get that out as well.

Laurie Arrowsmith 4:37

So it's being aware of those first. And then being picking up on them and then trying to calm them down. Before we do any sort of response to our child.

Anita Weber 4:45

Yeah, yeah, for sure. And sometimes it might be that we're actually too late. We've realized that because we've yelled at our child. That doesn't mean that we can't repair the relationship. We can't come back to our child and say, Hey, I was feeling really angry. I've said some things that are really didn't mean to, we need to show our kids that we experience the same emotions they do. And that we have ways that we can handle that.

Laurie Arrowsmith 5:07

That's right, and that we're human too. And we make mistakes as well.

Anita Weber 5:10

Yeah, the first step to helping our children with their experiences of emotions is knowing and understanding our own experiences as well.

Laurie Arrowsmith 5:18

So you skipped ahead in your own mind.

Anita Weber 5:20

Exactly. So, you know, I actually talked myself into the anger. So sometimes we as parents need to recognize those triggers. What are the things that make us angry?Sometimes we're actually angry just at those triggers, not at the actual behavior of our children. And we talk ourselves into thinking that means more than what it actually does.

Laurie Arrowsmith 5:40

So what do we do with the self talk then? And how can we catch it?

Anita Weber 5:44

We actually need to acknowledge whose issue it is. We're socialised to think that when we have a problem with something that someone else is to blame.

Laurie Arrowsmith 5:52

We so are in society, aren't we?

Anita Weber 5:54

Yeah, that leads to an expectation that that person, that guilty person should take action to fix it, or have some consequences. You know, and those consequences, you know, angry, angry minds, as parents are usually punishments.

Laurie Arrowsmith 6:09

Yes. And so what are some of the triggers? Do you think that are likely to raise our angry response?

Anita Weber 6:14

Well, for instance, kids not completing their tasks or tasks not done to our standards, that fight the siblings over something that once again, we need to go and intervene.

Laurie Arrowsmith 6:24

Oh, yes, the siblings.

Anita Weber 6:26

You know, showing disrespect or defiance. And the big one not listening, we always hear people complaining about our kids aren't listening to us.

Laurie Arrowsmith 6:34

Always. Yes. So who has the issue?

Anita Weber 6:37

Well, it's usually us, for example, a child leaving their clothes lying on the floor, we're the ones who actually care about it, because it's going to impact on our ability to do the laundry. We can't decide what's clean, what's not clean. And we might even be really angry about our ironed clothes, on the floor in a crumpled mess.

Laurie Arrowsmith 6:56

The other one is a messy bedroom, our children having a messy bedroom. So who's issue is that?

Anita Weber 7:01

Once again, it's ours. Because if our kids were really concerned about it, they'd actually take the action needed to clean it up. So you know, recognizing that we're the ones with the issue, and finding a way. So instead of our self talk, being my child leaves his clothes all over the place, in order to get to me, we might be thinking about, I'm cross about those clothes being left all over the floor, and not being put in the laundry basket.

Laurie Arrowsmith 7:27

Because it means more work for me.

Anita Weber 7:29

Yeah, so we need to focus on the solutions instead of blaming our children.

Laurie Arrowsmith 7:33

Okay, so that's the key, we focus on the solutions instead of the blame, okay,

Anita Weber 7:37

And children are more likely to cooperate with us, if we invite them to help us rather than fight with them, because we've yelled at them because of the messy floor.

Laurie Arrowsmith 7:45

So can you give me an example of how we might do that?

Anita Weber 7:48

First of all, we need to deal with our feelings. Remember that we have a choice. And we can choose to employ strategies that help us calm down, for instance, some of them might be walk away, have a drink of water, just stop, just take some time to breathe deeply. Maybe counting to 10 helps for you, whatever calm down strategy that you can use, that will actually work for you to just bring yourself back down to being able to think logically about the problem. And then to recognize it, ask that I have the issue, and think creatively about how we can solve it.

Laurie Arrowsmith 8:23

So trying to solve it when our emotional temperature is high is not going to be a good result?

Anita Weber 8:28

No, because we tend to react emotionally. And if we're angry, punitively. And that doesn't help our children, to cooperate with us.

Laurie Arrowsmith 8:36

So bring ourselves back down so that we're calm, and then we can tackle it by offering the solution.

Anita Weber 8:42

Yeah. And alternatively, we might decide that we can actually let something go, you know, yeah, if the child's messy bedroom doesn't really impact on us, if we can actually close the door and not see the mess. Why don't we just let it go?

Laurie Arrowsmith 8:57

So that's actually another really good strategy, isn't it? If we can let it go? Let it go.

Anita Weber 9:01

Let it go. And another option we have, instead of yelling is using that assertive communication, providing a clear instruction and using non blaming language.

Laurie Arrowsmith 9:11

So can we talk through how we might do that?

Anita Weber 9:14

So you know, we achieved that by first of all, identifying that it's our issue. So we start with an "I", not a "you", yes, very important. So "I: feel and he's an example. "I feel disappointed when," and when is our next, when the meal goes cold. when I've cooked dinner for the family, and nobody's come to the table, and then letting our kids know what we actually want to happen instead. I would like everyone to come to the table when I call dinner's ready.

Laurie Arrowsmith 9:40

And that's very different from saying more like you messages and putting the blame on them, isn't it?

Anita Weber 9:45

Yeah, we're taking responsibility for our feelings, and also the communication that's necessary for children to help us meet our goals.

Laurie Arrowsmith 9:53

Excellent. I really like that. I think it's a really good, easy solution to a lot of these problems.

Anita Weber 9:58

Yeah. I mean, the alternative might be that we go, "you never come to the table when I call", and our children then get on the defensive and they might be angry, you never pay attention. I'm busy.

Laurie Arrowsmith 10:09

That's right. I might be doing something.

Anita Weber 10:11

It invites conflict. Conflict invites conflict. So yeah, we want to do it as simply and as easily as possible. And we want to build a connection with our children. So if we think about connecting with our children before we correct them for their behavior,

Laurie Arrowsmith 10:26

Okay, so connection before correction.

Anita Weber 10:28

Yeah.

Laurie Arrowsmith 10:29

So in this episode, we talked about what drives our anger and what our triggers are. And that when we do stuff up that we can say sorry, to our children make that repair. So remember, it's helpful if we deal with the issue when we and others are calm, and then we can be constructive. And then the times where we have actually yelled, it's okay, we're human, but that repairing is really important with our children. If you feel this is hitting home for you, and you'd like to have more information about the groups that we run at Parents Zone, Google "Anglicare Parents Zone" for more information, or check the show notes where you are listening now.

## 

## Episode 6: How to respond to our kid’s behaviour

Laurie-lee Arrowsmith 0:09

Welcome to ParentZone Pods at Anglicare Victoria, we've been working with parents to support their experience for over 20 years. Parenting is the toughest and most important job you'll ever have. Hi, I'm Laurie. And with me is Anita.

Anita Weber 0:24

Hi Laurie!

Laurie-lee Arrowsmith 0:25

And we appear in group facilitators at parents own. This podcast reflects our work with parents and the many conversations we have had over the years.

ParentZone acknowledge and pay our respect to the traditional custodians of this land we are recording on today, both the Wurundjeri and the Bunwooroong people of the Kulin nations, we also pay our respects to elder's past, present, and future. I

n this episode, we're going to talk about discipline and ways we can actually positively discipline our children, we're going to discuss behavior, and what it really means what our children really trying to tell us. Then we'll cover positive roles, and how we make them work in our home. So Anita, let's talk about our children's behavior, and why they behave in ways that drive us crazy.

Anita Weber 1:16

Well, children simply behave, and they behave in ways that they find gets them what they want. If a behavior works, if they get rewarded for it, by our attention, they're going to repeat it and children learn from the reactions of the people around them. So yeah, children will behave well if they can

Laurie-lee Arrowsmith 1:35

And what gets in their way?

Anita Weber 1:36

Many things. So it could be unclear or vague instructions from the parents, for example, "Be careful," what does that mean?

Laurie-lee Arrowsmith 1:43

True,

Anita Weber 1:44

Or it could be not knowing what is expected of them expectations that might be too high. So they just they know that they can't meet those expectations. For example, they might not be to our standard, you know, we might ask them to make their bed over and over and over again.

Laurie-lee Arrowsmith 1:58

I've been there

Anita Weber 1:59

Then they refuse to do it. Or our rules might change, and they just don't know, whether they are behaving well or not.

Laurie-lee Arrowsmith 2:07

So it's a bit of miscommunication then.

Anita Weber 2:09

Certainly is we need to think about our discipline as a process of teaching and allowing our children to take responsibility for their actions. And in order for them to choose to behave well. They need to know what's required of them. They need to know what those rules are, what the consequences are. And most of us have experienced a different approach, which is really where we're punished for our bad behavior.

Laurie-lee Arrowsmith 2:32

So can I ask what is the difference between punishment and discipline?

Anita Weber 2:36

So I'll take it the other way. So discipline is the process of teaching. It's allowing our children to learn from their mistakes and to take chances and to make good choices. Whereas punishment is the parents taking responsibility for the child's behavior, and punishing them for being bad or for doing the wrong thing. It's more or less us getting our revenge on their behavior, which puts us in conflict with having a really harmonious relationship.

Laurie-lee Arrowsmith 3:03

Okay, so when we're talking about discipline, and we're really talking about how are we teaching our children to behave?

Anita Weber 3:08

Yeah.

Laurie-lee Arrowsmith 3:09

Okay. So when the child does continue to bounce on their couch? Are they a Naughty Bear child?

Anita Weber 3:15

Not necessarily behaviors, communication? So what are they actually trying to tell us about how they feel?

Laurie-lee Arrowsmith 3:20

While I'm thinking that they've got lots of energy that they need to get out?

Anita Weber 3:23

Yeah. And so we may need to help them find the alternative. Or they may actually be trying to express an anger or fear or a desire for our tension.

Laurie-lee Arrowsmith 3:32

So what I'm hearing as you as you're trying to separate that child from the behavior, so it's all intertwined.

Anita Weber 3:38

Yeah. So let's look at the context and what's happening for the child as well as have we been very clear in our rules. So we start to think about the consequence, and we start to think more logically about what's going on rather than thinking that the child is deliberately doing something to upset us.

Laurie-lee Arrowsmith 3:53

Yes, I'm pushing buttons, which you often hear,

Anita Weber 3:57

It;s okay, forkids to make a mistake, we actually still love them and care for them. We just need to think about and know our own triggers and how we respond. And are we actually reinforcing that need.

Laurie-lee Arrowsmith 4:09

So often in our parenting groups, when we ask participants what their rules are in their homes, they often can't tell us that sort of reside in our heads, don't they? And we identify the role when they are broken.

Anita Weber 4:20

And can you imagine what that's like for a child? The idea of the child jumping on the couch, that's a really common thing that comes up and often think well, what's their rule? What guides them when they make that choice and it might be okay to jump on Nana's couch, but it's not okay to jump on mum's friend's with a really nice house. But at only Jackie's we can jump on the couch because my cousin jumps on the couch to with his sneakers on. But oh, I got into loads of trouble when I jumped on the couch and I had buckles on my shoes. And the other thing is, you know to making a choice and with that, sometimes the consequences change. One parent might just tell you off, but the other parent might really yell.

Laurie-lee Arrowsmith 5:00

So I can see this could be really confusing for our children.

Anita Weber 5:04

Yean, how do they make a choice?

Laurie-lee Arrowsmith 5:05

So how do we make it clearer for them? What's a more positive way that we can approach this?

Anita Weber 5:10

Well, we need to have a very clear rules that really outline our expectations of how to behave in certain situations, we need to communicate those rules to our child, they need to understand and know so we need to make sure that they do. And we also actually need to tell them what they can do, not what they can't do.

Laurie-lee Arrowsmith 5:31

Okay, so this is really important as tell us a bit more about well about that.

Anita Weber 5:35

Imagine the experience, we as adults, we often make those choices, we know what the rules are, and we know how to follow them. We make choices, whether we're going to follow them or not. For instance, if we're driving, and we're in a hurry, or we're running late, we make a choice. We know that there's consequences if we speed but we make a choice. And people make that choice all the time, to speed knowing that they're going to get a fine if they're caught. But you know, if we're in an unfamiliar area, for instance, and we're wanting to park our car, because we've got an appointment somewhere, and we've just found a park in a residential street, we might Park they're not knowing what those rules are in regards to parking in that area, and be really, really angry and confused when we come back to our car to a car fine. So it's very similar to our children when they don't know what the rule is, or the expectation that we as parents impose a consequence, when they don't know what they've done. Right or wrong.

Laurie-lee Arrowsmith 6:33

Yeah, I could see that happening quite a lot in my house, yeah, that conflict arising because it's not clear.

Anita Weber 6:39

Yeah, we're more likely to go how unfair it is that we've got this fine, when we didn't know that we were doing the wrong thing. And so in the first place, so we really need to be clear. What do we expect? What are those rules? And if we have positive rules that tell children how to behave, that makes it so much easier for them to make those choices.

Laurie-lee Arrowsmith 7:00

So let's finish on an example. Can you walk me through one Anita?

Anita Weber 7:04

So imagine we're on a walk with our child in the park. And our rule might be, don't run, but we need to put that in a more positive spin to it. So we might be, pleased move slowly and carefully near the edge, or we always walk across the road. Or if you need to run, meet me at the tree. So we're actually providing some different scenarios for that same situation, that child's desire to run, that we're meeting that in alternative ways.

Laurie-lee Arrowsmith 7:30

So you're still addressing their needs. But it's not going to cause conflict this way.

Anita Weber 7:35

And look, and really important, when our children are trying to meet our expectations, when they are trying to follow our rules, that we actually need to praise their attempts, we need to provide very specific praise. For instance, if we've asked them continuously to put their bike away when they're finished with it, we actually need to let them know that they've done a great job putting it away when they have done so. Or even thanks, and showing gratitude for their attempts, you know, letting them know that you've noticed.

Laurie-lee Arrowsmith 8:03

And I guess that reinforces that behavior for next time.

Anita Weber 8:05

Yeah, we're letting them know how we want them to behave.

Laurie-lee Arrowsmith 8:08

Okay, great. So we've learned a lot in today's episode. So we've talked about discipline and different ways that we can actually use it in a positive way with our children, and how we can use positive roles in our home to replace those negative roles with the nose and don'ts that we sometimes use.

Anita Weber 8:23

Yeah, and to help our children choose to behave well.

Laurie-lee Arrowsmith 8:27

Yeah. If you feel this is hitting home for you, and you'd like to have more information about the groups that we run at ParentZone, Google Anglicare ParentZone for more information, or check the show notes where you are listening now.