



Lunch and Learn

Overparenting Unplugged

TRANSCRIPT



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## Introduction

**Dr. Lisa Novak, CATCH (00:00):**

I'm Dr. Lisa Novak, Director of Education at CATCH. I'm going to be moderating today's Lunch and Learn about a topic that stemmed from a wonderful podcast that I discovered a few months ago. It's called Raising Parents with Emily Oster. If you haven't checked it out yet, I highly recommend it. Before I introduce today's speaker, I wanted to quickly mention that we are reserving right around the second half of our hour today for Q and A. Please don't be shy, put any and all of your questions in the chat as you think of them, and we'll get to as many as we can before the hour is up. And for those of you who feel most comfortable asking your questions anonymously, you can privately message them to Rachel T or Rachel Tzinberg, and she'll send them my way. And now I am honored to introduce you to today's speaker, Dr. Andrea Goddard. Dr. Goddard is a licensed clinical psychologist and the founder of Breakthrough Psychotherapy in Northfield. She earned her doctorate in clinical psychology from Adler University and gained extensive experience working in a myriad of settings before founding her own practice. Dr. Goddard specializes in using evidence-based practices to support individuals and families with more severe emotional vulnerabilities. Breakthrough Psychotherapies concierge model allows their team to offer many options for therapeutic support and personal growth that are tailored to each client and family. And I can personally vouch for that as I've had the wonderful opportunity to collaborate with her professionally on multiple occasions. And now I'm going to hand things over to you, Dr. Goddard. Thanks for being here today.



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## Group Activity

**Dr. Andrea Goddard (01:39):**

Thanks, Lisa. That was so nice. Well, hi everyone. Welcome. I'm so glad that we can have our lunch together. And so, I thought before we jump in, most of us are transitioning away from our busy work days or something busy. I thought we could do a quick exercise so we could all be on the same page. And so I'd like us to take a minute and just think about our childhoods. In particular, as we're thinking about our childhood, what did we used to do for fun? What did we used to do when we were out of school during our free time, whether it was weekends or any other time? I'd like us to think about who did we play with and what did we do? I'll give you guys a second to think about that. I see "running around the neighborhood with neighbor friends," "capture the flag and hide and go seek,"

**Dr. Andrea Goddard (02:35):**

"played outside with neighborhood kids," "played with sister and friends," "Barbie dolls," "pretend when we were super little," "I would put on plays and musicals with my sister." Gosh, you guys are so good at sharing. Thank you. "Played with friends in the neighborhood," "played with friends and neighbor in the backyard," "digging for treasures." Awesome. Okay, these are great examples. Okay, now we have got some themes there. Lots of playing with friends, lots of outside, lots of with neighbors. Now I want us to think about our own kids. So I'm going to assume that many of us are parents who are participating today. If you're not, that's fine. But think about your own kids. What do our kids do when they're not in school, either after school or on a weekend? I'll give you guys another 30 seconds to minute to think about that.

**Dr. Andrea Goddard (03:34):**

Okay. So now that we've thought about our childhoods and our kids' childhood right now, if you have multiple childhoods as well, I'd like us to think about the differences between the two, if there are differences. If you guys want to write in the chat again and share, maybe you can provide me with some



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examples of just the differences. Are there any? Okay. “Structured activities or with an adult,” “organized sports team,” “technology,” “homework, and activities,” “they are isolated,” “video games,” “really working on decreasing scheduled activities and having kids play together.” “It's hard because most of their friends have activities.” I take my kids to the park or playground,” “gym,” “Instagram or YouTube,” “video games.” Okay, good. You guys. Awesome. Okay. So if we look at the examples from our first thought experiment of our childhood, and then we think about our kids and what they're growing up with and going through what stands out most?

Dr. Andrea Goddard (04:38):

And the reason why I think we're all here is that our kids have a tremendous amount of structured activities, and they're growing up with technology, which is totally different than what our childhood was like. Than the olden days we'll say. Today the title of the presentation is Over-Parenting Unplugged, how to Let Kids Thrive. As I thought more and more about this title and really read between the lines and boiled it down, what I thought would be most appropriate and what we're actually doing is training parents. How to train parents to be the best parents they can (because I know that's what we're all trying to do) with the modern-day pressures, the modern-day influences of trying to help our kids thrive the best with an incessant amount of input and how to strike a balance. So we'll figure it out.

## Presentation

Dr. Andrea Goddard (05:32):

That's the goal. I thought first I would share a little bit about what therapists are seeing now and what the research is showing. It is a very bleak picture. I promise you; I'm not going to just continue to paint this really bleak, depressing picture throughout this entire 30-minute presentation. But the reality is that kids are worse off today than they were 30 years ago when we were kids. They're more anxious, they're more depressed, they're more medicated. Kids' anxiety and suicide rates are three times higher from 1950 to 2005, and also extremely alarming, two times higher from 2005 to 2020. Kids' reading and math



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scores have not recovered from the pandemic. Obesity is at an all-time high of roughly 20%. In the most recent CDC data, 40% of high school students indicated that within the last year, they experienced sadness that impacted their ability to do activities for at least two weeks.

Dr. Andrea Goddard (06:38):

If you can imagine not being able to function for two weeks in high school, the demands that increase, it's alarming. Kids are trying to manage this constant flow of information from news or social media. The pressures that are coming at them at home, at school, socially extracurricular, and they're struggling. It's apparent they're struggling. We need to understand why. In our practice, I have been thinking about this for a while. We've been practicing, our practice has been around for almost a year, but I've been a psychologist for almost 15 years. And what both the research and my clinical experiences have shown is that within these three contexts, the school context, the social context wouldn't fit on this slide, it's on the next, but the family context, there are key patterns. First, in the school context, there are still, as I mentioned before, gaps in learning from the pandemic.

Dr. Andrea Goddard (07:38):

But even before the pandemic, kids were struggling to grasp all of the information that is presented to them at the rate that it's presented to them. But that's not necessarily new. I mean, yes, technology has just increased the flow and the speed of information and the demands of information. What is ultimately happening is that kids are struggling to feel confident enough to raise their hand and ask for help. To self-advocate when they don't know the information. They don't know who to ask or how to ask or feel comfortable asking. I mean, we grew up in an era where we were always told there's no stupid question. Yes, that's true. And some of us were more willing and more brave. I can tell we have the brave crew here with willingness to participate. Kids today are struggling to get the resources to ask for help to make sure that they're getting what they need.

Dr. Andrea Goddard (08:33):



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And that's also parents. Parents don't necessarily know what their kids need. There's a disconnect between how much a kid struggles and what the parent understands their struggles to be. Which we'll get into in a minute. Parents don't necessarily know what type of accommodations or if accommodations are appropriate, whether it's a 504 plan or an individualized education plan. How to ask for those, what those mean. And so fundamentally, there is a large disconnect between a child's ability to get all of the information that they need from school to catch up from what they missed during the pandemic, and then to feel comfortable and confident enough to move forward. Within a social context, socialization has changed fundamentally since we were kids. We didn't grow up with computers. I think when I was a senior in high school, AOL, whatever it stands for, instant messenger, was just starting to become popular.

Dr. Andrea Goddard ([09:35](#)):

Now today, everyone socializes through technology, through FaceTime, through text messaging, through Snapchat, through Instagram. The problem with that is it doesn't develop the necessary social skills that kids need in order to observe and react to nonverbal language. In order to ask for clarification, in order to make sure that what they're actually understanding is an accurate interpretation of whatever the conversation is about. Fundamentally, this is leading to changes in social groups, cyber bullying, negative comments that are internalized just based on one picture that's posted on the internet. And so kids today are experiencing a high level of loneliness, continuous changes in friend group, feeling abandoned, feeling again, alone, withdrawn. It's horrible. It's really sad. Fundamentally, part of this phenomenon with the difficulty of self-advocating and low self-esteem can be linked to a limited social freedom. And so the jump, I'll make sense of that connection.

Dr. Andrea Goddard ([10:49](#)):

When kids are allowed to be independent, like you guys mentioned from your childhood, when we're allowed to run around with our neighbors and bury treasures and dig them up. When we're allowed to run through the woods and stick sticks in the mud and watch what crawls out. Or pick up rocks and



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watch all the bugs crawl. When we fall off our bike and are expected to get back up and try again. When we're not being rescued. When we have to go to our neighbor's house and ask for a snack or ask for help. When we need to run to Graeter's or run to the store, we probably don't have to run to Graeter's but get to go to the ice cream store and ask for ice cream and get the correct change back. All of that develops grit. And so grittiness from a psychological standpoint is an ability for a person to cope, to be resilient is another word.

Dr. Andrea Goddard (11:36):

It's a synonym. So when we're resilient outside in our everyday life, I'm looking out the window because that's what I'm thinking about. But when we're outside in our everyday life and we get to try adventures, try new things, make mistakes, fail, fall, get hurt, hopefully not too hurt, but then go ask for help. When we take chances, what that does for our nervous system is it allows us to then cope when challenges are faced both socially and at school. It allows us to persevere. It allows us to work through a challenging problem. Like when our teacher tells us, "Hey, you have a pop quiz," we don't melt down. When our teacher tells us you didn't understand this content. We can say, "okay, can you help me please?" rather than shut down and shove it in our back only to find out later that we're missing a lot of information. So it is that independence, that freedom, that separation and individuation that allows us as kids and then as teenagers and then as young adults to launch into the next stage. And so we're going to get into how to support this skill deficit that we're seeing.

Dr. Andrea Goddard (12:46):

As both a psychologist and a mom, I ask myself, how did this happen? How have our kids become so anxious and so unhappy? In his newest book, the Anxious Generation from Jonathan Haidt, which Lisa presented about, did an awesome presentation in September, and then Emily Oster in her podcast, they both suggest that changes in childhood mental health are largely attributable to a lack of childhood independence and to an increased reliance on technology. Both of these variables, the lack of independence and the technology, are truly re-hardwiring the brain. We know that kids are happier



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when we give them independence and more freedom. So our biggest challenge as parents is to resist these new norms of parenting, of modern-day parenting, I should say. Also think about what our childhoods were like, and then strike a balance between the old and new, right?

Dr. Andrea Goddard ([13:56](#)):

Ideally there's more freedom, there's less parental inputs, less structure, so more unstructured play and more family connection. So I get it, I'm a mom, I work, my kids are busy, they're in school. It's super easy for me to say, and I'm a psychologist, let's remove technology, let's schedule less. But the reality is it's so much easier said than done. I can give a quick example. My son is in kindergarten, he's six. Last night was his first night of lacrosse. I'm laughing because my wife is here and I'm looking right at her. We signed our son up for lacrosse and we think he'd be probably good at it. He loves running around. He's a really tall, big kid and he loves running around carrying sticks. So we thought, okay, perfect.

Dr. Andrea Goddard ([14:51](#)):

Generalization made, he probably could play lacrosse. But what we didn't consider is that One it was on Monday night. Two, he has already plenty of activities. He does tutoring, he does basketball, he does ceramics, and he loves coming home from school and take care and doing nothing, just playing with his sister, sometimes fighting with his sister, but just playing. We took that from him last night. Last night he came home and was so mad at us. I'm putting together this presentation, I'm listening to the podcast, I'm reading the books and I'm saying, oh my gosh, I'm falling right into the trap. That felt so natural for me to do because many of his friends, by the way, in his class are also participating in this sport in lacrosse on Monday nights. He was so upset. And so my wife and I thought, okay, let's listen to him.

Dr. Andrea Goddard ([15:46](#)):

Okay, let's take a scoop of our own medicine and let's pull him out. And we did. He is not going to do it anymore. But what it showed me is the reality of the amount of pressure, the amount of demands that we're putting our kids through today. And again, it's so much easier said than done. We thought we were



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doing for our son the best that we could. So again, the idea is that we want our kids to be out to be running, to be playing in our neighborhoods, to be challenging themselves and setting their own goals and not being able to reach the highest branch on a tree, but trying again. We want them to be able to ride their bike and push themselves on their bikes to the place where then they realize that they've gone further and further, which then can be translated into school.

Dr. Andrea Goddard ([16:33](#)):

But a big challenge is that no one else is doing it. So it's easy again for me to tell my kids to go play outside, which they'll do, but then they get tired of it because no one else in our neighborhood is playing outside. All the other kids are in structured activities. So from a community-based level, it's a much larger challenge of how do we remind parents of the benefits of unstructured play? Structured sports are not unstructured play. Pro-social sports are so important, pro-social activities, it doesn't have to be sports, but it could be anything. Any STEM related activity. But pro-social activities, structured activities are not an opportunity for kids to experiment, to be creative, to do whatever they want to do, to make mistakes, to get upset, to cope, to learn that resilience that's so important in every other area of our life.

Dr. Andrea Goddard ([17:31](#)):

As parents, the idea is then how do we tolerate both the lack of kids outside running around in the neighborhood, which for now, may be out of our control, although I think sessions like this, Lunch and Learns discussions like we had in September through CATCH continuing the motivation and momentum to slow down on technology to increase family connectedness is where it starts. To making plans, having other parents who are similarly aligned and values and morals and ideas of how they want to raise their kids, connecting with them and scheduling get togethers and just letting the kids be and let the parents talk if that works. But for parents, tolerating the boredom, tolerating the whining, tolerating the dysregulation, the tantrums is also a trick to being able to allow our kids the freedom and the independence that they need. Because kids, after coming off an overstimulated session with their video games or with their devices, they don't want to play outside.



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Dr. Andrea Goddard ([18:33](#)):

Playing outside is not exciting. Just like it's not exciting to stare at a sheet of paper when they're given a worksheet at school and being told to think about it. I mean, Roblox is way more exciting and way more enticing. And so we need to pull back a little bit and we need to think about how do we increase that connectedness? How do we as parents connect in a way with our kids that then can translate into feeling comfortable and confident letting our kids run around the neighborhood? One of the skills that I thought was key, and which I think I talk about more than any other skill as a child psychologist and as a family therapist, is a skill called validation. And it's a core skill, a basic skill, basic, not because it's simple, basic, because it's just the foundation.

Dr. Andrea Goddard ([19:25](#)):

So when we think about validation, it's a very long fancy term for just understanding. And it's understanding what our children's experiences are, our spouses experiences are, coworkers, experiences are whoever it may be. But when people feel understood, what happens is their physiology, their biology changes. So typically what happens is it reduces that more fight or flight reaction, that power struggle that we often get in with our kids when we tell them to go run around and play outside and they do it for five minutes and then they want to come back in and look at their iPad or video game. We're like, that was not long enough. You have got to go back out there. Validation helps our children not only feel understood, it also helps them communicate more. It reduces that vicious negative cycle, that fight or flight, that power struggle, that aggression, that refusing to talk, the shutting down.

Dr. Andrea Goddard ([20:24](#)):

It reduces all of that. And when we as parents feel like we're understanding our kids more, feeling like they're making choices that we can trust are going to keep them safe. Kids are extremely resilient by the way. But when we can see that in them, when we can hear that in them as parents, we feel much more comfortable allowing them to cross a busier street, allowing them to ride their bike a little bit further, allowing them to go into a neighbor's house and run around and play, knowing that, one, they're going



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to use their manners, but two, they're not going to get in trouble or nothing bad is going to happen to them. So validation again, lets our kids know that the relationship matters. And I think I'm preaching to the choir here because all of you are here as an interest in being the best parents you can be.

Dr. Andrea Goddard (21:10):

But what validation does is it lets our kids know that we're there, we're ready to listen, we're ready to try and understand their experiences, and we're going to do it without getting angry or jumping to conclusions or problem solving. And again, by understanding our kids better, ultimately what happens is we allow them to have more freedom. We allow them to do more of what they want to do, and we can understand more why it's so hard for them to put down the device, or they can understand more why we want them to put down the device. So what do we validate? The idea is we want to validate another person's feelings, their thoughts, and their actions, and that it all makes sense. Invalidation would say it's just quick problem solving ; what you're doing makes no sense. I can give a quick example and I'm looking at the time, but we're good.

Dr. Andrea Goddard (22:03):

I have a daughter; I have a son and a daughter. My daughter's younger than my son. And for the first, I would say maybe even the first month of this new school year, she would get in the car every night. I usually pick her up. And I've learned now not to ask, how was your day? I don't ask anything. We just get in the car, and we turn on our favorite songs. And then by stop sign two, she's willing to share. So I could tell from my rear-view mirror that she looked unhappy. She actually looked very sad. And so I'd ask, you know, what's wrong honey? And she said no one on the playground wanted to play with me. And I immediately went into change in solution talk. I said, okay, her name is Ruby, I can share. I said, okay, Ruby. Well, did you try playing with other friends?

Dr. Andrea Goddard (22:49):



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Did you try asking them in a different way or asking them politely to play? Did you ask your teacher? Did you go and play soccer? I know that they play soccer every day and she sort of likes soccer. So I kept trying to come up with solutions. All I got was silence. She said no, and that was the end. She just stared out the window looking even more dejected, even more upset. I realized that what I was doing was invalidating. It was not allowing her to one feel the feeling she was having, but two feel okay that she felt alone, felt I guess left out, felt confused about what to do. So once I started to say that it does feel upsetting, you do feel sad, it's really hard to not be included. A couple days of that, then I was able to ask her if she was interested in learning what to do or some strategies that she could try. And sure enough, she was. So, it's not to say that it's perfect. It's not the simplest skill. It is a way that we can help our kids not only understand the skills that they need, that they may be missing in order to self-advocate, but also, we can understand what our kids are going through. Then feel much more comfortable pushing them out the door and tolerating the reaction when we aren't going to give them their iPads anymore.

Dr. Andrea Goddard (24:14):

**Validating Statements**

VALIDATION

- "I can see how you would feel that way."
- "That must be really hard."
- "I feel the same way."
- "How frustrating!"
- "I bet you're frustrated."
- "I'm here for you."

INVALIDATION

- "What's the big deal?"
- "You should feel lucky."
- "You are too sensitive."
- "Calm down!"
- "If you hadn't done that it wouldn't have happened."
- "I don't want to hear it."

These are just some examples of validating statements. I'm not going to read through them, but the basic premise of validation is that we're actively listening and we're just putting forth an effort to slow down, to put down our phones, to stop looking at our computers, stop work, and just try

and understand what they're going through without problem solving. This creates a much safer, more trusting environment and increases the likelihood that conversations like this can happen in the future. The point of bringing this particular skill to a presentation like this is that when we feel like we understand our kids more, when they feel more connected to us, we as parents feel much more



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confident promoting their autonomy, promoting their resilience, promoting their independence, trusting that they are going to make the right choices, that it's okay that they're bored, that it's actually really important, that they're bored.

Dr. Andrea Goddard (25:11):

And as soon as kids are bored, then they get creative and then they decide, okay, well maybe I'll go ride my bike and maybe I'll ride it a little bit further than I did last time. That goal pushing, that striving, is what's needed and what is missing when they're staring in front of an iPad or a device in the afternoons. And again, there's no perfect formula. So very quickly what validation does not do is agreement. So just because we're validating does not mean that we're agreeing with all that kids are doing and saying. We aren't going to let our kids do whatever they want. It doesn't mean lowering expectations or turning education into entertainment. It's not like that. It just allows our kids to then communicate what they need, what their interests are. Maybe like Lisa mentioned in September, asking our kids, what's something you'd like to do that you haven't been able to do?

Dr. Andrea Goddard (26:08):

Then allowing them to do that. That's a big follow-through; it is a really important part of that question. But this connection that we get through validation gives our kids the confidence to make choices, to try new things, to identify and pursue their own goals and helps them develop those goals. Achieving and trying those goals or actually failing the goals and trying again is what allows our kids to develop the strategies they need that are lacking at school, socially, sometimes at home, so that we can feel like our kids are having a much fuller childhood and a childhood that's setting them up for success as young adults and adults. That's really the bulk of my presentation. And I think we're right on the 30-minute mark. So let's see. I'm going to just move forward here. Oh, okay. One more thing.

Dr. Andrea Goddard (27:02):



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Here's my website. Here's my email. I have an enormous list, enormous, like 150 ideas of planned positive activities between child and parent and just child alone. A lot of times parents will say to me what do we do? Like outside of going to the movies, outside of taking my kids to the park, what can we do? I have it for you. It just doesn't look very pretty when you put it on a slide because the font is like really small and it's from Dialectical Behavior Therapy, DBT, which is a treatment modality that I practice all day long, basically. I'd be happy to share that with you. If you have questions, email me and I can send it right to you or answer any questions. I don't know if there are any additional questions or if there's anything to discuss. I'm happy to try.

## Q&A

Dr. Lisa Novak (28:01):

Thank you, Andrea. That was amazing. I love; I'm like neck crampy from all of my nodding. I'm like, yep, yep, yep, yep. All of those things. One thing that I really wanted to start with is this idea of okay, we can validate their feelings and really help them feel more understood. Some of these things are frustrating. What about at a bigger level? Like really thinking about the community, thinking about our kids' friends, and thinking about how can we go beyond validating? I get it. Like you're outside playing and it's a little boring because there aren't any other kids out there, to how do we get more kids out there? Do you have thoughts about that bigger next step?

Dr. Andrea Goddard (28:47):

Yeah, I do. So I think it starts here. I'd really think it starts here. And I think it started in September with the other CATCH talk. And I think it starts with really motivated parents who recognize this as a problem and who, well, a problem, I'll put it in quotes, because I think the idea is, and it's more of an opportunity to make an adjustment. And I think the more parents that can see that by getting together, by forcing the play dates, by setting down technology, by seeing the benefits of prioritizing our kids getting together with other kids. We all have play dates. We do that already, but I think the goal would be how do we do



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more of it? And how do we do it in a slightly less structured, less forced way where it's just, I'm picking up the phone and calling our best friends and they're going over to our friend's houses for an hour or two. How can we make it a little bit more, I guess, unstructured, right? And I think it starts here. I think it starts with conversations. I think even from a community standpoint and even from a school standpoint, how can we, how can we empower our schools to promote less technology? Not giving our kids cell phones until eighth grade or later. How can we help even social events if there are more within the community? I know we're getting our school; my kids school is getting a new principal. Perhaps there's an opportunity to meet with that principal and say, Hey, is it possible to have a social? They do two a year, maybe just one a year. But it's events like that and it's conversations like this that allow more community members to then go out and share the message to allow us to say, well, I mean, I, I think I'm a little biased here, but for me to go to my neighbor and say, Hey, let's just let our kids play. When your kids are free, just text me because chances are my kids are free. Rather than scheduling it on a Saturday at 2:00 PM maybe it's just becomes a little bit more free. I mean, I remember we had a phone with a cord that would wrap around my whole entire kitchen, and you know, my friends would call and they would say, are you free? We'll just hang up the phone and run outside. More of that, more of what we used to do while also appreciating that technology is a good thing and that it doesn't always have to be us running around, but the more running around we do, the better off we'll feel. So I don't know if that helps.

Dr. Lis Novak ([31:18](#)):

It for sure does. I mean, my experience has been exactly as you said, just finding a couple of people that feel this way too and just starting with them and seeing what that ends up looking like for our kids. And then other people catch wind of it and are like, oh, okay. That sounds all right.

Dr. Andrea Goddard ([31:33](#)):

Right.

Dr. Lisa Novak ([31:34](#)):



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You talked a lot about this, you know, empowering them to become more independent. That's what builds their grit. I get a lot of questions from parents around, well, how do I know if this is something my child should be able to do on their own right now? Or are they not, you know, not old enough, not responsible enough, not developed enough. A perfect example is talking to your teacher, right? If there is some sort of issue that the teacher needs to be made aware of. How do you advise parents around when they can figure out, like, I don't know, am I supposed to let them do that?

Dr. Andrea Goddard (32:09):

Yeah, so that's a really good question. I usually err on the side of let's let the kid decide what they think they can do. For instance, the therapy model for gradual exposure therapy. Let's say someone had a fear of heights. It's just a simple model, okay? To think about it this way. When addressing a fear of heights, we would never say, as a therapist, I would never say, let's go to the top of my building. This building that I'm in right now is three floors. There is a way to get to the very top, and it's not that complicated. It's just walking up the stairs. I would never say to this child or this individual who's afraid of heights, let's go to the top floor right now. Right? That would one be flooding, and two, they would run away, and three, they would never come back, right? We ask as therapists and as parents, the approach would be to ask the kid what they think they can do. Give them an opportunity to try. If they try and don't succeed, that's great. That's actually almost better than if they succeed the first time. Because if they don't succeed, it's a conversation. We wouldn't just say, okay, go ask your teacher. You think you can ask your teacher, go ask your teacher and not follow up with them. We would ask how it went, what did they learn, whether they need additional help, whether they want us to help. Sometimes our kids might say I don't know, I can't do it. And you would say, okay, well would you like me to help? And then I would encourage parents to explain to their kid what they are doing. So not just then get on the computer and type up an email and send it, but have your kids sit with you while you write the email or have your kids come with you while you go into the school to talk to the teacher. Or if you can swing it, pick up your kid right after school and see if you can schedule a time to talk to your teacher and have the kid there if appropriate,



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obviously, so that they can hear the language. It's a dialogue. It's a back and forth in order to assess what the kids know and what they don't know and then giving them the skills.

Dr. Lisa Novak (34:23):

Absolutely. What do you do if your routine or kid or teen only wants to be home and hanging out in the rec room rather than playing outside and they're the ones that seem resistant to this more independent type of play or to getting off of their technology?

Dr. Andrea Goddard (34:39):

Yeah. That's more often the case than not, right? It's actually the most common scenario that I see. Because again, technology is so interesting and so fun. It offers, the benefits is that it offers really unlimited possibilities of information and entertainment and stimulation to the world, right? It's great and there's a balance. This is where I think parents need to be sturdy parents, firm parents and set limits. I can't prescribe the amount of limits. I can't say you only get one hour a day. That would not be helpful for me or appropriate for me to say right now. I do think as parents though, it's our job to ensure that there are limits, there are parental controls on all devices. That is the parent's job to set the limits and say that you can only have this amount of time. Once the screen time is up, it is up to you to decide what you want to do with yourself and time. But there will be no more screen time. Kids will fight that one. They will tantrum, they will scream, they will just do nothing. Let that happen. That's actually really important. It's our job as parents to tolerate their reaction and not react to it, not fight it, not give them a thousand suggestions like I tried to do with my daughter, which didn't help. The idea would be once they're done tantruming, there is an extinction burst, which means they'll escalate before they deescalate. As parents, we don't want to say, okay, now that you're escalating and screaming and crying, I'll give you your technology back. Once they're at a calmer place, we can maybe come up with suggestions, which is why I have that whole list of shared parent child interaction; and activities that they could do. I cannot imagine out of a list of 150 activities that there isn't a single one. Kids may reject it at first, and after a while you will be amazed kids go to their own ways of filling their time, whether it's



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picking up play, whether it's drawing, whether it's playing an instrument, whether it's literally just sitting there and observing and describing their fingernails. It doesn't matter, right? Let them be bored. It's fine.

Dr. Lisa Novak ([36:59](#)):

It's interesting. We play a lot of structured games at my house, a lot of board games, card games, things like that, which I know have their place, but it's still not the same as free play. Last weekend I had my boys who are similar in age to your kids, and we couldn't do anything with them. We're like, go do something on your own. They made a nine course mini golf course in our rec room. Like each hole. I was like, this is the coolest thing I've ever seen. But it reminded me how we don't do that often enough. We continue to structure even when I don't realize that we're structuring.

Dr. Andrea Goddard ([37:33](#)):

Yeah, exactly.

Dr. Lisa Novak ([37:34](#)):

I'm wondering if you can speak to frustration tolerance. Teachers are reporting, the kids are struggling with behaviors at school, at levels they've never seen before. They're unable to attend and see tasks through. Does free play in some of what you're talking about help with that frustration tolerance piece?

Dr. Andrea Goddard ([37:52](#)):

Yeah, that's exactly the point of it. That is one of the core elements that is learned during free play, during tolerating boredom, during requiring our brains, our bodies to feel the frustration. As psychologists, we never want to say eliminate these feelings. Don't feel sad, don't feel anxious, don't feel frustrated. One, that's impossible. It's like telling someone not to sneeze or yawn, right? You could maybe hold it back a little bit, but not a reality. The reality is how do we cope with it? How do we cope with it in a way that's adaptive, that doesn't then shut us down, doesn't then lead us to cry overwhelmingly in an inappropriate way that then we can't focus and function. For instance, your kids



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created this nine-hole golf course. I would imagine there was some frustration going into it. You have two kids, I'm sure at certain points they disagreed about the positioning and the placement. So that required communication, collaboration, frustration tolerance, pushing through all of that frustration and cooperating with each other. If we're not doing that outside, I don't mean like literally outside of our doors, but like outside of school for instance, our brain is not acclimating. It's not reacting and then on its own readjusting back to a baseline where we can learn and function. That nine-hole golf course, that was your kids learning how to cope, learning how to self-regulate, learning how to cooperate and persevere.

Dr. Lisa Novak ([39:31](#)):

Yeah. The flexibility piece of it too. I mean they would try something, and it didn't work, and they're like, oh, we've got to figure out a different way. You see all the different skills that they're building through those activities. It's almost like a reminder of, oh, they need to be doing this more.

Dr. Andrea Goddard ([39:50](#)):

Well good, you saw it, right? That's very validating.

Dr. Lisa Novak ([39:52](#)):

I saw it so far once in 2025. Somebody said, we struggle with our 6-year-old shutting down when she gets upset. She's really quick to cry. Sometimes she's so upset that she won't even respond to us when we try to ask what's wrong or how are you feeling? What tips do you have to help prevent her from getting so upset that she's just completely shut down?

Dr. Andrea Goddard ([40:16](#)):

That's a really good question. I see it all day long. We work with parents all day long. The idea would be one, to validate the feelings, to label. For a 6-year-old, maybe she has an awareness of what she's feeling, where she can label it. She can say, I'm sad, I'm frustrated, I'm angry. Those are the basic feelings. There are more in this one example. First would be to label it and you can label it for them. She



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may correct you and say, I'm not sad, I'm angry. And you could say, okay, you're so angry right now. That's all I would encourage you to do, to start. Okay? So that's the validation piece is you are upset, you are frustrated, you're having a hard time. And then for a 6-year-old, let me go back. Biology. Our basic biology is that we are born with our midbrain and the bottom part of our brain fully intact. So that is our amygdala, our hypothalamus, and our Vagus nerves. It's our fight and flight response. It's what keeps us alive. If we didn't have that, we wouldn't cry when we're hungry as newborns. We wouldn't cry when we're afraid as newborns. We would walk into dangerous parts. We'd walk across the highway. We would do things that would make us die. We would die as a species. So we are fully intact when we're born with our emotion regulation system. The problem with that, our brains are incredible, okay? It is the most incredible muscle. But the problem is that our frontal lobe, our top brain, is not developed really at all until truly like 26. Okay? So the reason why that's a challenge is that coping skills are learned. They aren't innate. Breathing is innate, right? We have to breathe. Our body's going to breathe whether we want it to or not. It's really hard to suffocate yourself. Breathing on its own, if we're breathing incorrectly, when we're in distress, we'll actually keep our brain and our heart from coding whatever's going on as stressful or distressing. Learning coping skills at a really young age, it's never really too young. It's six years old for us to teach your child how to cope, how to self-soothe, how to self-regulate, how to communicate what is going on and why, will only ensure that then as they grow up, they know how to self-regulate. They know when they are coping, that once they're coping, that they then can either problem solve. Because we can't problem solve when we're in emotion mind. Our brain is not that advanced that if we are overly emotional or we're emotional really at all, we can't come up with solutions. First, we need to regulate back to a baseline enough so that then we can come up with what to do next. If we don't have the skills to bring ourselves back down, then it all looks dysregulated. It would be labeling the feelings, identifying physically what's going on, coming up with the words to then say what you feel, then coming up with coping skills that help your child get to a place where that they then can problem solve. Then go to a trusted adult to help them, because they're only six. They are not meant to solve life's problems alone, right? We want to support your kids.



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Dr. Lisa Novak ([43:35](#)):

Thank you. I want to just note a couple of comments that people have made. One to that point is at six, maybe they're not ready. But even as teenagers, they're often not ready. So somebody commented that you need a high school class to teach some of these skills. I think we're seeing gaps in what our kids are currently confident and able enough to do independently.

Dr. Andrea Goddard ([44:02](#)):

Yeah, that is a great idea. So that goes along with I think your initial question, Lisa, what do we do? How do we do this on a bigger scale? That's a great idea. Lisa, maybe we go to the high schools.

Dr. Lisa Novak ([44:14](#)):

Perfect, let's do it. In all of our spare time. Right?

Dr. Andrea Goddard ([44:19](#)):

Right.

Dr. Lisa Novak ([44:19](#)):

Well, and two other ideas here. One doesn't take a lot of time, but what somebody said here, we as parents have to model this too. We're constantly holding our own phones. We have to think about what message we're sending. I know that's something that we've been working on really hard in my household. But it's something that doesn't take a lot of time and in fact ends up bringing up a lot of time to be present with our kids. I think it's a really important one to note that it starts with us.

Dr. Andrea Goddard ([44:44](#)):

Yes, yes it does.

Dr. Lisa Novak ([44:46](#)):



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There was a question about whether CATCH organizes events for kids to get together. The answer to that is no. Or maybe not yet, but I very much agree with that sentiment that it has to start somewhere. I think we're all trying to figure out like where, who can we glob onto and what schools or organizations can we tap into to really try to find the masses of people that want to move forward with things in that way? I wanted to touch on something you mentioned a few times, and I think it's part of a barrier to why people don't do this more. You gave the example of our brains aren't developed yet, and so we might dart into a street, right? There's things we have to watch that our kids not do that really are safety issues. I've been reading a lot lately about this idea of the difference between risk and danger. This idea that as you're describing play and getting frustrated and things not working and having to problem solve. There has to be some risk inherent in the free play that they're engaging in. I think we're risk averse for our children. We fear that it's going to make them get hurt either emotionally or physically. I think we might be mixing that up with danger. Nobody wants to let their kid touch a hot stove or run into a busy street. Those are dangerous things that we need to be there to help actively avoid until they're old enough. But that risk piece, I don't think we talk about enough. Can you share anything about that?

Dr. Andrea Goddard (46:24):

Yes. I think that's a really interesting point that actually goes more along with parents' tolerance of letting their kids take chances. I think if we are to start at a really young age, promoting our kids to do things that they may not truly be able to do. Like for instance, both of my kids are beyond the walking, learning how to walk stage. But what I was instructed to do with both kids was to not carry my kids around everywhere I went. I was to let them be on the ground, right? Like put them down, right? By putting my kids down, what it did was it gave way for them to try and do things on their own. I think as parents, what we do is we want to protect them. We want to do everything we can to make sure that they don't get hurt. There is a detriment to that, to their development. I would never encourage parents to just say, go free. You know, go roam free and play- if you don't live in an area that can allow for that. It's called scaffolding in psychology. It's that you don't start at level 10. You don't start at the highest height if you're working on an exposure to heights. Because if someone's afraid, you start small and you



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say, okay, well what would you like to do? Where would you like to ride your bike? What store would you like to go in and out of? I wouldn't say to my 6-year-old, okay, I'm going to be at home, and I can't see downtown. I live in Northbrook. I can't see downtown Northbrook from my home. I wouldn't say, go ride your bike to Northbrook and go buy yourself an ice cream and come back. But what I would say is I'm not going to order for you at the counter. I will launch you up because it's a really high counter at Graeter's or at Baskin Robbins, so he can see. You order for yourself. The more he tries and the more I can see that he's successfully doing it, the more confident and comfortable I feel at establishing further goals of letting him ride around, of letting him go play and eventually, hopefully, letting him ride his bike around the entire town and go to the skate park. Maybe not even tracking him. I don't know yet. I'm still, to decide on that. The idea is that we don't want to start in a place that we as parents feel uncomfortable, but at the same time, we need to feel a little bit uncomfortable knowing that it's so important for our kids to try. Each family's different, but that would just be the much more larger macro picture of how to support this.

Dr. Lisa Novak (49:01):

Absolutely. We've got some comments coming in from people saying I'm a teacher and I'd love to get some of these things started. Somebody mentioned Greenbrier having a wellness committee that's developing some parent and child activities and events to implement. Wait till eighth groups that many of our neighborhoods and schools, you know, in certain grades in particular are really starting to catch. I think we're moving in that right direction. Somebody mentioned that Tina Payne Bryson just wrote a book called The Ways of Play. I haven't read it yet, but I heard a great interview, and it sounds like an instruction book for parents on this topic, for people that are interested. Somebody else adhered to the point about risk. It's not just about letting our kids take chances, but getting comfortable with watching our kids be sad, uncomfortable, frustrated, not just physically hurt. I think that is a huge one and so, so important and something that I do think a lot of parents, myself, very much included do struggle with.

Dr. Andrea Goddard (50:05):



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Yeah, right? We do, yes. Yeah.

## Conclusion

Dr. Lisa Novak (50:08):

We don't want our kids to not feel good. At the same time, I think the part that we forget there is that they have to learn how to not feel good, how to feel uncomfortable, how to feel sad, how to feel worried, how to feel frustrated, because that's how they also learn how to move through those feelings. If we make it our job to prevent them from ever feeling that way, then they don't learn how to cope with those emotions and they become really much bigger problems later on in their lives because they haven't learned how to deal with it effectively. Exactly. Yeah. Great. Well thank you so much. I think that covered all the questions that came in. I think we are good. Thank you so much for bringing just such relevant and important information to our community. I know you're on this journey with me and we're all doing the best that we can to just continue to spread the messaging so that we can feel that ripple effect in the community as well. These insights and your information was really super valuable. Thank you all for being here and thank you again, Andrea for just sharing your wisdom on these topics. We so appreciate it.

Dr. Andrea Goddard (52:39):

Of Course. You're welcome. Thanks guys.

Dr. Lisa Novak (52:42):

Have a great day.

## Resource Links

[Raising Parents with Emily Oster](#)

[The Anxious Generation, Jonathan Haidt](#)



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[CATCH Anxious Generation Resources](#)

[Dr. Goddard's Activity List](#)

[The Way of Play by Tina Payne Bryson, PhD and Georgie Wisen-Vincent, LMFT, RPT-S](#)

[Podcast: The Importance of Risky Play](#)