



S2 Ep 1: Raising Resilience

Dr. Kimberly Bell: [00:00:00] Are you interested in knowing your young child in a whole new way? Understanding what's really going on in their developing mind? Does your child say or do things that make you stop and wonder, where did that come from?

Welcome to Season 2 of The Hidden Language of Children Podcast, where we explore child development and all the stuff that can make raising kids such a challenge. I'm your host, Dr. Kimberly Bell, clinical director at the Hanna Perkins Center for Child Development in Shaker Heights, Ohio, where we help families guide children to understanding and managing their feelings so they can become the boss of themselves. This podcast is your window into that world. Our guest today is Dr. Tovah Klein. She is the director emeritus of the Barnard College Center for Toddler Development, and she is the author of two bestselling books for parents: "How Toddlers Thrive" and her new one: Raising Resilience, how to Help Our Children Thrive in Times of Uncertainty. It is a pleasure [00:01:00] to have you here, Tovah. Welcome.

Dr. Tovah Klein: Thank you. I'm excited to be here.

Dr. Kimberly Bell: To get us started, let's define exactly what you mean when you're talking about the word resilience in children.

Dr. Tovah Klein: Yeah. So when I, when I think of resilience, um, particularly in young children, but children of all ages, it's really how do we think about children facing adversity? So resilience is the ability to adapt, adjust, and be flexible. That's the part that resides within the child. And if you think of a young child, all three – adapting, adjusting and flexibility – are a challenge, but that's what's developing over time and that's what will help them face adversities – little ones medium, ones big ones – over time.

Dr. Kimberly Bell: So let's talk a little bit about what that looks like. Because what, what struck me just now is you said this is what develops over time. I think [00:02:00] sometimes people think that when we talk about temperament or something, that there are children that are naturally resilient and children that are naturally overly-sensitive or something and sort of lack resilience. So you are



looking at it as more of a developmental task. Can you talk a little bit about what that development might look like in terms of a toddler versus a five-year-old?

Dr. Tovah Klein: Yeah, so I, I think it's, it's an important kind of misnomer to dispel, which is this idea that either you are resilient or you're not, as if it's a dichotomous piece or that it's a trait, which it's not. It would be easy if you could just sort of have you know, a potion or a pill and say, here, take this and now you're resilient.

But it doesn't work that way. And so resilience is something that's developing over time. A child might look resilient in one situation and not another, [00:03:00] but it's embedded in the parent-child relationship. Which in many ways is the good news. You know, it might make parents nervous, like, oh no, one more thing I have to think about.

And I always say, no, it's actually not. When you're a loving presence in your child's life; when you are the stability that your child needs, or you get the support that you need to help the relationship, that's the foundation that helps a child handle all of the, let's call them daily mishaps or misfortunes. So getting out the door in the morning, for example, with a 2- or a 3-year-old is a challenge for most people on any given day. The question is, how do you help your child get out the door? Or how do you help them understand that there's no spaghetti tonight, even though you said there was spaghetti, and that's what they were looking forward to.

And every time we do that and help children understand negative emotions, particularly for our youngest children – you know, [00:04:00] starting around age 2, children are facing frustration, anger, disappointments in a way that infants don't – and every time we help them with those emotions – understanding that they're upset for a reason; we can label that – they get better at handling negative emotion, and all of that is part of what we eventually call resilience. But it's not something that goes across every situation. It's not something that happens all the time. And I think we often feel like my child is or isn't resilient, and I would like to lighten up every parent to know sometimes they are and sometimes they're not. Just like us as adults, sometimes you feel like you can handle something and sometimes you feel like you really can't.

And so thinking of it more as this is developing within the relationship, this is developing over time and will continue to develop.



The beauty of [00:05:00] 5-year-olds in many ways is that they're a little bit more reasonable than your younger children, so again, doesn't mean it's gonna be easy all the time, but their thinking abilities, their abilities to sometimes calm themselves. Which they may not have been able to do before. Their ability to look back a little bit, like when you say to, a 5-year-old, "Remember you got into a fight with this friend before. Let's think about what helped." You can't really do that so well with a two or 3-year-old, but you could help them sort of recollect that they've gotten through tough moments before. So the good news about development is that they're getting more and more abilities as they get older.

Dr. Kimberly Bell: They have more cognitive capacity to bring to bear, whether it's memory over time, multiple experiences...

Dr. Tovah Klein: Exactly.

Dr. Kimberly Bell: There are a couple of things that I always say to parents, which is, [00:06:00] you know, helping your child manage a feeling does not mean fix, handle or changing the circumstance.

Sometimes it's just tolerating the emotion with the child.

Dr. Tovah Klein: Right,

Dr. Kimberly Bell: without rushing to try to fix it and sending the message that your child can't handle it, right? But being the, the sense of confidence in, their ability to adapt and, and be resilient, um, which seems both simple, but is not easy for parents to necessarily sit in a difficult emotion without trying to fix.

Right? It can be a hard thing to do because you have to be able to tolerate your own internal reaction to seeing your child struggle.

Dr. Tovah Klein: Yeah. I think of it this way, this idea of like, how do we help our child with emotions runs counter to almost everything maybe any of us, [00:07:00] myself included, went into being a parent with. You kind of enter being a parent, whether you plan to be this parent or you are accidentally this parent, we all thought it was about making our children happy.

Dr. Kimberly Bell: Yeah.



Dr. Tovah Klein: And if you ask any parent anywhere, it doesn't matter how many resources they have or don't have, it doesn't matter what cultural background they come from. I think just about every parent will say, "I feel best when my child is happy." And what we didn't know is that every child knows how to be happy.

Like most children, you hand them a lollipop or an ice cream cone, they're happy. Not that it's that easy, but when children have what they want or think that they have what they want, they're pretty content. The problem is our role in life as parents is to help them understand the hard emotions. And it's not always fun for [00:08:00] sure. And just as you're saying, as children get upset – there's actually data on it – as the child rises, so does the parent. especially as you know Kim, if it's your firstborn,

Dr. Kimberly Bell: Yeah.

Dr. Tovah Klein: ...we tend to be very tied in. I think evolutionarily, there's something there. But as the child goes up, we go up with them. The question is, can you bring yourself to place that says, "OK, this is not a three alarm fire. I have to first exhale myself, ground myself so I can say to my child, "You're upset. You have a right to be upset. I'm gonna help you. I'm gonna sit here with you." And that's this calming. And what happens is the child actually feels us and feels our calm, but it's not always easy for any parent. We bring histories, we bring our own [00:09:00] experiences, we bring everything we lacked. We bring all of our trauma if we had that, and we bring the good stuff.

So it's all of the above, right? It's not all negative, but when a child is upset, it's gonna go right to the heart of my own, as the parent, emotional experience. And that's really what we're talking about. Like how do you sit with a child who may be throwing a tantrum over what may seem silly to us, but for that child is really important.

Dr. Kimberly Bell: Mm-hmm.

Dr. Tovah Klein: They wanna wear that red shirt today, and the red shirt is at grandma's. It's not even in the laundry so they could wear it dirty. It's at grandma's, it's not here.

And then how do you say to yourself, "OK, my child's not a rotten human being. My child's not being a brat. They're upset." And I've got to let them be that maybe



as I make breakfast or for some children, I've gotta really hold them or sit with them. we have [00:10:00] to accept it ourselves, and that is very challenging for many, many parents.

Dr. Kimberly Bell: Well, and this is kind of a great lead in, let's talk about your example of the shirt being at Grandma's. The one that I commonly see here is the shirt is at your dad's house or your mom's house because you have divorced parents and so the thing you want isn't at this particular home and that can be even more difficult than grandma's house because it brings in guilt. And when you have parents who are lost in their guilt, it makes staying in that emotion even more difficult unless you can recognize what that emotion is. So what, what are some of the things you talk to parents about when it comes to guilt?

Dr. Tovah Klein: Yeah. You know, I say guilt doesn't help us. But most cultures, most religions, most, you know, [00:11:00] you name it, to bring us to guilt. And when it comes to our child, that's very, very potent. But when I talk to parents, I really do talk about, guilt is not a motivator.

It's not actually helpful. And so the more you can come up with, in the moment, literally tactics to handle, like, "Oh! There's my, that guilt thing..."

Dr. Kimberly Bell: mm-hmm.

Dr. Tovah Klein: Or there's that piece that gets in my way. Sometimes, just giving it a word. Um, I'm blanking on a word right now, but, you know, there's, that thing; it's like a heads up.

And then, you know, I talk to parents about mantras. Like, what can you say to yourself that quickly comes to you? You know, and for guilt, it's not my fault. It is really not my fault. So, and if you can get yourself to some place of, it's not my fault and it's not my child's fault, even if you've told them [00:12:00] over and over, "you love that red shirt, let's make sure it goes back between daddy's house and mommy's house." They're still gonna forget, right?

Dr. Kimberly Bell: Mm-hmm. Yep. Yep.

Dr. Tovah Klein: And so it's nobody's fault. But if you could have a mantra that says, my child's not a bad kid, or this is not my fault, it re- grounds you.



Dr. Kimberly Bell: Mm-hmm.

Dr. Tovah Klein: Oh yeah, here we go again. For one of my children, one of my mantras was, "here we go again." Just to say to myself, you've been in this before. I'm the adult here.

Right? And then you do start to feel the floor under you as the adult, you remind yourself, the shirt's at mommy's house, or the shirt's at daddy's house. And then, then you can exhale because you're back in the moment. What guilt does is it takes us out of the moment, it takes us to all this other stuff that we're bringing with us, and we're forgetting that that little person in front of us who's still really little, [00:13:00] even if they're a big kid, they just need us to be right there with them.

Dr. Kimberly Bell: Yeah, and I think, you know, some of the decisions that we have to make for children are very difficult. You know, some of the families that we work with here have had to make very difficult decisions about early medical procedures, whether it's a necessary surgery at a time that we would not like, love for a child to have a surgery, you know, or, or some other, um medical or physical difficulty that requires a painful physical therapy session...

Dr. Tovah Klein: yeah.

Dr. Kimberly Bell: that, that we know, right? Or getting a divorce. I mean, those are kind of two extremes, but we know in the long run this is what's best for our child. But we also know in the moment that are creating maybe a "little T" trauma, right? Maybe not a big, maybe a big T trauma. Maybe a little T trauma. But we know it's gonna be painful and it's an experience we don't want our children to have, and [00:14:00] you know, one of the things that, that I talk to parents about in those kinds of situations is that it's not necessarily the event, it's how you process that event before, during and after.

Dr. Tovah Klein: Yeah.

Dr. Kimberly Bell: Um, and here one of our mantras is that, uh, children can get through anything that can be talked about.

Dr. Tovah Klein: I love that. Because really what you're talking about is when there's nothing hidden, this doesn't have to be a secret. I can talk about that emotion. You were mad at mommy.



Dr. Kimberly Bell: Mm-hmm.

Dr. Tovah Klein: You were angry at Daddy. You didn't want your blood drawn and yet you're OK now. And I'm here with you. You can still be mad. Says to them also, I see you and I hear you. I couldn't change it. But to say, "I still see your pain..." And and I put the word genuinely in because [00:15:00] I think so often I work with parents where you know people have been told, say these three things as if it's like magic, say these three things and they go, but it didn't work.

Dr. Kimberly Bell: Yeah, like 1, 2, 3, abracadabra, and all of a sudden you'll have the best behaved child ever, and then, you know, when it doesn't work for your child, it's like, well, you didn't do it right.

You know?

Dr. Tovah Klein: I can give you a very personal example. When I had my first child who didn't sleep I was, you know, it was around six months, I was exhausted, probably depressed. I had this child that didn't sleep, who's now a very capable adult. And I finally went to Barnes and Noble.

This was before social media was like a parenting space. And I looked on the shelf and I pulled out books on sleep. And almost everyone basically blamed the parent, know well, if you have them on a schedule, well, if you feed them this way, well, if you don't do this. And I thought, you know, I cried. And then I was like, I, I don't need to be [00:16:00] blamed even if I'm not doing it right.

Dr. Kimberly Bell: Yep.

Dr. Tovah Klein: I don't need to be blamed. I actually need help.

Dr. Kimberly Bell: Mm-hmm.

And so

Dr. Tovah Klein: that's partly the role you play or I try to play in how do we help parents really understand, you're doing the best you can and we can help you shift to see this child in front of you. Um, and hopefully we can help you have a little more self-compassion because being a parent is hard.



Dr. Kimberly Bell: Mm-hmm.

Dr. Tovah Klein: There's no question it's hard. And you don't know when it's going to be hard. Maybe it was hard from the beginning or maybe it wasn't, and then it got hard, but it's gonna be hard, and it's gonna push for our experiences and our pasts in a way that I think nothing else does really.

Dr. Kimberly Bell: Yeah, I would agree. You know, and I, I'm thinking in my head of, um, many of the sort of the, the thinkers, um, that focus the way that you do on sort of [00:17:00] understanding the deeper thing that this isn't about. We're, we're not talking about behavior or modifying behavior here. We're not talking about, um, finding an "it" or a diagnosis.

You're getting to the root of the importance of the relationship between the parent and the child, which does two things. It's both scary – because then it feels like such responsibility, but when it's done through compassion, then it becomes empowering, and powerful, and I think it's important to know that this relationship that you talk about between the parent and the child and sort of the being there with the child doesn't mean that you don't work outside of the home. That's not what we're saying here.

We're not saying the being there emotionally and, and being sort of consistently emotionally attached to your child is about quit your job if you're gonna be a [00:18:00] good parent. We're not like, right. We're not saying that, that it can be done in a multitude of circumstances.

Dr. Tovah Klein: Yeah, for sure. I mean, it's a really important point, and I think the piece that gets overlooked sometimes when we talk about being there, or what relationships are, is that as children get older and they do, you know, what we call internalize the relationship, what we mean is even if they're at school and they're struggling, you know, with a peer situation or they, they feel lonely and they miss the parent, it's can they say to themselves or get some comfort in mommy still loves me. Daddy's gonna be home when I get home.

Dr. Kimberly Bell: Mm-hmm.

Dr. Tovah Klein: It's this idea that children carry us with them. I would think of it as whose voice do they hear in those moments of upset?



Dr. Kimberly Bell: Mm-hmm.

Dr. Tovah Klein: Right? Do they still hear that they're [00:19:00] loved? Do they still feel like someone's going to take care of me even if I do all these bad things, like throw the toy or kick my friend or not listen to the teacher or the caregiver. And then the reunion, when parents do come back either to pick them up at daycare at school, or come home at the end of the day, that reunion brings the child back to I am safe. We are OK.

Dr. Kimberly Bell: Mm-hmm.

Dr. Tovah Klein: And we underestimate the reunion. You know, we talk so much about separation that...

Dr. Kimberly Bell: mm-hmm.

Dr. Tovah Klein: ...we forget that there's also, at the end of the day, if you do work or you do have other things in your life, which I hope every parent has something beyond their children,

Dr. Kimberly Bell: Yes. Yes.

Dr. Tovah Klein: that when it's when you come back together and that hooks into how we talk about repair, it's, it's not the thing that upsets your child with you or the time that you [00:20:00] yelled at them that matters so much, it's can you come back together and say, wow, we had a rough time, the two of us, and I shouldn't have yelled like that. I'm sorry.

Dr. Kimberly Bell: Mm-hmm.

Dr. Tovah Klein: I always love you even if I yell. And even if your child gives you the cold shoulder, because they sometimes do – they're like, well, I'm not ready for you to come back – they've heard it and eventually they come back to the parent. You hug them and you say, yeah, that was rough.

Dr. Kimberly Bell: Yeah.



Dr. Tovah Klein: And you know, we're still together. We still love each other. Then children learn about anger. Anger is part of a relationship.

Dr. Kimberly Bell: Mm-hmm.

Dr. Tovah Klein: Anger is, you know, something that happens in this loving relationship.

That's where resilience comes from. I'm gonna be OK even when really bad stuff happens.

Dr. Kimberly Bell: Yeah. One of the things that we do in our preschool, a lot of the kids that we work with would have what people would call separation anxiety that made it difficult for them to be at other schools. Um, and so they come to us and we have a rather lengthy uh, settling in process where the parent waits [00:21:00] in the waiting room and the child can go back and forth from the classroom to the waiting room, and then the parent goes on a walk and they come into the classroom and they say, I'm going on my walk now.

And then they go to the window, they go to the parking lot, which happens to be right outside the preschool window, and they go to the parking lot and they wave through the window. And then when they come back from their half hour walk, then they come back in the classroom and they say, I'm back. And then they go to the, the waiting room where they wait again because sometimes we have to redo that process, right?

Because something has come or something has been difficult and that the message there is two things. One, uh, parents always come back.

Right. Parents always come back. Um, and you can manage things in bearable bits.

Dr. Tovah Klein: Yes.

Dr. Kimberly Bell: Sometimes you've had to manage it in big bits because somebody has passed away or something like that has happened. But you can learn in, in bearable bits to manage, you know, these kinds of separations. But you hit on something that I know we wanted to talk about, um, before we run out of [00:22:00] time, that is the notion of repair. And you said, you know, even if your child is giving you the cold shoulder or says I hate you, or, you know, one of those



other things that might happen in those moments that, that the parent really holds the love for both of them.

Like, I know you love me and I'm gonna hold the love for both of us. And the, um, the two-way feelings as we would call them, right. The ambivalence. So, talk about your concept of repair and how important that is in the relationship.

Dr. Tovah Klein: It's a really deep process. Even though on the surface it may not seem so deep, which is young children count on parents in a way that I think it's hard for a parent to even fathom. And it's so deep for the child, like I need to know that I am still loved even if I do whatever bad thing they're, they they've done or they're even thinking [00:23:00] about. I'm mad at my parent because... And so the repair really is, I mean, I think of it like if you think of a break or a rupture, two things come apart, and that's very scary to a child. Even if they've screamed, even if they've said horrible things, depending on their age, um, even if they've thrown stuff, that coming apart and the thought that they've lost, the parent cuts to their core of, I won't be safe in this world, I'll be alone. And so it really is up to the parent to in some way say, I've gotta be the adult here.

And then you say to the child, I got upset. I shouldn't be this upset and I still love you. I'm gonna take a minute. And then you go back to them,

Dr. Kimberly Bell: Mm-hmm.

Dr. Tovah Klein: and children often fall into our arms. Not all children. That's where you get into personality or temperament.

Dr. Kimberly Bell: Right.

Dr. Tovah Klein: Like some children are so relieved that they just sort of bury their head in you. [00:24:00] Other children are like, I'm not so sure of this. Or, I'm still mad, but they hear it. I am still loved.

You know, you can say to a child, in that repair, I still love you, even though I'm gonna make you put your shoes on. Or even though I said things that I shouldn't have said, I still love you and I always love you. And I think the piece that's often maybe hard for us to understand as adults is we love our children and even we're really upset with them if there was a way to like stop the parent in real time and



say, oh, whoa, you're really upset. Do you love your child? Almost every parent is gonna say, well, of course I love her.

That's not the issue right now.

Dr. Kimberly Bell: Mm-hmm.

Dr. Tovah Klein: But if you stopped a 3 or 4-year-old in that moment and said, do you love your parent? They're gonna tell you no. Because for a young child, this is the developmental piece. These dichotomies are dichotomous. I love you, or I don't love you, if you're not letting me do what I wanna [00:25:00] do, I don't love you.

Dr. Kimberly Bell: Mm-hmm.

Dr. Tovah Klein: Right. But a few moments later, I do love you again. And they don't understand...

Dr. Kimberly Bell: mm-hmm.

Dr. Tovah Klein: ...that love is like, oh no, the love is always there. That's up to us to let them know. Even when I'm having a hard time as a parent, even when you are having a hard time, I still love you.

Dr. Kimberly Bell: Mm-hmm.

Dr. Tovah Klein: Which helps children then start to accept I'm good sometimes, and bad sometimes; it's part of being me.

And doing, you know, quote bad things, whatever the child thinks is bad or the parent thinks is bad is not the end of the world.

Dr. Kimberly Bell: Yeah.

Dr. Tovah Klein: It's part of being a kid.

Dr. Kimberly Bell: These are the things that are not in the manual. The, the ability to hold two feelings at the same time is something that develops over time. Your child doesn't have it, but you have it.



So when they say they hate you, and yes, it's very real in that moment, you are the one that holds the two-way feelings. But the child loses the loving feelings and the parent has to hang onto that. And that's what we call the two-way feelings, right? Like soon you're gonna remember that you love me and I love [00:26:00] you, and for now, I will remember for, for both of us.

Dr. Tovah Klein: Yeah, and to not expect the child to be able to feel that or express that right then, and to know that that's normal. I think it's very

Dr. Kimberly Bell: Yeah.

Dr. Tovah Klein: scary for parents when children are that upset and saying, I hate you, or You're the worst. You know, you're the worst mommy ever. You're the stupidest daddy. You know, whatever they throw at us. It's not that they're necessarily going out in the world and saying the same thing. They feel very safe. Even when there's been conflict in a relationship, if they're grounded in safety, they're gonna, they're gonna let those feelings out at home, usually ...

Dr. Kimberly Bell: yeah. More than elsewhere because it's too, they're too vulnerable elsewhere. So OK. There's really so much more in your book that we obviously do not have time enough to, to, to touch on even. But you do go into a beautiful amount of depth about all the different ways that parents help, uh, their child through their relationship become resilient to things that can happen in the [00:27:00] world. You talk about COVID or you know, something like individualized, like a, like a divorce or when we have school shootings... and I mean, we have a lot of things that kids have to be resilient for these days.

And, and I really like the way, you know, you go into all the categories of all the different ways that you can help your child to develop resiliency and you give very nice examples. And, and so as we're talking about it, sort of as the theoretical underpinning of all of this, your, your book does get nice and specific about ways that you can be helpful and what that actually looks like. Which I, I really appreciated when I was reading it. I know that it comes in this nice hardcover book. I also notice that it is on audible and it's on Kindle as well, right? So it's on all the ways. It's on all the ways in all the formats.

Dr. Tovah Klein: You can read, you can listen, you can scroll. Yep.

Dr. Kimberly Bell: It's accessible and I think the book is accessible to parents in terms of its content as [00:28:00] well...

Dr. Tovah Klein: Thank you.

Dr. Kimberly Bell: Which I really, um, enjoyed. So let me do a quick commercial. So if you are a parent in the Cleveland area and you like what you hear about our approach to early childhood education, you might consider enrollment for your little ones in our toddler group or preschool. Hanna Perkins was an early pioneer in social emotional education way back to the 1950s when, uh, we were still calling it nursery school. So our school has rolling admissions. So we are always giving tours and taking applications, and you can get lots more information on at our website, Hannaperkins.org for those listening, H-A-N-N-A-P-E-R-K-I-N-S.org.

Alright, Tovah, this is a section that we call, "Let's Rephrase That." And this is where we talk through things that sometimes grownups say to children when they are themselves dysregulated, right? Maybe we're a little emotional. It's the first thing that comes out of our mouth, and [00:29:00] we kind of talk and come up with alternatives that might be a little more helpful in the development of resiliency. Ready to give it a try.

Dr. Tovah Klein: Sure.

Dr. Kimberly Bell: OK. the family dog has just been diagnosed with cancer and has to be euthanized. While mom and dad are reeling at the news, their 5-year-old daughter doesn't know anything about it yet. The first instinct for just about any parent would be to handle the sad duty without telling the child and explain the dog's absence afterwards by saying something like, "The dog has gone to live on a farm in the country." How would you suggest handling that a little bit differently?

Dr. Tovah Klein: Um, the first thing I just wanna say is I always think the death of a pet, even if it's a fish, is really important for children to learn about lifecycle. And so I think you, you always come from a place of compassion.

And I would say to those parents, you don't have to do [00:30:00] it immediately. If you've just gotten this diagnosis, like you, you know, you wait a day or two, or however long you have until you're ready, and then be aware of a couple of things. Your child will sad but not as sad as you are.



Because death for children has very different meaning, so the first thing to do is approach it by saying, we have something sad that we want to tell you about. It frames it a little bit.

Dr. Kimberly Bell: Mm-hmm.

Dr. Tovah Klein: So there's some information we're about to give you, and it kind of primes their system of like, uh oh, what's going on? And then you say, our doggy is old. Very, very, very old. Because I think you wanna put it in a category of it's not us, because what do children think when they hear someone's sick or might die? "Uh oh. What about mommy and daddy?" That's the core of their life. So you can explain that the dog is very old. She [00:31:00] has a doggy sickness. And the dog doctor, called the vet, doesn't think the dog can live very long, and that's making us very sad and we're gonna have to say goodbye. And I don't even think you have to get into the details of what that is, although for some children, they will ask.

But it's the idea that you put it out there and you say to them, I'm gonna walk you through something sad and hard and maybe their first loss. We're going to be here for you and we're gonna be honest. Because you actually build trust in children when you say hard things happen and we can talk about them and we're gonna help you through it. . And then you have to use at some point the word death, which people certainly in American culture are very uncomfortable with – saying the dog's had a nice life. We have lots of good memories. The dog's gonna die, and that means we're not going to see the [00:32:00] dog anymore. We can remember, we can look at pictures, we can talk about good times, but we won't be able to see him anymore. I think one of the hardest parts for parents, and I always say this to them, depending on the age of the child, that they're gonna get over it much quicker than you, and very soon, I'm preparing you.

They're gonna say, can we, let's say the dog's name is Charlie. Can we get another Charlie?

Dr. Kimberly Bell: Yeah.

Dr. Tovah Klein: And I say to the parents, that's gonna hurt you because you know that this is one particular dog that's played a special role in your life, but your child has a concept of, "OK, well Charlie was good. We can get another one."



But the other piece to this is to, to assure children, even though this is sad, and you might have other feelings too, you can tell us about any of those feelings. You can

Dr. Kimberly Bell: Mm-hmm.

Dr. Tovah Klein: express them. You might be confused, you might feel some anger. But mommy and daddy are here. We're gonna still have dinner together tonight. We're gonna still put you to bed. It [00:33:00] says to them, the rest of your world is really staying. I'm sad, and sometimes you might even see me crying a bit over the dog, but I'm OK and I'm gonna still take care of you.

That is the heart of what children need.

Dr. Kimberly Bell: Yeah. That's, that's really, that's beautiful. That statement of it's gonna be hard. You're gonna have feelings. I'm gonna have feelings, but I am still here for you. I am still your, your parent and we're still gonna be doing the parent job, um, in all these other areas of life.

One of the things that, that I say to parents is, you, you know, when we talk about telling them the truth, we're not talking about overloading them with details. You know, allow the child to ask the question. And if you feel like you're not sure what they're asking, then I always say, well, what do you think?

Dr. Tovah Klein: Yeah.

Dr. Kimberly Bell: So that they can tell you what their potential distortions are, right? What [00:34:00] their worries are, what they're most afraid of, what they think might be happening. And then you can, you know, gently correct

Dr. Tovah Klein: Right.

Dr. Kimberly Bell: those misconceptions of, of, you know, whatever they maybe put together in their head.

Dr. Tovah Klein: I would say it'll also appreciate that, along those lines, every child has their own nuance in this, their own things that they're gonna think about.

Dr. Kimberly Bell: Mm-hmm.



Dr. Tovah Klein: It might sound scary to one child and absolutely not to another, and one might have many questions over time, they'll come back with questions. You have to be ready for that. A parent might think, "Oh, she's totally fine. She's not even thinking about it. And then three weeks later they're like, can we see Charlie again? Where's the dog? You're like, wait a minute. Didn't we have this conversation? Yes, you did. But today she woke up, she's like, where's my dog? And so then

Dr. Kimberly Bell: Yeah.

Dr. Tovah Klein: you kind of go through an abridged version. And again, that's part of the process. It's a process.

Dr. Kimberly Bell: It's part of integrating the truth, in reality. Yeah. Over, over [00:35:00] fantasy that that changeover that occurs right around 4 or 5 where, where they, can't just wish Charlie back.

Yeah, yeah. Thank you so, so, so much for being with us.

Um, this has been really, really enjoyable. But that is our time for today. Uh, if our conversations here, raise any questions for you or if you have parenting concerns of your own, you can do a couple of things. You can share them with us here. We're happy to answer your questions on the air.

You can send questions by email to the hiddenlanguageofchildren@gmail.com or visit our website at hiddenlanguageofchildren.org. If you feel like you might need a little bit more coaching or help talking to your children about something difficult, you can also come to the Hadden Clinic here at Hanna Perkins, and you can give us a call at (216) 991-4472.

We hope you have enjoyed this conversation and found something to take away from it. Hidden Language of Children Podcast is a [00:36:00] production of the nonprofit Hanna Perkins Center for Child Development in beautiful Shaker Heights, Ohio. Our producer is Bob Rosenbaum, and Dan Ratner is our consulting producer. If you like this podcast, please subscribe to hear future episodes and please share it with all your friends and family. I am Dr. Kimberly Bell, a